



PREVENTION OF BULLYING POLICY (Parents and Girls)
(formerly known as the Anti-Bullying Policy)

SCHOOL CODE OF CONDUCT

Treat everyone, whether younger or older, with the same kindness and respect, with which you yourself would wish to be treated.

Any breach of the law of the land is a breach of school rules.

No girl may put the welfare or safety of another in jeopardy through her words or deeds.

A POLICY STATEMENT

The whole ethos of Downe House aims to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding of the needs of others, thus developing a sense of self-esteem and fulfilling an awareness of the importance of tolerance. This is intrinsic in the aims and objectives of the school.

As a community Downe House recognises that the threshold of tolerance is different for everyone. This Policy recognises the need to respect and support the needs of the individual in this domain. The aim of this document is to state clearly that, without exception, bullying is always unacceptable at Downe House. Every pupil has the right to be happy and secure at School and to be supported and protected when she feels vulnerable.

Physical, verbal or emotional abuse of any member of the community is not acceptable at Downe House. Incidents are taken seriously, recorded and appropriate action taken. Repeated or serious bullying may lead to a girl being required to leave the School.

Staff must always be vigilant, with tutor and Housemistresses in particular paying close attention to the group dynamics, rivalries, or any bad feeling in their House. Any member of staff who suspects bullying must refer the matter to the tutor or Housemistress within 24 hours. If a pupil reports bullying of any kind, it must be reported to the tutor or Housemistress, and a record must be passed to him/her of what was said by the reporting pupil or member of staff. The tutor or Housemistress should refer the matter to the appropriate Head of Section or the Deputy Head if the matter is considered serious in which case a more formal procedure may be adopted, as detailed below.

Allegations of bullying may in the most serious cases raise child protection concerns in which case the reporting procedure under the School's child protection policy should be followed.

A DEFINITION OF BULLYING

Bullying is any behaviour which hurts, or causes distress to another person or group of people by taking advantage of their vulnerability, or by making them feel uncomfortable or threatened. It is usually unprovoked and is, by definition, often repeated and can continue for a long period of time. It always reflects an imbalance and abuse of power. Bulling behaviours are aggressive although they may not seem so. These patterns of behaviour damage self-esteem both in the aggressor and the victim.

All people have the potential to bully others or to be bullied. Bullies are often highly socially competent people, who may provide plausible explanations for their conduct.

Bullying can be carried out by an individual or within the context of a group of people, where individuals have different status, with one being the leader. It is likely that the leader will be quite able and articulate. Repeated teasing should be viewed as bullying. It is, however, not bullying when two young people of about the same size and strength have the occasional quarrel. Although this kind of behaviour is not bullying it will still be taken seriously by the school.

EXAMPLES OF BULLYING (this list is non-exhaustive)

Here are some examples of bullying behaviour:-

- Hitting, kicking, pushing people around, spitting, slapping
- Name calling, taunting, teasing, insulting, 'snide' comments, putting people down in class
- Intimidating, threatening, isolating or excluding from the group
- Using email, text or other electronic messages, or web spaces to write or say hurtful things (cyberbullying)
- Spreading rumours and writing unkind notes or letters
- Taking, damaging or hiding belongings

All aspects of bullying behaviour play on the victim's vulnerability. A victim may feel vulnerable because of her age, physical appearance, difficult situation at home, ethnic background, nationality, colour, religion, disability, special educational need, sexuality, because she is new to the school, is shy or seems to have no friends. Bullying behaviour may hurt or distress the victim, and over a period of time can lower her sense of self-esteem and make her unhappy.

