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Chapter 4

Key Understandings and Competencies

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Evidence for building key understandings and competencies

Key understandings and competencies

Schools that improve staff, student and family understandings and competencies are more likely to effectively reduce bullying behaviours. Key common understandings about bullying include the nature, prevalence and types of bullying, as well as information about bystander roles. Key understandings are supported with skills or competencies needed to prevent, identify and respond to bullying incidents effectively and consistently.

Raising awareness and teaching common understandings about bullying is an important factor in equipping the whole-school community with the knowledge required to take positive action to prevent bullying and respond effectively when bullying does occur. All members of the school, including teaching and non-teaching staff, students and their families, need to be the target of education efforts to build the knowledge and skills to prevent, identify and respond effectively to bullying behaviour. This chapter discusses how staff professional learning, curriculum content and family communication can be used to ensure common, consistent understandings across the whole-school community.
Staff professional learning

When bullying behaviours within a school are tolerated actively or passively by teachers, it is likely these behaviours will persist over time. This demonstrates the need for comprehensive professional learning for all staff to help them to feel confident in assisting students with bullying related matters. This training needs to be part of a whole-school response to bullying where the training is linked to the school’s bullying-related policy and response plan. In a meta-analysis of the effective components of school-based bullying interventions by Farrington and Ttofi (2009) teacher training was identified as one of the program elements significantly associated with reducing the prevalence of students’ bullying others. The vast majority of staff disapprove of bullying and perceive themselves as having a responsibility to reduce and prevent school bullying. However, many staff report they feel other teachers at their school need more training to improve their skills related to covert bullying, including cyberbullying.

Developing school staff’s knowledge about the forms and functions of technology may be particularly important in reducing cyberbullying. The ‘digital’ generation gap between young people and their teachers may be a potential barrier in attempts to help students who are cyberbullied. Findings from an Australian study demonstrate school staff are less able to recognise, and are more uncertain about how to address bullying involving technology, compared with other forms of bullying. In a study of pre-service teachers’ perceptions about cyberbullying, the vast majority of teachers surveyed reported they generally lacked the confidence to identify or manage cyberbullying, possibly because this form of bullying is easily concealed and does not result in physical effects that can be recognised as indicators of bullying. Further, some research has reported that students do not perceive adults at school as being able to help if they were to report cyberbullying to them.

Explicit student learning through the curriculum

Improving students’ key understandings, skills and competencies to prevent and respond to bullying, especially as a bystander, also needs to be an essential element of school action to support students who do not seek help from school staff. Students’ responses to bullying situations is associated with their self-esteem, attitudes towards bullying, empathy, moral perceptions of bullying and social skills, as well as their expectancies about the outcomes arising from bullying others. Accordingly, it is recommended that the curriculum raise students’ awareness about bullying and its harmful effects, and the rights and responsibilities of all students with regards to bullying situations. Curricula should also provide students with opportunities to develop their social skills and strategies enhancing self-esteem. It is important that strategies teaching students about safer online behaviours are embedded into the curriculum, rather than as stand-alone messages, to enable students to refine their skills over time and to foster lasting behaviour change.

In Farrington and Ttofi’s meta-analysis, the use of anti-bullying videos to raise students’ awareness about bullying was associated with a reduction in students being bullied. However, the same meta-analysis found that student curriculum was not significantly related to reductions in bullying. This may suggest that education efforts directed towards students should be more engaging and interactive, and integrated throughout the school curriculum to be most effective in reducing bullying.

Educating students about technical and cyber safety strategies to prevent, respond to and report cyberbullying, is essential as much cyberbullying behaviour occurs out of sight of adults. Although students demonstrate knowledge of technical strategies to deal with cyberbullying, such as blocking the sender or ignoring the bullying, they may be less educated about other strategies such as how to remove harmful websites. Knowing and using these strategies, however, are two different matters, as another study found only a minority of students responded to cyberbullying behaviours by using technical strategies, such as blocking the sender, changing their screen name, or sending warnings.
Teaching students strategies specific to overcoming and preventing cyberbullying is an important focus of school action to reduce all types of bullying behaviour. A recent meta-analysis of interventions to prevent cyber abuse found psycho-educational Internet safety programs were effective in increasing students' Internet safety knowledge. Students should be educated about their rights and responsibilities in cyberspace and encouraged to adopt positive attitudes towards technology and develop good 'digital citizenship' skills.

Effective family communication

Opportunities for parents, carers and other family members to further their knowledge about preventing and responding to all forms of bullying will support the schools' efforts in this regard. This recommendation is made on the basis of research demonstrating the links between family functioning and bullying behaviour. For instance, poor supervision and lack of attention in the home, parental acceptance of aggressive behaviour, harsh discipline and parent modelling of aggressive behaviour are all associated with bullying behaviour. Conversely, students with higher parental support and a good relationship with parents are less likely to be involved in bullying. Moreover, high parental support may protect against symptoms of depression among students who are victimised and/or who bully others.

