

TITLE:

Student Bullying and Harassment SOP

Summary of Contents:

SERC is committed to providing a caring, friendly and safe environment for all learners, so they can learn in a secure atmosphere.

Bullying in any form, is entirely contrary to College values and principles. This SOP sets out clear guidelines on how bullying incidents should be dealt with.

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Responsible Owner:

Campus Manager Ards and Manager for Welfare and Equality

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 South Eastern Regional College (SERC) is committed to practices that protect vulnerable groups from harm and creating a safe learning environment that promotes well-being and security for all learners with the safety of the child or vulnerable adult as paramount. Staff in the College recognise and accept the responsibilities to protect and develop awareness of the issues that may cause harm to young people or to vulnerable adults and promote the concept of the 'safe learner'.
- 1.2 Central to the College's Student Bullying and Harassment SOP is the belief that all learners have a right not to be bullied or harassed in any manner, and that bullying, or harassment is always unacceptable. Bullying and any form of harassment can have a severe, detrimental impact on the learner leading to distress, depression, thoughts of self-harm and sometimes suicide. SERC embraces the advantages of modern technology in terms of the educational benefits it brings, however the College is mindful of the potential for bullying and harassment to occur.
- 1.3 The College also recognises that it must take note of bullying or harassment perpetrated outside SERC, but which spills over into the classroom or learning environment. Under the auspices of this SOP, any bullying aspects carried out by learners which impact on the College environment can be investigated by SERC and this could result in Disciplinary Action being taken.
- 1.4 The College values all its learners equally, regardless of age, ability, race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. All victims of bullying or harassment will be treated in a supportive manner.

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 This procedure applies to all learners and staff at SERC.
- 2.2 The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to set out SERC's position on bullying and harassment, and to give clear guidelines on how such incidents should be dealt with. It should be read in conjunction with *the Student and Trainee Performance, Behaviour and Disciplinary Management SOP* and *Care, Wellbeing and Safeguarding SOP*.

3.0 Guidance and Definitions

Bullying

- 3.1 The Department of Education in its recent consultation document 'Addressing Bullying in Schools' (2015) proposed the definition:

"Bullying is the repeated and intentional use of physical, verbal, electronic, written or psychological acts or omissions, or any combination thereof, by one or more pupils against another pupil or group of pupils with the intention of causing hurt, harm, fear, distress or adversely affecting the rights or needs of that pupil or group of pupils".
- 3.2 Bullying is inherently repetitive in its nature, involving the intentional use of physical, verbal, psychological or other acts to cause hurt, harm, fear or distress to one or more students.

It encompasses actions which seek to deliberately exclude students and can encompass situations where the student(s) undertaking the bullying behaviour might reasonably have known that this would be the effect of their conduct.

- 3.3 Isolated incidents of aggressive behaviour cannot be described as bullying, even though they would be if they were repeated. It is acknowledged that such behaviour can have a serious impact upon the recipient and should continue to deal with these as breaches of SERC's *Student and Trainee Performance, Behaviour and Disciplinary Management SOP*.
- 3.4 SERC adopts a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and will not tolerate bullying in any form. SERC is committed to providing a caring, friendly and safe environment for all our learners, so they can learn in a secure atmosphere. Bullying in any form, is entirely contrary to the values and principles we work and live by.
- 3.5 All members of the college community have a right to work in a secure and caring environment. They also have a responsibility to contribute, in whatever way they can, to the protection and maintenance of such an environment.
- 3.6 Bullying can be:
- **Emotional** - being unfriendly, excluding someone, tormenting (e.g. threatening gestures, interfering with personal possessions.)
 - **Physical** - pushing, kicking, hitting, punching or any use of physical violence.
 - **Racist - bullying** can be a range of hurtful behaviour, both physical and psychological, that makes a person feel unwelcome, marginalized, excluded, powerless or worthless because of their colour, ethnicity, culture, faith community, national origin or national status and can include racial taunts graffiti, gestures
 - **Sexual or Sexist** - Sexual bullying includes any behaviour whether physical or non-physical, where sexuality is used as a weapon. It includes unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments.
 - **Homophobic** - Homophobic bullying targets someone because of their sexual orientation (or perceived sexual orientation). It can be particularly difficult for a young person to report and is often directed at them at a very sensitive phase of their lives when identity is being developed. Homophobic bullying has been shown to have an extremely damaging impact, with depression, suicidal thoughts and self-harm reported.
 - **Transphobic** - Transphobic bullying is bullying based on prejudice or negative attitudes, views, or beliefs about trans people. Transphobic bullying affects young people who are trans but can also affect those questioning their gender identity as well as students who are not trans but do not conform to gender stereotypes.
 - **Verbal** - name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing, and graffiti.
 - **Cyber** – all areas of internet, such as social networking, email, chat room misuse, threats/abuse by text messaging or calls from any mobile device and misuse of associated technology i.e., camera or video. Cyber-bullying is an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual using electronic forms of contact repeatedly over time against a victim who cannot easily defend himself/herself.
 - **Disability**- Bullying involving young people with disabilities employs many of the same forms as other types of bullying, with name calling and pushing and shoving being common. Also includes, seemingly 'low level' bullying from which there is no let up.