The following points must be reinforced frequently by all staff:

- To witness bullying and do nothing is to imply that you agree with what is going on
- The School must not tolerate bullies and must make it clear that it disapproves of them
- There is no place for bullying in the School community, and the victim will always receive a sympathetic hearing and be supported

PROCEDURES

GUIDELINES FOR ACTION SHOULD BULLYING OCCUR

1. PUPILS

Downe House provides a number of people with whom a pupil can share a problem. Each House displays a chart listing all those who are ready to listen and who are familiar to the girls. The list also contains names of outside agencies to which girls might go if they prefer. In many cases a victim of bullying does not want anyone else to know what is happening:

- She does not want to 'tell tales on others'
- She does not want the bully to be punished
- She is afraid of what the bully might do
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However, if a girl is being bullied, it is always better to tell someone;

- Sharing what is happening will help her deal with her feelings
- Bullying thrives on secrecy – it can only be dealt with by being brought out into the open
- It may save other people from becoming victims of bullying.

Girls are encouraged to:

- Be confident that action will be taken to stop the bullying
- Be confident in their own self-worth and value to the School community
- Be a good friend, above all when it is known that someone is unhappy or lonely and remember to include everyone in class and in the House, especially where sharing activities or group work are concerned

All pupils are encouraged to follow these guidelines.

1. Explain to the bully that her words/actions are upsetting; she may not be aware of this. However, if the bullying continues try not to show your feelings. Stay calm.
2. Walk away quickly and confidently, even if you don't feel that way inside.
3. If you are different in any way, be proud of it – it's good to be an individual.
4. The bully will not stop if she thinks she can get away with such behaviour. Discuss the problem with your friends and if you think it is serious tell a member of staff or if you feel uncertain about taking this step, you may want to talk first informally to:

- Your parents
- Your Tutor
- Your Housemistress/master
- Any other teacher
- The Deputy or Headmistress
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5. When you are talking to an adult about bullying, be clear about:

- What has happened to you
- How often it has happened
- Who was involved
- Who saw what was happening
- Where it happened
- What you have done about it already

What happens next?

Any of the people listed in Point 4 above will be able to advise and support you and to take the matter further. The level of response to incidents will obviously vary according to their seriousness. In most cases a complaint may be resolved informally in the first instance – a girl who has been accused of bullying may be asked to talk about her behaviour and encouraged to change/improve it. It may sometimes be the case that the girl in question genuinely has not realised that her actions can cause distress. The situation will then be closely monitored by staff.

However, a more formal procedure may be adopted for more serious cases, or in any case where informal discussions have not resulted in a change/improvement in a girl's behaviour, with the effect of conveying to all parties how seriously bullying behaviour is taken, as follows:

- The victim and the accused should be asked to record the events in writing as soon as possible;
- The victim and the accused will then be spoken to individually about the complaint, and each girl will have an opportunity to give their version of events:

- The girls' record of events, a note of the discussions held and outcome of the discussions should be given to the Deputy Head (where the discussions are held by the appropriate Head of Section. The details will be kept on the pupils' files.
- Copies of the aforementioned documents should be sent to the Deputy Head and the Headmistress where there has been an incident of fighting or aggression. Any girl involved in a serious fight may well be sent to the Deputy Head or the Headmistress, but usually after discussion with the tutor or Housemistress and the Head of Section. It is very important to have a clear record of events, for a girl may become a habitual offender, a fact which will not be clear unless there is consistent reporting.

In addition, parents may be informed and invited to discuss the problem with the Deputy Head or the Headmistress.

Sanctions will be imposed on pupils who are found, following an investigation, to have bullied. Ultimately a girl who is found to have committed a serious offence of bullying, or who will not change/improve her behaviour, may be required to leave the School.

When bullying has been reported and action to prevent it has been taken, the situation will be monitored closely by staff to prevent it occurring again. Everyone involved has the responsibility for helping the bully to change her behaviour. In addition, the victim may need help to deal with her feelings and to understand and overcome her vulnerability.

You can help to stop bullying

1. If the girl being bullied is in any danger, fetch help. If she isn't, remain with her; your presence may ease the situation.
2. Show that you and your friends disapprove.
3. Give sympathy and support to other girls who may be bullied. It could be your turn next.
4. Be careful about teasing or making personal remarks. If you think they might not find your comments funny don't say them.
5. If you know someone is being bullied you should report what is happening to someone in authority. If you feel uncertain about taking this step you may want to talk first informally to any of the individuals listed above (at the top of page 3). The victim may be too scared or lonely to report it herself.

2. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Problem solving approaches to bullying which are school based alone may not always work without the support of the parents. The involvement of parents has been found to be effective in deterring persistent bullying. Parents need to show their daughters ways of dealing with difficult situations without using violence or aggression. Downe House believes that making parents aware that their daughter has been involved in bullying demonstrates the fact that the school takes seriously this matter, seeks to change such patterns of behaviour and welcomes parental support in that process.

IF YOUR DAUGHTER IS BEING BULLIED

Parents along with peers will probably be the first to hear of a bullying incident. They should not dismiss it. Parents should contact their daughter's Housemistress, Tutor, Deputy Headmistress or Headmistress if they are worried. It is essential to stay calm, supportive and find out the facts of the situation. Reassurance will be needed in order to persuade your daughter that she has done the right thing by telling you. You may find it helpful to have the following checklist at your side to ensure that correct information is passed to school.

- What happened?

- Who was involved?
- Who saw it?
- Where did it take place?
- How often has it happened?
- Why did it take place?
- What form did the bullying take?

When you inform the school of these details you will want to ask what you can do to support the school in the action taken to support your daughter. You will also want to make a note of the suggested strategy the school intends to take. Stay in touch with the school so that they can be kept informed of how things are improving and to establish further contact if necessary.

IF YOUR DAUGHTER IS INVOLVED IN BULLYING

It is important to work with the school to modify the patterns of behaviour which are causing your daughter to bully. It is important to acknowledge that these things do happen and the School has mechanisms in place to deal with this issue. It is helpful to recognise some of the reasons why pupils behave in this way from time to time.

Children sometimes bully others because:

- They are not aware of how hurtful it is.
- They are copying the behaviour of older siblings or people they admire.
- They have a temporary difficulty integrating in their peer group.
- They are bullying others because of encouragement from friends.
- They are going through a difficult time personally and need help.
- They have not yet learnt satisfactory ways for making firm friendships.

TO STOP YOUR DAUGHTER FROM BULLYING OTHERS

- Talk with your daughter and help her to understand that what she is doing is unacceptable as it makes other girls unhappy.
- Discourage aggressive and violent behaviour at all times.
- Suggest ways of joining in activities with other pupils without bullying.
- Liaise with the school: Housemistress, Tutor, Head of Lower School, Upper School or Sixth Form, Deputy Head or Headmistress.
- Make time to have regular chats about how things are going at school.
- Check that your daughter has identified an adult at school to whom she can go if she has a problem or a worry of any kind.

N.B. the School will want to and need to take action if bullying occurs. The matter will be sensitively handled but it needs to be effective.

IF YOUR DAUGHTER IS BEING BULLIED BY A MEMBER OF STAFF

The girl should use the complaints procedure laid down in the Student Planner and displayed on each House Board. Please make sure that you are also familiar with this procedure.

IF YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED THAT THE MATTER HAS BEEN DEALT WITH

Families who feel that their worries and concerns have not been addressed appropriately might like to consider the following steps:

- Make an appointment to discuss the matter with the Headmistress, keep a record of the meeting.

- If parents remain dissatisfied, they are encouraged to pursue the matter under the Complaints Procedure for Parents.

RESOURCES

Advice for parents and families about bullying

- 'Bullying and how to fight it' A. Mellor (1993)
SCRE, 15 St John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR (Available from good bookshops)
- Fighting, teasing and bullying: simple and effective ways to help your child.
J Pearce (1989) Thorsons, Wellingborough. (Available from good bookshops)

ORGANISATIONS WHO CAN HELP

Childline	0800 11 11
NSPCC Child Protection Helpline	0808 800 500
www.bullying.co.uk	

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