Farrington and Ttofi also found information for parents (for example, information about the bullying prevention initiatives at their school or general tips about bullying) was an important program element related to reducing the proportion of students’ bullying others. Parent training (information nights, teacher-parent meetings) was also significantly associated with both a decrease in students bullying and being bullied.

As a result of the 'digital divide' between young people and adults, parents may feel limited in ways they can support their child to prevent and respond to cyberbullying appropriately and effectively. An Australian study by Campbell and Gardner (2005) showed many students believe adults are unaware of the existence of students' online lives. Moreover, students are unlikely to report instances of cyberbullying to adults, probably because adults appear to be less informed about the issues around cyberbullying and students' fear of having their computers or mobile phones taken away, causing further isolation. Given cyberbullying has generally been found to occur more outside of school hours, rather than during school, developing parents' awareness about cyberbullying is crucial.
Actions for building key understandings and competencies

Staff professional learning

Ongoing professional learning opportunities about bullying enable staff members to feel prepared and motivated to implement the school bullying prevention and management policy. This is especially true for professional learning which focuses on specific strategies for cyberbullying prevention and management, including opportunities to learn about new technologies and their positive and negative uses.

School leaders who extend professional learning opportunities to non-teaching staff such as administration, canteen workers, gardeners and bus drivers, encourage consistent responses to bullying behaviour across the whole-school and recognise that bullying, including cyberbullying, can occur in break times, or on the way to and from school, where teaching staff may not be present.

Strategies for good practice: Staff professional learning

1. All school staff (new and existing) are enabled and encouraged through ongoing, regular, evidence-based professional learning to actively support school action to reduce bullying.
2. Specialised professional learning opportunities are provided for key pastoral care staff to effectively enable student behaviour change.
3. All school staff are informed of their legal responsibilities to protect students from bullying related harm.
4. Staff professional learning comprises a range of key understandings and skills.
5. School staff are provided with opportunities to promote their professional learning related to bullying prevention by networking with other schools and staff.

All school staff (new and existing) are enabled and encouraged through ongoing, regular, evidence-based professional learning to actively support school action to reduce bullying

All school staff (including grounds staff, cleaners, bus drivers and canteen employees) need to be aware of their responsibility and be provided with professional learning to support school actions to reduce bullying behaviour. As bullying behaviour often occurs on students’ journeys to and from school and during break times when supervision ratios (teacher to student) are lower, non-teaching staff can provide support for the schools’ bullying prevention related policies and guidelines. Ensuring students are aware of the role non-teaching staff play in preventing and responding to bullying situations increases their credibility among students and supports their commitment to intervene when appropriate.

Some school staff members have particular responsibilities in the school for providing student support services. Students, however, often approach the staff with whom they are more familiar to seek support and advice. School leaders can support staff by ensuring they:

* are familiar with the policies relating to student support services
• are aware of and are comfortable with their role
• understand role boundaries
• know how to effectively refer students to appropriate internal and external services if needed.

Schools can increase their understanding of the issues students face by conducting regular surveys of the whole-school community, as described in *Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.2*.

### 2 Specialised professional learning opportunities are provided for key pastoral care staff to effectively enable student behaviour change

Quality, up-to-date professional learning for pastoral care staff increases their capacity to respond effectively to student needs. Expanding the pastoral care team to include year group or other group level coordinators (for example, tutors and heads of house) recognises that some students may not seek help, support or advice from staff in traditional pastoral care roles. An expanded pastoral care team with current training increases student access to support and also increases the likelihood that students will receive quality pastoral care outcomes.

Some professional learning areas requested during CHPRC research include how the pastoral care team can:
- collaborate with school community members to identify and promote a shared vision of a safe and supportive school environment
- encourage and enable whole-school community members to participate in school planning and decision-making
- make decisions fairly and ethically and embrace the principles of equal opportunity and social justice
- be proactive in the development and promotion of an effective and well executed whole-school policy outlining strategies, structures and systems for the prevention and management of bullying
- consult and negotiate with whole-school community members ensuring fairness of participation and equity in input in the development of whole-school policies and planning
- empower staff to initiate and take responsibility for safer and friendly school strategies.

### 3 All school staff are informed of their legal responsibilities to protect students from bullying related harm

All Australian educators are now required, through mandatory reporting, to report to the police those incidences which may be of concern regarding the wellbeing of young people in their care (see Mandatory Reporting guidelines for relevant state or territory). As all staff are required to be trained in this content this is an excellent opportunity for staff to also be educated about their duty of care with regard to bullying and cyberbullying.

Staff will benefit from having an understanding of not only their legal requirements, but also some relevant cases which apply to this area. These are best presented as cases which involve students (for example, staff negligence regarding their duty to students), or cases which involve students and no staff (such as 'sexting' cases), and cases which involve staff (as in staff professional negligence).