3.7 How does bullying differ from banter?

- Bullying involves a deliberate intention to hurt or humiliate. There is a power imbalance that makes it hard for the victim to defend themselves. Bullying is usually persistent.
- Occasionally an incident may be deemed to be bullying even if the behaviour has not been repeated or persistent - if it fulfils all other descriptions of bullying. This possibility should be considered, particularly in cases of sexual, sexist, racist, or homophobic bullying and when young people with disabilities are involved. If the victim might be in danger, then intervention is urgently required.
- Bullying of any kind is unacceptable at SERC. If bullying does occur, all students should be aware that incidents will be dealt with promptly and effectively. This means that anyone who knows that bullying is happening is expected to tell a member of the college staff.
- If a student feels that they are being bullied by a member of the College staff, they should report this directly to the Head(s) of Pastoral Care. This can be done by going to the Pastoral Care page of the Student Intranet and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups page provides the names of Safeguarding staff in each campus. They may also disclose this with a member of SERC Extra, Training/Technical Support Officer or Learning Support Staff.

3.8 How to respond to bullying

When bullying does occur, a clear consistent response is essential. The goals of any intervention should always be the same, no matter who is dealing with the incident, namely:

- To make the student whom is being bullied feel safe, and feel that you are taking their report of being bullied seriously;
- To stop the bullying and change the bully's behavior;
- To make clear to every learner that bullying is unacceptable;
- To learn lessons from the experience that can be applied in the future.

3.9 Why is it important to respond to bullying?

Bullying hurts. No one deserves to be a victim of bullying. Everybody has the right to be treated with respect.

3.10 Signs and symptoms of bullying

A young person may indicate by signs or behaviour that he or she is being bullied. All College staff should be aware of these possible signs and should report these to a Safeguarding Officer if a student is:

- Is frightened of walking to or from college;
- Doesn't want to go on the usual mode of transport;
- Changes their usual routine;
- Is unwilling to go home;
- Begins to have a poor attendance record;
- Becomes withdrawn anxious, or lacking in confidence;
- Attempts or threatens suicide or runs away;
- Has difficulty sleeping;
- College work begins to suffer;
- Has possessions which are damaged or "go missing";

- Has unexplained cuts or bruises;
- Becomes aggressive, disruptive or unreasonable;
- Is bullying other students;
- Stops eating;
- Is frightened to say what's wrong;
- Gives improbable excuses for any of the above;
- Is afraid to use the internet or mobile phone;
- Is nervous and jumpy when a cyber-message is received.

These signs and behaviours could indicate other problems, but bullying should be considered a possibility and should be reported to a Safeguarding Officer.

