



BEDFORD COUNTRY SCHOOL

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Where every child has every chance, every day to learn with love and laughter



SCHOOL POLICY REGARDING SAFETY AND SECURITY OF LEARNERS

AIM

This policy is aimed at protecting the learners at school.

- In our school each educator is responsible for maintaining discipline inside as well as outside the classroom.
- Educators should at all times be involved in teaching inside the classroom. They should not stroll about during class time.
- Educators should only leave classrooms in an emergency – in such a case another available educator should supervise until the educator is back in the classroom.
- Educators should reach their classrooms as soon as possible after the bell has rung, before school, during changing of classes and after intervals.
- Learners should not be disciplined by means of corporal punishment, alternative measures should be taken.
- Learners should not be allowed to work alone at school after hours. There should be supervision at all times.
- Learners are only allowed to go to the bathroom one at a time.
- Learners should be supervised at all times at sports events.
- Educators should move about during intervals in order to be visible and near places where most of the learners play.
- Educators should reprimand learners immediately when they play in an irresponsible fashion.
- Educators should immediately investigate injuries that happen during intervals, take down statements and record them in the injury book.
- The school's first aid case should be kept in the office in the care of the secretary in order to be available to all educators.

- First aid is only allowed to be administered by a First aid qualified educator.
- No learners should leave the school grounds without being accompanied by a parent or an educator.
- The educator on duty must be at the exit to tick off each learner as they are collected by authorized persons.
- The educator on duty may not leave the school premises until all learners have been collected.
- The educator on duty must phone the responsible parent if a learner is left uncollected.
- People who collect learners during class time should be able to identify themselves to the educator on duty.
- No unauthorized persons should be allowed onto the school grounds.
- The school's gates should be locked during the school day and the educator on duty or office staff should unlock gates if necessary.
- Any visitors should first report to the secretary to receive permission.

1.1 Assault

Assault is an attack on a person. There are many variations; it may be provoked or unprovoked, premeditated or spontaneous, minor or major. One person or many may carry out assault and weapons may or may not be used.

Immediate action

Each incident is unique and there can be no standard response. Nevertheless, there are some actions that should be carried out as soon as possible, as soon as it is safe to do so

(do not be too preoccupied with the cause at this stage!):

- ensure that there is no continuing threat to the safety of the parties involved and to the safety of others
- separate the parties who are involved so that they can no longer see each other
- calm them, and provide medical assistance if needed
- call in outside assistance if required, for example, medical assistance or the Police

Only when things have calmed down, should one try to determine the cause of the assault.

Preventative action

Management should always be aware of what is happening in the school. This will build the confidence of stakeholders in the management's ability to know what is happening and to act on information.

Being aware of developing tensions and making efforts to defuse them before they blow up into major incidents is an important management skill. When one develops conflict resolution abilities in all stakeholders, but especially in members of the management team, those involved in disputes will have alternative strategies for coping with disagreements.

1.2 Bullying

Bullying is the physical or mental abuse of one individual by another, or others. The victim is usually unable to respond appropriately and his or her inadequate response tends to encourage the perpetrators to continue their bullying tactics. Mental bullying is sometimes disguised as 'only teasing' when, in fact, it consists of derogatory or embarrassing comment aimed at humiliating the target. A key characteristic of bullying is that it is ongoing; some learners suffer from bullying throughout their school careers. In some cases bullying can lead to the destruction of self-confidence and to someone with such a low self-image suicide often looks like the solution to problems.

Immediate action

Do not draw attention to the bullying by making a public issue of a particular case. This is the last thing the victim desires, and it would play into the perpetrator's hands by giving him or her the publicity he or she seeks. It is preferable to take note of an act of bullying and later, as soon as is reasonably possible, without drawing attention to it, instituting the preventative measures discussed below.