Seek assistance from the sector administrator or head office (independent, Catholic or government) if you need more information regarding legal responsibilities.
Staff professional learning comprises a range of key understandings and skills

The following areas are considered key understandings that the whole-school community need to know and act on consistently:

• what constitutes bullying (definition of bullying, including cyberbullying)
• how to identify bullying (including overt, covert, cyber)
• the effects of bullying on students
• how to effectively respond to all forms of bullying behaviour
• opportunities to learn about ICT and their positive and negative uses
• how to appropriately monitor and supervise students’ online behaviour
• referral to credible sources for further information and support about bullying and related issues, such as cyber safety resources and mental health support.
• ways to access current research on bullying and evidence-based approaches to reducing school bullying.

The introductory chapter, Bullying: The evidence before the action, contains information about these points, and examples of how this information can be incorporated in behaviour expectations policies is provided in Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkit 3.5.

School staff are provided with opportunities to promote their professional learning related to bullying prevention by networking with other schools and staff

School leaders can facilitate the sharing of knowledge and practices by providing and supporting opportunities for staff to network with each other and surrounding schools on a regular basis. Networking opportunities provide:

• an exchange of ideas
• motivation for improvement and change
• affirmation of staff’s efforts in responding to bullying related issues
• insight into how others have responded to issues
• learning about the effectiveness of programs, practices and policies implemented in other settings
• engagement with other professionals in an informal setting which helps facilitate open discussion and cross-institutional collaboration
• the possibility of sharing of resources.
Explicit student learning through the curriculum

An effective curriculum is part of a ‘whole-class approach’ to facilitate changes in the attitudes and dynamics of the group, creating common understandings of bullying and how to respond, while simultaneously building the social skills of students. An interactive and engaging curriculum for students includes activities which target the risk and protective factors associated with bullying behaviour, comprising self-esteem building, promoting respect and care for self and others, moral perceptions and behaviour expectations. Cyber-specific strategies include technical strategies to respond to, and report, cyberbullying, principles of cyber safety and digital citizenship skills.

Strategies for good practice:
Explicit student learning through the curriculum

1. A developmentally appropriate, comprehensive and engaging social and emotional learning curriculum is taught across all year levels.
2. Student curriculum comprises a range of key understandings and skills.

A developmentally appropriate, comprehensive and engaging social and emotional learning curriculum is taught across all year levels

Addressing bullying behaviour through the curriculum enables primary and secondary schools to openly discuss the issue with students in consistent, developmentally appropriate ways. Use of activities which engage students regularly over time, and involve cooperative teaching and learning strategies within a whole-school approach, can lead to positive and lasting change. Students’ bullying behaviours need to be targeted through formal teaching and learning prior to them becoming most prevalent. CHPRC research suggests that students need to receive targeted social skills development and bullying prevention content in every year level, but particularly prior to Year 4 and immediately prior to, and following transition to, secondary school.

Schools can develop students’ prosocial desires for bullying to stop and their inclinations to help people being bullied by advocating for positive peer influence. This encourages greater student support and confidence in application of bystander strategies. Implementing teaching and learning activities based on a social and emotional learning model:

- enhances students’ social skills
- maximises learning opportunities
- promotes cooperative behaviours
- develops a supportive school culture where students, staff and families feel valued.

Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.1 discusses the contents of the Friendly Schools and Supportive Schools curriculum materials.
Student curriculum comprises a range of key understandings and skills

Schools that provide a developmentally appropriate curriculum that includes targeted, practical strategies explicitly for students, enable a shared understanding about social and emotional learning and bullying behaviours that is consistently modelled and conveyed. This also provides students with the opportunity to practise making thoughtful, effective choices about their social and personal behaviour in whole-school environments. In a secondary setting being given the opportunity to learn how to set privacy settings and disable geotagging for example, can be an effective tool for students knowing how to prevent and manage cyberbullying incidents. Key understandings for students include:

- what constitutes bullying
- how to identify bullying (including overt, covert, cyber)
- the effects of bullying on all students
- building skills to enhance positive, healthy relationships, both online and offline
- building skills to effectively respond to bullying behaviour, both online and offline
- building skills to develop social responsibility, both online and offline
- providing opportunities for self-reflection
- providing ‘real-life’, experiential activities to reinforce learning, e.g. role-play, opportunities for positive online social interaction.

Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.1 describes the Friendly Schools and Supportive Schools curriculum materials and how these can be included in the curriculum to promote positive social skill development and bullying prevention.

Effective family communication

Schools that provide learning opportunities to students’ families assist in empowering them to help their child to respond to bullying, and implement strategies for the prevention of bullying. This may be in the form of information for carers/families, teacher-carer meetings and information nights for families. Families can play an important role in monitoring their child’s behaviour and communicating with their child about bullying. Given the disparities in technological knowledge among students and their parents/carers, providing families with opportunities to learn about the latest information and communication technologies and their positive and negative uses, is a crucial component of effective family communication.