3.11 Additional sources of advice and guidance

- **Anti-Bullying Alliance:** www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk
- **CEOP** (The Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre): Hosts the Young people's online charter and is responsible for safety on the intranet. There is advice for parents and carers and for young people particularly on cyberbullying. www.ceop.gov.uk
- **ChildLine:** Offers confidential advice and information to young people up to the age of 19. www.childline.org.uk
- **Childnet:** For information and materials on a range of online safety aspects such as social networking, being a good digital citizen, and cyberbullying. www.digizen.org/cyberbullying
- **EACH (Educational Action Challenging Homophobia):** provides training for local authorities to challenge homophobic bullying: www.Eachaction.org.uk. EACH also provides a national helpline for young people experiencing homophobic bullying: Tel: 0801000 143.
- **NSPCC:** Offers a wide range of advice and support in this area, including what to do when a child may disclose a further problem such as domestic violence or neglect. Visit: www.nspcc.org.uk
- **PSNI:** Crimes can be reported to PSNI and advice can be taken by using the following link <http://www.psni.police.uk>
- **SAIL:** SAIL is a support group for the families of gender variant or Transgender individuals of circumstances. www.transgenderni.com/SAIL-7017.html
- **Stonewall:** Information on tackling homophobic bullying: www.stonewall.org.uk

3.12 Harassment

Harassment can be defined as, “unwanted contact relating to sex, racial or ethnic origin, age, disability, religion or belief and sexual orientation which affects the dignity of a person, thus creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. It can be persistent, or an isolated incident.”

Harassment can take many forms and may be related to an individual's:

- Gender, marital or family status;
- Religious belief or political opinion;
- Disability;
- Race or ethnic origin;
- Nationality;
- Sexual orientation;
- Age

The above list is not exhaustive, and any claim of bullying or harassment will be investigated by the College Pastoral Team and could be dealt with in lines with the *Student and Trainee Performance, Behaviour and Disciplinary Management SOP*.

4.0 **Students' Rights and Responsibilities**

Students' Rights

- 4.1 Every student has the right to learn in an environment which is free from any sort of bullying or harassment. SERC recognises the right for every student to report any allegations relating to bullying or harassment. All allegations will be dealt with seriously, promptly and in a confidential and sympathetic manner.
- 4.2 All incidents of bullying or harassment should be reported via the College's Safeguarding and Pastoral Support Referral App. The Referral will automatically come to the Heads of Pastoral Care, Director of SPQS and Principal/CEO of the College. They will then decide how the incident should be dealt with. This can include linking with the Gateway team and/or PSNI should the Cyberbullying be deemed serious enough to warrant reporting to these external agencies.
- 4.3 Support and Counselling will be offered to all parties involved in the allegation through the College Wellbeing Partner, Inspire Students!

Student Responsibilities

- 4.4 Every student within SERC has the responsibility to ensure that there is a learning environment in which all learners are respected regardless of their background. All students, staff and volunteers must follow this policy and ensure that their behaviour and treatment of others does not cause any offence.
- 4.5 Every learner has a responsibility to ensure bullying and harassment does not occur and to make it known that they find this type of behaviour within SERC unacceptable. If a learner encounters any form of bullying or harassment, whether it be directed towards themselves or others, they should report this to a member of SERC Staff. SERC Staff will ensure that their report will be dealt with seriously, promptly and in a confidential and sympathetic manner.