Preventative action

Counselling is necessary for both the victim and the perpetrator. Ironically, the perpetrators of bullying often have personality deficits which they disguise or compensate for by venting their own feelings of inadequacy on others who are perceived as being too weak to respond adequately. The victim may benefit from an understanding of the underlying motives of the perpetrators. He or she must be given help in developing appropriate coping and response mechanisms to use when bullying takes place. Helping the victim to protect and develop his or her feelings of selfworth should be fundamental to the counselling. Probing the perpetrator for underlying causes for the bullying may help one decide on methods of dealing with the problem. Helping the perpetrator to develop empathy for the victim can lead to a change in attitude. It is essential to monitor the situation carefully for some time after it appears to have been resolved. The entire issue of bullying can be the subject of assembly comment and discussion in, for example, language classes.

1.3 Child abuse

Child abuse is any undermining of a child's rights but in the context of this manual it refers to:

- physical abuse
 - sexual abuse
 - emotional abuse.
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- **Physical abuse** is any non-accidental injury either inflicted on the child, or sustained by the child, through an adult's intentional omission to protect the child from physical harm or injury.
 - **Sexual abuse** is the exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of another person. It may include, for example, fondling, inappropriate remarks,

exposing the child to sexual behaviour or pornography, exhibitionism, sodomy, rape or attempted rape. Incest may include any of these behaviours, but is perpetrated by a family member.

- **Emotional abuse** is an attack on the child's emotions and feeling of self-worth via, for example, criticism, belittling and insulting remarks, rejection, withdrawal or withholding of love, support and guidance.

There are various indicators of possible abuse but be careful and do not to jump to conclusions.

Indicators of physical abuse include . . .

- physical indicators such as unexplained bruises and burns
- behavioural indicators such as withdrawal, or fear of going home or to a particular place.

Indicators of emotional abuse include . . .

- high levels of anxiety
- depression and apathy.

Indicators of sexual abuse include . . .

- discomfort when going to the toilet
- difficulty in walking and sitting
- bizarre, sophisticated, unusual or age-inappropriate sexual knowledge.

Immediate action

If a child takes an educator into her or his confidence the educator should follow these ten steps:

- Write down verbatim what the child has said, if possible ascertaining when, where, by whom, and the period of the alleged abuse.
- Note and record the appearance of the child and any other relevant circumstances; the educator's own inferences should not be recorded.
- Sign, date and keep the record in a secure place.
- Ascertain and take appropriate action to ensure the child's immediate need for safety by asking these questions: when, where, by whom, over what period?
- Discuss the problem only with the principal or the counsellor. (Decide jointly on the next step. Do not attempt to handle the case without specialist help.)
- Contact and consult with the relevant Department of Education regional office social worker. (Involving the police must be left to the social worker.)
- Think through the potential consequences, such as the effect on the child and on the parents.
- Plan together with the principal, social worker, community nurse and, if appropriate, the parents, what steps are to be taken.
- Take steps to help the child; for example, by giving support and referring the child for specialist assistance; a programme to improve self-esteem and to clarify values is of the utmost importance.
- Follow up at a later date.

If the child has not confided in the educator but abuse is suspected, the educator should follow the last nine steps above.

When the police or social workers bring a case to the school's attention

these officials cannot be refused permission to conduct an investigation or an interview with the learner on school premises as they are authorised to investigate any incidents. But the parents or guardians (if they are not accused) must be notified before the investigation or the interview. They have a right to be present during the interview. However, the rights of the child to privacy and

protection are paramount. The question should always be: What is in the best interests of the child? If a parent or guardian cannot be present, a member of the school staff who is selected by the child could be present at an interview.

If a learner is the alleged perpetrator of abuse the police must, on presentation of a warrant, be allowed to question and/or arrest the learner. No person, including a police officer, may force the learner to submit to questioning.

If parents or guardians are prevented from being present during an interview or investigation it is usually because they may be implicated. Principals must ensure that they receive notice in writing from the SAPS or other investigating agency as to why the interview or investigation is both necessary and unavoidable without prior notification of the parents or guardians.

In cases where both parents are prevented from being present, should the learner wish, it remains his or her legal right to have an assistance officer present. This can be a member of the family, a school staff member or a member of the Education Psychological Services who is selected by the child.