Strategies for good practice: Effective family communication

1. Multiple channels are used to communicate information and provide educational learning opportunities to families.
2. Parent information mirrors teacher knowledge and student learning to ensure common understandings and skills across a range of topics.
Multiple channels are used to communicate information and provide educational learning opportunities to families

Leaders who seek to actively involve families in school efforts to prevent and reduce bullying behaviour encourage ownership and support among the parent body, ensuring students receive a consistent message. Schools can be innovative in the ways in which they engage families in school activities, including:

- getting to know the families in the school in both formal and informal settings
- ensuring that the school policy on bullying is presented in ways that are accessible to all families
- encouraging all staff to maintain regular, positive contact with families to establish supportive relationships
- advertising and hosting school functions using multiple channels to raise awareness of events, with enough notice to facilitate attendance
- hosting school functions at times which maximise family attendance
- considering the provision of childcare support during school events to enable meaningful adult participation
- surveying families about desired content for family information sessions
- providing the school newsletter in an accessible format
- finding ways to celebrate successes with the families in the school community.

Several toolkits in this book provide examples of how to engage and communicate with families. These include: Supportive School Culture Toolkits 2.1 and 2.2, and School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.5.

Parent information mirrors teacher knowledge and student learning to ensure common understandings and skills across a range of topics

Consistent messages are important in reinforcing student learning and behaviour engagement. Schools can provide opportunities for families to develop their understandings about the following:

- what constitutes bullying
- how to identify bullying (including overt, covert, cyber)
- the effects of bullying
- how to effectively communicate with their child about bullying
- how to appropriately monitor and supervise their child's online behaviour
- developmental stages of child and adolescent social and emotional learning
- the role of bystanders in discouraging bullying behaviour
- skills for parents to respond effectively to bullying (including specific strategies for overt, covert, cyberbullying)
- opportunities to learn about information and communication technologies such as social media (e.g. social networking, instant messaging, chat rooms, blogs, online gaming, mobile phones, websites) and their positive and negative uses
- skills for their child to build positive, healthy relationships
- skills for their child to effectively respond to bullying behaviour, both online and offline

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- skills for their child to develop social responsibility, both online and offline
- referral to credible sources for further information and support about bullying and related issues, such as cyber safety resources and mental health support.

For examples of how to enhance families' understanding and skills, see Supportive School Culture Toolkits 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4.

Summary

It is important to improve student, staff and family understandings and competencies to positively impact on the reduction of bullying behaviour. In particular, common understandings about the types, prevalence and nature of bullying, as well as students' role in bullying situations are important to realise behaviour change. To support the establishment of common understandings and competencies related to bullying situations, schools can implement developmentally appropriate curriculum, offer targeted professional learning opportunities, distribute newsletter items and present social skills and values related assembly items.

Two school stories are provided to illustrate how CHPRC research schools sought to enhance common understandings and competences related to bullying situations. Schools who wish to implement strategies to improve the bullying-related understandings and competencies of their whole-school community may find further information in Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkits 4.1 and 4.2.

- Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkits 4.1 outlined the developmentally appropriate (K-9) curriculum materials comprising the Friendly Schools and Supportive Schools Program.
- Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkits 4.2 describes how schools can survey their whole-school community to understand bullying related knowledge, attitudes and skills.

In addition, toolkits comprising other chapters of this book will help to support the development of common understandings and competencies across the whole-school, and the introductory chapter, Bullying: The evidence before the action, contains definitions and background information to support this.
School Stories

Brief background to school initiative

The issue of bullying was regarded as important to the school and general community. It was beginning to create problems within the school affecting students' learning. The school began by surveying students about bullying and ensured open and consistent communication with parents, staff and students about the level of bullying that was occurring at the school.

School profile

- Non-metropolitan government school
- 500 students
- Years: K-7

Action

This school believed that raising the awareness of its students, staff and parents was the first step in addressing bullying behaviour. To begin, the school conducted a bullying behaviour awareness week. The school took a collaborative and cross-curricular approach for the week and provided teachers with the opportunity to use the Curriculum Framework and Outcomes and Standards Framework in a practical sense. Collaborative teams of teachers were involved and provided with a half day to plan activities around the theme of bullying.

Activities included:

- songs and poems about bullying, poster making, puppet making for use in plays and role-playing based on the theme
- LOTE activities such as examining body language across different cultures and storytelling
- Science activities such as drawing scientific comparisons between nurturing human relationships and nurturing relationships in society and nature
- Maths activities conducting graphing exercises based on the bullying survey and creating tallies of positive/negative incidents in the classroom
- creating books that exemplify positive approaches to bullying (which were used in buddy reading), drawing cartoons depicting responses to bullying, diary entries guided by the theme and letter writing
- comparisons of schoolyard bullying to bullying in the workplace, lessons on conflict resolution skills and role-playing
- behaviour modification games
- the planting of a friendship garden and friendship rocks.