5.0 Procedure

- 5.1 Tackling bullying is the responsibility of all members of staff. In addition, the College Safeguarding Team is the nominated 'anti-bullying team' who provides a focus for anti-bullying work. The Safeguarding Team are led by the Head(s) of Pastoral Care.
- 5.2 The role includes responding to bullying incident, ensuring that records are kept and that data on bullying incidents is collected and held securely, and linking with the Gateway team and/or PSNI.
- 5.3 All incidents of bullying should be reported via the College's Safeguarding and Pastoral Support Referral App. The Referral will automatically come to the Head(s) of Pastoral Care, Director of SPQS, and Principal/CEO of the College. They will then decide how the incident should be dealt with. This will normally be via one of the Safeguarding team or a tutor, Assistant Head of School, Training Support Officer or Head of Training.
- 5.4 The member of staff who is asked to investigate the bullying incident should arrange to meet with the alleged victim as soon as possible, to understand the nature of the concern.
- The starting point for any intervention should be to talk to the learner who has been bullied, establish what has happened, and agree a way forward
 - Make time to listen calmly to the student
 - Take the bullying seriously and avoid telling students to 'just ignore it'
 - Agree an action plan with his or her consent
 - Avoid humiliating the victim by taking actions which make them seem weaker or powerless
 - Help the victim become more resilient, for example by building up their self-confidence, emphasizing their strengths and helping them to develop protective friendships
- 5.5 Where there is evidence or a strong suspicion that bullying has taken place, then the member of staff should interview the perpetrators as soon as is possible.
- 5.6 Wherever possible parent/guardians on both sides e.g. alleged victim and alleged perpetrator should be informed that an incident has occurred.
- 5.7 In serious cases of bullying this may be a '**Gross Misconduct**' offence under the *Student and Trainee Performance, Behaviour and Disciplinary Management SOP* and should be dealt with in accordance with the SOP.
- 5.8 Staff will address any prejudice exhibited by a whole group. If a group of learners are behaving in a prejudicial way - this needs to be addressed with the whole group.
- 5.9 The staff member who has dealt with the incident should monitor all the students involved and deal immediately with any further concerns/incidents. Bullies will often appear to comply but may still bully someone else or bully more secretly so that they do not get caught. Therefore, it is important to monitor the situation, follow up discreetly with the victim

to make certain the bullying has actually stopped, and that they feel safe and pass any concerns about a student to other staff who may be teaching them.

5.10 Support for the Bully

The College will always seek to work with the bully (bullies) to change their behaviour. Students who are bullying need to learn different ways of behaving. The college has a responsibility to respond promptly and effectively to issues of bullying. There is often an underlying reason for bullying behaviour. A bully can be very insecure and may:

- Have been the victim of bullying in the past
- Worried about becoming a victim of bullying themselves
- Want to be part of a particular group of students
- Generally, have lower levels of self confidence

Support may be required to enable a bully to change his/her behaviour. Breaking patterns of behaviour and expectations of other students and staff may make him/her a victim to others. Bullies wishing to reform should be encouraged to seek help and advice from the Inspire counselling service or their Personal Tutor. They can also be put in touch with other external support organisations who may be able to offer additional support on Anger Management or support that SERC or Inspire may not be able to provide. Information on these support networks can be obtained from the Heads of Pastoral Care

A bully should be encouraged to change his/her behaviour and should not be intimidated, humiliated or made to feel uncomfortable when seeking support.

5.11 Cyber-Bullying

Cyber-Bullying can be defined as follows:

“Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites.”

Cyber-Bullying is different from “Normal” Bullying as:

- Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and reach a person who is being cyber-bullied even when he or she is alone. It can happen any time of the day or night.
- Cyberbullying messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience. It can be difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source.
- Deleting inappropriate or harassing messages, texts, and pictures is extremely difficult after they have been posted or sent.
- Cyber bullying can be traced and tracked to find proof of the bullying so that it becomes less of a question about one person's word over another.

Where cyber bullying has taken place, printouts should be obtained wherever possible (e.g. of emails), or the member of staff taking the statement should sign it to say they have seen any text messages/call records on the learner's mobile phone.

All incidents of bullying or harassment should be reported via the College's Cause for Concern App. The Cause for Concern will automatically come to the Heads of Pastoral Care and Principal/CEO of the College. They will then decide how the incident should be dealt with. This can include linking with the Gateway team and/or PSNI should the Cyberbullying be deemed serious enough to warrant reporting to these external agencies.

5.12 School Partnerships Provision

Where a student who is a victim of bullying or the bully is a pupil from a school participating on a School Links Programme this should be reported to the School Partnerships Manager so that they can report this back to the school.

6.0 Communication Plan

6.1 This Standard Operating Procedure will be communicated to staff and students via the Learning Engine on the SERC Intranet and via Staff Development training.

7.0 Review

7.1 The data collected via the Cause for Concern App will be reported to the Education Committee of the Governing Body at each of its meeting.

7.2 This SOP will be reviewed annually or sooner to reflect changes in circumstance.