If there is a request to remove the child from the school for the purpose of a medical examination and if the child is under the age of fourteen, a police officer, social worker or other authorised person must produce proof of parental consent. If, in the bona fide interests of the child, the matter is considered urgent and the person who seeks that the child is removed requests it, the principal may choose to agree to this. However, such action would not absolve the officers who are involved from informing the principal in writing of the reasons for the child to be taken away.

If a police officer, social worker or authorised officer removes a learner from the school to a place of safety in terms of the Child Care Act, No. 74 of 1983, the principal cannot be held responsible for the child being taken away.

Preventative action

For learners awareness is the keynote. Using appropriate aspects of the curriculum and the expertise of both departmental officials and outside individuals or agencies, a school can ensure that its learners realise . . .

- what constitutes abuse
- that abuse is wrong
- that anyone can be abused, anywhere
- that being abused is not the fault of the victim
- there are ways to prevent and stop abuse
- that the child will be protected by law.

A multi-dimensional approach is suggested. This means that discussion on abuse is encouraged, and games, art, music and stories may be used to draw out and encourage the learners to express their ideas. The school can embark on a programme to help improve and strengthen family life and children's feelings of self-worth. The Life Skills component of the curriculum should incorporate aspects that are designed to prevent abuse by increasing child awareness. One such method is by selecting learners for groups carefully so that they may support and help each other.

For educators apart from being involved in the programmes mentioned earlier, they must develop awareness of and expertise in . . .

- recognising indicators of possible abuse
- giving support to abused children.

1.5 Sexual assault

Sexual assault is any intentional, forced, undesired sexual contact perpetrated without the consent of the victim, who is usually, but not exclusively, female. Our Constitution gives everyone the right to dignity and privacy. Sexual assaults are an intrusion on both those rights. Such assaults can have long-term physical and mental consequences for the victims. Instances of sexual assault occur in our schools, but they are not often publicised either by the victim, who does not want to add to his or her embarrassment and humiliation, or by the school, which shuns the bad publicity. The result is that perpetrators often go unpunished and uncounselled. These assaults are more common where women have a lower status than men, are not treated with dignity and where women are expected to be submissive and sexually available. Such assaults are more common in a society where violence of all types is prevalent and where sexual abuse is not subject to determined condemnation.

Immediate action

Victims of sexual assaults will be traumatised and in need of support and sympathetic professional assistance. They are often not in a state to allow for detailed questioning, and the first priority is to ensure that the victim receives support and medical attention. Sexual assault victims are often battered as well. Parents must be contacted immediately. Counselling is necessary, and the school may have to call on outside expertise such as People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA). State hospitals and clinics are now more aware of how to deal with cases of sexual abuse and they can arrange for counselling and for the police to come and take statements. For females, a female police officer must be available to do this. They can also contact the district attorney on behalf of the victim. Sexual assault is a crime and the police must be informed. The victim can lay a charge against the perpetrator when he or she is in a position to do so. This can be done at the local police station. The police are obliged to treat such cases very seriously and a failure to do so must be discussed with the station commander.

Preventative action

Above all, attitudes have to be changed. There has to be a collective mindset of respect for all people, especially against seeing women as submissive and obliged to be available for gratuitous sex. There must also be a wholesale rejection of violent crime. Schools are ideal institutions in which to begin to change attitudes but there has to be a commitment on the part of all role players to a concerted programme of action. It must be understood that such changes take time; thus the sooner schools commit to the process the better.

In addition, learners should be better informed about risks and avoidance. They should be advised on reasonable precautions, such as attempting to avoid places and circumstances where they may be at risk. Every person should devise a 'personal safety plan' for which the person has examined his or her particular circumstances and worked out how to cope in each possible situation. This plan should be shared and discussed with his or her family and friends. The school must have a policy detailing how sexual assault should be dealt with. Such a policy must include all necessary contact names and telephone numbers.

This policy was adopted by the School Management on

This policy has been made available to school personnel and is readily accessible to parents and learners on request.

This policy will be reviewed and updated every year.

Signed _____
School Management

Date: _____

Signed _____
Principal

Date: _____

Signed _____
Educator Representative

Date: _____