A staff survey was conducted following this week. The results of the survey suggested that teachers enjoyed the week and the opportunity to plan activities with colleagues. Teachers believed the week had raised the awareness of both students and teachers, but also of parents. The school reported that students enjoyed the collaborative approach, particularly the opportunities it provided and the common theme between classes. Staff also received positive feedback from parents who appreciated the open and honest manner in which the school was dealing with the issue.
Following this week the school developed a policy on bullying in collaboration with students, parents and teachers to ensure the whole-school community would have greater ownership of the policy. All teachers were asked to discuss with their class what bullying is, how they feel about bullying, what they could do if bullied, what students, teachers, and parents could do to prevent bullying at the school and what could be done to make sure the policy is working. The policy was developed from these responses and worded in the vernacular of the students.

The school adopted a whole-school positive incentive plan. This included the distribution of faction tokens for positive behaviour, honour certificates, ‘Aussie of the Month’ awards, positive visits to the principal, work displayed at the Aboriginal Medical Centre, the Community Centre and the front office and positive behaviour banners awarded to the class with the most cards. Throughout the process communication between parents, staff, students and the community was a high priority. This was achieved through newsletters, articles, school assemblies, community displays and representation in the press.

What we learnt

Difficulties encountered

Getting all staff to accept the program and the additional effort required was initially a problem at the school.

Overcoming difficulties

These initial problems were overcome by giving staff time to collaborate and discuss policy, plans and activities, and setting realistic and achievable goals. Having parents involved and showing an interest also highlighted the importance of the program to staff. This was achieved through the involvement of the P&C as well as during parent-teacher meetings.

More information about the strategies used by this school can be found in the following toolkits:

- Supportive School Culture Toolkit 2.1
- Supportive School Culture Toolkit 2.2
- Supportive School Culture Toolkit 2.3
- Proactive Policies and Practices Toolkit 3.5
- Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.1
- Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.2
Brief background to school initiative

It became evident that bullying was a problem at this school. There was a significant amount of media attention on the issue at that time and, subsequently, the school psychologist and deputy principal decided to take some positive action. The school adopted a whole-school approach to combat bullying behaviour. They placed an emphasis on cooperation with colleagues, communication and consistency in consequences and a commitment to creating a positive classroom atmosphere.

School profile

- Government school
- 720 students
- Years: 8-12

Action

The school introduced the Treat Everyone Decently (TED) program as the cornerstone of their anti-bullying policy. The TED school committee trained people, including teachers, and managed student behaviour, house points and rewards, issues of tolerance and an overall review. They also addressed the school assemblies. The program was designed to enhance self-esteem and positive behaviour. Prizes in the form of letters of commendation and other rewards were included.

The TED program was taught as a core subject to emphasise the importance that the school placed on the matter. The same teachers taught it each year and were, therefore, able to build on the students’ knowledge. Bullying was addressed in the Year 8 component of the program and revised in Years 9 and 10. The four bullying sessions defined what bullying was and the school’s policy on bullying, and examined ways bullying could be reported, and what students could do about bullying. Sessions were interactive and encouraged students to ask questions and brainstorm solutions. Each school department was asked to integrate the TED messages into their curriculum. The school provided staff professional learning to facilitate this process.

The school also ran a TED Plus program where teachers acted as mentors and were matched with students who had behavioural problems or learning difficulties or were unhappy at school. The students met daily with their mentor and a behaviour card was kept which both completed. The behavioural expectations were explained in simple terms, for example, the student will not interrupt in class, will not constantly talk to the person next to them and will listen to instructions. By concentrating on a small part of a student’s behaviour, this process provided tangible aims for the student. The program ran for four weeks and at the end of that time the student’s behaviour was reviewed. The student knew that their mentor was not going to judge them, but rather work with them through every situation that arises. This system was extremely successful. The school made an attempt to use friends to monitor students’ behaviour, as they usually respond well to their own peers. For example, in a particular group of friends, one girl was exerting her power over the others and on one girl in particular. The student bullying was taken aside and it was pointed out that through her behaviour she stood the risk of losing all of her friends. She was then asked to choose two friends to monitor her behaviour and report to the teachers. This had a significant impact on the level of bullying that was occurring.
What we learnt

Difficulties encountered

The school struggled to recruit enough people to run the program. There were unsuccessful attempts to get teachers to take on the responsibility of the program. Furthermore, initially not all bullying incidents were dealt with consistently; teachers did not always follow the procedures.

Recommendations for other schools

This school emphasised the need to get parents involved as early as possible as their support was essential to the success of the anti-bullying program. They also suggested that there be a program ‘launch’ with high levels of publicity and information; suggesting something like a whole-school sausage sizzle. This serves two purposes; it makes the program look important (if it looks important people tend to think it is important) and it provides a great opportunity for the whole-school to come together with teachers, students and parents and receive information. The school also suggested setting realistic targets for teachers – don’t overload them.

