

SAFE SCHOOL POLICY

Introduction

Mercedes College does not tolerate harassment in any form as our College community is committed to Jesus' challenge that we love one another.

To provide a safe school environment we believe:

- each person has the right to learn and play in a safe environment
- each person must show respect for self and others and for property
- action will be taken to assist both students who are experiencing harassment and those who are harassing others
- everyone has a responsibility to take action where harassment is occurring. Bystanders can choose to be a part of the solution or a part of the problem.

A safe environment is ensured for everyone if the Christian tradition symbolised in the following Mercy Keys is maintained as a focus:

- Compassion
- Integrity
- Justice
- Loyalty
- Mutual Respect
- Responsibility.

What is harassment?

Harassment is repeated intimidation of a physical, verbal or psychological nature of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons. It is any behaviour which is unwelcome and makes you feel uncomfortable or fearful. This power may be physical or social and may shift over time from one person to another.

Examples of harassment include:

- Put downs, belittling others' poor or good abilities and achievements
- Offensive name calling or making derogatory remarks about a person's physical, cultural, religious or social background
- Interfering with other people's property
- Making suggestive comments or other forms of sexual harassment
- Writing spiteful notes or graffiti about others
- Sending offensive messages in writing, by telephone or email
- Chasing someone with the intent to hurt them
- Hitting, punching, slapping, tripping, bumping or pushing.

Anyone can experience harassment at any time; however it is not harassment when two students have a disagreement or quarrel. If parents are concerned that their son or daughter may be experiencing harassment, they are encouraged to contact the College to voice their concerns.

Harassment can lead to:

- Difficulty concentrating on school work
- Absence from school

- Feelings of powerlessness, fear, embarrassment, discomfort
- Feelings of isolation
- Stress and depression
- Social exclusion.

How do I know if my son or daughter is being harassed?

Generally young children will tell a teacher or parent if they are experiencing harassment. If they do not make this explicit, behaviour changes may be noticed, including aggression, a reluctance to go to school, tears and tantrums, and declining school performance.

Middle School students may not tell parents, but they may confide in friends or teachers. Senior School students will generally talk to their friends about harassment, rather than parents or teachers. Nevertheless, parents should look for any unexplained changes in behaviour, attitude or routine and be open to discussing these changes calmly with their child.

Grievance Procedure

- If concerned about the possibility of harassment occurring, talk this over calmly with your son/daughter to gather as much information as you can
- Encourage your son/daughter to seek help through key College personnel including their Class or Home Group teacher, SRC Peer Support students or the College Psychologist
- If the harassment continues, contact the Class or Home Group teacher to discuss the information you have gathered, which will be treated confidentially
- The Class or Home Group teacher will follow up contact with key people and arrange an action plan to support the student.

If you are not satisfied with the action taken in response to your concerns, you are encouraged to seek a review through the Head of School, College Psychologist or Principal.

What if my son/daughter is harassing other students?

In the event that your son/daughter has participated in the harassment of another student, they will be interviewed by the Home Group teacher, Head of School or College Psychologist, depending upon the nature of the harassment and prior reports. They will be offered strategies to modify this behaviour and a consequence (eg detention) may be given. You will be notified of this action and offered further assistance by the Head of School or College Psychologist if appropriate.

Reports of harassment incidents will be kept by the Head of School and maintained for a one year period.

Policy Review

A committee representing students, parents and staff will review this policy every two years. This policy will be broadly distributed to all College staff, students, parents and bus drivers.