



MERCEDES COLLEGE

COMPASSION LOYALTY JUSTICE INTEGRITY RESPONSIBILITY MUTUAL RESPECT

Safe School Policy

Mercedes College does not tolerate harassment in any form.

Our College Community is committed to Jesus' challenge that we love one another.

To provide a safe school environment we believe:

1. Each person has the right to learn, play and be in a safe environment.
2. Each person must show respect for him/herself, for others and for their property.
3. In taking action to provide strategies for students who are experiencing harassment and strategies to learn more positive behaviours, for those who are harassing others.
4. We all have a responsibility to take action where we see harassment occurring. Bystanders can choose to be a part of the resolution of harassment, or a part of the problem.

Following the Christian tradition symbolised in our Mercy Keys:

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

ensures a safe environment for everyone.

What is harassment?

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

It is not harassment when two students of similar age and physical and emotional development have a disagreement or conflict.

Examples of harassment include deliberate and repeated behaviour such as:

- a hit, punch, slap, or trip
- bumping or pushing
- chasing someone with the intent to hurt them
- interfering with other people's property
- offensive name calling
- spreading rumours about individuals or their families

- put downs, belittling others' poor, or good abilities and achievements
- making derogatory remarks about a person's physical, cultural, religious or social background
- making suggestive comments or other forms of sexual harassment
- writing offensive notes or graffiti about others.

Cyber bullying is when one person or a group of people, repeatedly try to hurt, embarrass or exert power over another person, using their computer or mobile phone. The person bullying usually has some advantage over the person targeted, and it is done on purpose with the intent to hurt them. It is not an accident or teasing between friends.

Forms of cyber bullying can include:-

- Harassing and threatening messages.
- Sending nasty SMS messages, IM's, pictures or prank phone calls.
- Using a person's screen name or password to pretend to be them.
- Forwarding others' private emails, messages, pictures or videos.
- Posting negative comments or compromising pictures.
- Sending sexually explicit images – 'sexting'.
- Intentionally excluding others from an online group.

Harassment can lead to:

- A loss of desire to attend school.
- Difficulty concentrating on school work.
- Feelings of powerlessness, fear, embarrassment, discomfort and isolation.
- Social exclusion.
- Stress, anxiety and depression.

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.

- 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/tutor, the College Psychologist or Year Level Coordinator.
- If the harassment continues, contact the Class or Home Group teacher/tutor or the Year Level Coordinator to discuss the information you have gathered, which will be treated confidentially.

- The class or Home Group teacher/tutor or Year Level Coordinator will follow up contact with key people and arrange an action plan to support the students.

Cyber bullying is a specific form of harassment which can be addressed in the following ways:

- Save and store the emails, chat logs or SMS messages in case of Police investigation.
- Block and delete the bully from all contact lists.
- Do not respond to nasty emails, chats, SMS or comments – this is what the bully wants, so ignore them.
- Use the ‘report abuse’ button which all websites/applications have. Report the problems you are having and they are obligated to investigate.
- Encourage some ‘down time’ without using the computer or mobile phone.
- If unwanted contact continues, consider deleting email, msn, hotmail etc. and start a new account. Only give your new details to a small list of trusted friends.
- Consider getting a new phone number if harassed is occurring via mobile phone. Report the problem to the carrier and insist on a new number for free.
- Inform the College. It is important that we know what is going on so that we can follow up issues of concern.
- If ongoing, report to SA Police. South Australia has laws that prohibit online bullying and stalking. This is not to be tolerated.

Grievance Procedure

If you are not satisfied with the action that has been taken in response to your concerns, if the harassment has not stopped, or if you feel let down by the process at any time, you are empowered to see the College Psychologist or Principal to discuss alternative action.

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/tutor, Year Level Coordinator, 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 (e.g. detention) may be given. You will be notified of this action and offered further assistance by the year Level Coordinator, 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.