More information about the strategies used by this school can be found in the following toolkit:

- Key Understandings and Competencies Toolkit 4.1
The social, emotional, cognitive and physical aspects of a person's development are inter-related. Each influences, and is influenced by, the others. Consequently, it is not uncommon for students who have difficulty managing their emotions and behaviour to face great challenges meeting the demands of schooling. This relationship between student behaviour and 'academic' problems is not always clear in terms of which comes first, but what is clear is that the presence of one greatly increases the risk of the other. Supporting students' emotional, social and behavioural development thus enables them to more effectively engage in their learning.

The *Friendly Schools Plus* program is designed to address three key aspects of students' school experiences shown to be related to improved social and emotional development: promoting positive peer relationships, promoting positive teacher-child relationships, and explicit teaching related to emotions, social knowledge and social skills. The program aims to develop students' social and emotional competencies to enable them to recognise and control their emotions; build positive relationships; show consideration for others; make thoughtful and sensible choices; and cope successfully with difficult situations. These outcomes are developed through the following five focus areas in this resource:

- Self-Awareness
Bullying can have a significant and negative impact on students' social and emotional development and other learning. An anxious, frightened and withdrawn student has limited learning potential.

To reduce and ultimately prevent bullying it is important to focus on why most students and young people do not engage in bullying behaviour. These individuals tend to display greater social and emotional competence than those who bully others. Students and young people who demonstrate social and emotional competence are also more likely to have positive relationships and social capabilities that reduce the likelihood of them being bullied. They also are more likely to manage a bullying behaviour better if they are victimised or a bystander.

Bullying is more than an event between students who bully and students who are bullied. It is a social relationship involving group values and group standards of behaviour, which means it requires consistent action across the school community to achieve positive change.

What is social and emotional learning?

Social and emotional learning is the process of developing and practising important social and emotional understandings and skills. These understandings and skills can be grouped into five key areas (see Figure 5).

**Self-awareness skills** help us to recognise and understand our feelings, while valuing our strengths and abilities. This involves:

- being able to identify what we are feeling
- understanding why we might feel a certain way
- recognising and having confidence to use our strengths and abilities.

**Self-management skills** enable us to handle and direct our emotions in appropriate ways. This involves:

- managing our emotions so they don’t stop us from effectively dealing with situations and pursuing our goals
- striving to achieve our goals despite difficulties.

**Social awareness skills** help us to be aware and respectful of the feelings and perspectives of others. This involves:

- recognising what others may be feeling
- trying to understand a situation from another’s point of view
- accepting and valuing people who are different from ourselves.

**Relationship skills** help us to deal with relationship problems and other social conflicts. These skills include:

- making friends and maintaining healthy relationships
- dealing effectively with negative social influences and conflicts
- seeking help if we are not able to solve a social problem ourselves.
Social decision-making skills help us to consider the consequences of our actions for ourselves and others, and make thoughtful, effective decisions. This involves:

- understanding how a social situation makes us feel
- considering the different choices we have and the positive and negative consequences of each of these choices when making a decision
- making positive choices, while considering how these choices may affect ourselves and others.

Figure 5: Five Social and Emotional Learning Skills

(Adapted from: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2003(23))
Benefits of social and emotional learning

Improving social and emotional skills has a positive influence on children and adolescents' attitudes, behaviours and performance. A review of 317 studies involving over 300,000 children and adolescents found that social and emotional learning programs were beneficial for children and young people aged from 5-18 years, from urban and rural communities, with or without behavioural or emotional problems. Social and emotional learning improved participants' social and emotional skills, coping skills and resistance to negative peer pressure; resulted in more positive attitudes towards themselves, others, and their schools; improved social behaviours and cooperation with others; decreased risky, antisocial and aggressive behaviours; and decreased emotional problems including anxiety and depression.

Other research also suggests that social and emotional learning programs improve health outcomes for young people, including a decreased risk of tobacco, alcohol and illicit substance use problems, mental health problems and suicide, and sexually transmissible diseases.

Social and emotional learning programs can also improve academic success, with students demonstrating improved grades and test scores, more positive attitudes towards school, and better school attendance, as well as heightened trust and respect for teachers, improved management of school-related stress, improved participation in class, and fewer suspensions. These programs also show evidence of long-term effectiveness, especially if social skills are developed and consolidated across several years. Importantly, the positive effects of social and emotional learning can extend beyond the individual with improvements in students' social and emotional skills likely to have a positive influence on their schools, families and broader communities.

Social and emotional learning in the school curriculum

To make ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behaviour children and young people need to show understanding about themselves and to be able to take the perspective of, and empathise with, others. Being empathetic means being able to identify with, understand and care about how another person feels in a certain situation. This is especially important for students to reduce the bullying perpetration and to help those who are victimised.

Many students have not yet had the life experiences to enable them to directly understand or relate to what another person might think, feel or believe in a certain situation. Students benefit from the explicit teaching and learning activities that interrogate the different perspectives of individuals and groups involved in the social context and the decision-making processes they may apply to different social situations, such as preventing or responding to bullying.

The Friendly Schools Plus program uses stories and literature, cooperative games, role-plays, problem solving and reflective activities to encourage students to identify and understand their emotions, consider the perspectives of others, negotiate tricky situations, and make well-reasoned decisions. This comprehensive program provides sequential interactive and engaging learning activities to explicitly build social and emotional competencies in students that are important for each major developmental stage, from primary to secondary school.

Social and emotional learning by developmental level

The most effective social and emotional learning programs are those that integrate social learning into the curriculum, specifically targeting and building on social and emotional skills over time, from preschool to high school. While there may be considerable variation in children and adolescents' social and emotional skills, broad patterns are associated with early and middle childhood, and early and middle adolescence.
**Early Childhood**

From ages 4-8 children increasingly begin to use reason to understand the world, consider the needs of others and take responsibility for their actions. Developing confidence in their abilities and establishing healthy relationships is also important during this stage.\(^{[237, 238]}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Childhood Social and Emotional Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Awareness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can identify personal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• likes/dislikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• needs and wants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• strengths and challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can describe:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• positive qualities in others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Middle Childhood

From ages 8-11 students become increasingly independent but also more aware of social situations and relationships. Feeling part of a group and receiving social acceptance is particularly important at this time.

### Middle Childhood Social and Emotional Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Awareness</th>
<th>Self-Management</th>
<th>Social Awareness</th>
<th>Relationship Skills</th>
<th>Social Decision-Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can describe:</td>
<td>Can describe:</td>
<td>Can recognise</td>
<td>Can describe:</td>
<td>Can demonstrate:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• personal skills and interests they wish to develop</td>
<td>• range of emotions and situations that cause them</td>
<td>social cues that indicate how others may feel</td>
<td>• how to make and keep friends</td>
<td>• ability to respect rights of self and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• how family members and others can support positive behaviour</td>
<td>• and demonstrate ways to express emotions in socially acceptable manner</td>
<td>Can describe feelings and views expressed by others</td>
<td>• how to work effectively in groups</td>
<td>• knowledge of how social norms affect decision-making and behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can take steps towards and monitor goal achievement</td>
<td>Can identify:</td>
<td>Can identify:</td>
<td>Can apply constructive approaches to resolving conflicts</td>
<td>Can apply the steps of decision-making and identify and evaluate consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• differences and similarities between groups</td>
<td>• contributions of different groups and how to work with these groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>Can identify and contribute to roles to help in community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidence for Practice 153
Early Adolescence

From ages 11-13 young adolescents have improved self-control and self-reliance. They often have strong concerns about fitting in and physical appearance. Social and emotional skills have become more advanced, with young adolescents better able to analyse consequences and negotiate conflicts and interpersonal problems. Young people are also very concerned about making and keeping friends, including opposite-sex friendships. They also have a greater need for independence from adults often resisting the influence of parent and teachers, using peers to determine behavioural norms.\textsuperscript{[237, 241]}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Awareness</th>
<th>Self-Management</th>
<th>Social Awareness</th>
<th>Relationship Skills</th>
<th>Social Decision-Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can analyse how personal qualities influence choices and success</td>
<td>Can analyse factors to enhance or inhibit performance</td>
<td>Can predict others’ feelings and perspectives</td>
<td>Can analyse ways to build positive relationships with others</td>
<td>Can evaluate how values such as honesty and respect help to take into account the needs of others when making decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• using available supports can improve success</td>
<td>Can apply strategies to manage stress and improve performance</td>
<td>Can analyse how personal behaviour may affect others</td>
<td>Can demonstrate cooperation and teamwork to improve group processes</td>
<td>Can explain the reasons for rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can set short-term goal and plan to achieve it and analyse success or otherwise</td>
<td>Can explain how cultural differences can increase vulnerability to bullying and identify ways to reduce this.</td>
<td>Can evaluate strategies for preventing and resolving relationship problems</td>
<td>Can evaluate strategies to respond to negative peer influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can analyse the effects of taking action to oppose bullying</td>
<td>Can identify negative peer influence and determine ways to respond to it</td>
<td>Can evaluate their contribution to addressing needs in school and in the community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Middle Adolescence**

From ages 13-15 adolescents increasingly learn to balance freedom and fun with responsibilities, and individuality with peer influence. They value respect from others and independence from adults, and become more concerned with pursuing their own goals.237,242

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Awareness</th>
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<th>Social Awareness</th>
<th>Relationship Skills</th>
<th>Social Decision-Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can analyse how positive adult role models and other supports contribute to success</td>
<td>Can analyse how thoughts and emotions affect decision-making and responsible behaviour</td>
<td>Can analyse similarities and differences between their own and others’ perspectives</td>
<td>Can evaluate their contribution to groups where they are a leader or member</td>
<td>Can demonstrate taking personal responsibility for ethical decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can set priorities to build strengths and determine areas for improvement</td>
<td>Can monitor and find ways to develop more positive attitudes</td>
<td>Can use interpersonal skills to understand others’ perspectives and feelings</td>
<td>Can evaluate the impact of requesting or providing support to others</td>
<td>Can evaluate how social norms and expectations influence their decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can analyse and apply strategies to overcome barriers to achieving goals</td>
<td>Can examine and respond to negative stereotypes and prejudice</td>
<td>Can analyse actions they can take to help resolve conflicts as an individual or in a group</td>
<td>Can apply decision-making skills to establish responsible social relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can demonstrate respect for individuals from other social and cultural groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>Can evaluate their ability to anticipate the consequences of social decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Can plan, implement and evaluate their participation in activities to improve the school and local community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from: CASEL, Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Standards239)

Each developmental level as described in these tables is associated with the need for increasingly refined social and emotional learning. To meet this need, Friendly Schools Plus gradually increases the complexity of the age-appropriate activities provided for each year group. This allows students to build on and refine their social and emotional skills over time.
References

For more information, see: http://casel.org/


How to Use The Friendly Schools Plus Teacher Resource Books

The teaching and learning books are presented in five focus areas each representing one component of the social and emotional learning model.

• Self-Awareness
• Self-Management
• Social Awareness
• Relationship Skills
• Social Decision-Making

A table at the front of each focus area briefly describes the emphasis of each focus and the outcomes the activities proposed will enable students to achieve. A comprehensive list of activities is also provided.

Teachers are encouraged to teach from each of the focus areas in the order presented, as each builds on the vocabulary, concepts and skills covered in preceding focus areas.

Research clearly shows that the greater the dose of social and emotional learning the better the outcomes for students. As such the greater the number of learning activities completed in each focus area the greater the likelihood students will achieve the social and emotional learning outcomes. Teachers are encouraged to determine the social and emotional learning needs of their students to ensure the activities chosen meet students’ developmental levels, understandings and competencies. It may also be important to consider the school’s vision, priorities and values in deciding which social and emotional learning activities to teach. With this knowledge teachers can review the activities provided within the resource to decide which activities in each focus area they will implement.

Each focus is organised as follows:

• Introducing Key Messages – sets the context for the activity and introduces the key messages to help students to link previous social and emotional learning to new knowledge and skills.
• Developing Key Messages – provide students with opportunities to develop and practice key messages, relevant social and emotional understandings and skills. An electronic copy of the student activity sheets linked to these learning activities is provided on the CD enclosed with the teaching and learning books.
• Reflecting on Key Messages – encourages students to reflect and record their thoughts, feelings and attitudes throughout the course of their social and emotional learning in their student journal. Teachers are also encouraged to reflect on the extent to which students have understood the key messages for each focus.
Whole-School Surveys

Schools may wish to survey their whole-school community to develop an understanding of the prevalence and nature of bullying behaviour in their school; staff and family capacity to respond to bullying situations; and satisfaction with school responses to bullying behaviour. It is important that information provided by participants is treated as strictly confidential and that strategies are used to ensure these are communicated to participants prior to survey completion to enable the provision of honest responses.

- **Staff surveys**
  Surveying school staff provides schools with an understanding of their key understandings and competencies related to bullying behaviour. In particular, surveys can measure the amount of time spent actively involved in responding to bullying behaviour; self-efficacy in reducing bullying behaviour; perceived skill level to educate students about bullying behaviour; perceived understanding of bullying related understandings; attitudes toward bullying behaviour; and perceived effectiveness of school strategies implemented to reduce bullying.

- **Student surveys**
  Students can be surveyed to provide the school with a greater understanding of the prevalence and nature of bullying behaviour. Surveys can measure the frequency in which students engage in or experience bullying behaviour, including cyberbullying; the duration of bullying behaviours; how upsetting the behaviour was for students; bullying related absence, student actions taken after being bullied and resulting change; actions taken after bullying others; the time and location of bullying behaviour; and teachers’ response to bullying behaviour.

- **Family surveys**
  Surveying families enables schools to determine how successful they perceive school action to reduce bullying behaviour is, and satisfaction with the school’s response to bullying behaviour. Surveys can measure the frequency of students’ experience of being bullied or bullying others; the duration of bullying behaviours; attitudes toward bullying behaviour, perceived skill level to educate students about bullying behaviour; student absenteeism relating to bullying behaviour and friendship problems; and satisfaction with the school’s efforts to reduce bullying behaviour.

In addition to surveying the whole-school community, schools can undertake other assessments to measure school capacity to implement bullying reduction strategies (see Building Capacity Toolkits 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3); the physical environment of the school (see Protective Physical Environment Toolkits 5.1 and 5.3) and families’ perception of the welcoming environment of the school (see School-Family-Community Partnerships Toolkit 6.1).