



SECTION 4:

Responding to bullying behaviour

23. Responding to different levels of bullying behaviour

This section provides some practical tools for assessing bullying incidents and responding appropriately to incidents of differing severity.

23.1. Bullying incidents vary widely in their severity, impact on the target, and frequency. Most bullying behaviour is hidden from adults' view, and as such all allegations need to be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. This means getting an understanding of exactly what happened, considering it in relation to the definition of bullying and then implementing the school's bullying policies and processes. The approach or disposition that a school or teacher brings to responding to bullying behaviour is critical – policies and processes alone are not enough.

23.2. Most mild incidents of bullying behaviour can be responded to effectively by students (ie, targets and bystanders) themselves, or with minimal support from teachers. However, more serious instances of bullying behaviour will require a proportionately greater response.

All instances of bullying need to be taken seriously and responded to appropriately

Some bullying may reach the level of serious assault or child abuse. Schools should not investigate such incidents themselves and **must** refer these to New Zealand Police and / or Child, Youth and Family for follow-up (see quick reference guide).

24. Tools for assessing and responding to bullying incidents

24.1. The following pages contain two tools – a bullying assessment matrix and a quick reference guide – which have been developed to support schools' decision-making processes when bullying happens. Based on their knowledge of each student and situation, schools can use the tools to help assess the seriousness (moderate, major or severe) of a particular incident and develop an appropriate response. Depending on their resilience and capability, some students could be involved in making this assessment.

24.2. Note that the tools should be adapted to take account of the circumstances of the individuals concerned and of the incident. They are not a substitute for professional judgement, experience and advice or schools' policies and processes.

24.3. The bullying assessment matrix (see over page) can be used before going to the quick reference guide. It enables a school to assess a bullying incident's severity, impact and frequency and use this information to allocate a 'rating' to underpin the school's response.

24.4. The quick reference guide (see page 60) provides guidance for schools on responding to bullying incidents according to whether they are mild, moderate, major or severe. It can also be downloaded at www.education.govt.nz/bullyingprevention.

24.5. We welcome feedback on these templates, to bullying.prevention@minedu.govt.nz.

"Our big message to staff is: know your limits. Use your professional judgement and refer the issue to the appropriate person or people."

– Mt Albert Grammar School

Bullying Assessment Matrix

The bullying assessment matrix is intended to help guide a school's response to a bullying incident and to be used prior to referring to the quick reference guide. It is intended as a supporting resource and does not replace decisions based on professional judgment and experience or schools' current policies and processes.

Most incidents of bullying behaviour can be appropriately responded to by students themselves, or by classroom or duty teachers. This bullying assessment matrix is intended only for incidents where a higher level of response is appropriate.

Incident Details

Brief description of what happened:

Date: _____ *Assessment completed by:* _____

Important Considerations

- › Your initial assessment may change (eg **ORANGE** to **RED**) as new information comes to light.
- › You may decide to assess an incident as **RED** for reasons other than those stated here. Please note these below if this is the case.
- › Student vulnerability may be influenced by factors such as mental health, disability, or lack of a social support group.

Comments

(record any other mitigating or aggravating factors that have contributed to your assessment here)

Bullying Assessment Matrix

Instructions

Circle a number (1-3) for severity, impact and frequency.

Add ratings to obtain a total score. Give the incident a red, orange or yellow rating as follows:

- › total score of 8-9, rate incident **RED**
- › total score of 6-7, rate incident **ORANGE**
- › total score 3-5, rate incident **YELLOW**

If any domain (severity, impact, or frequency) has been scored a '3' rate the incident as **RED**.

Factors which may DECREASE impact:

- › target is resilient and able to manage situation with minimal support
- › incident is unlikely to recur or be replicated via digital technology
- › initiator willing to cease behaviour

Factors which may INCREASE impact:

- › vulnerable target, likely to require significant support
- › significant physical and / or psychological or emotional impact on target
- › significant impact on other students and the wider school community
- › incident replicated or prolonged using digital technology
- › similar incident has occurred before (same target and / or initiator)
- › incident involves inappropriate sexual behaviour or physical violence
- › marked size or age difference between target and initiator

Severity

1. moderate	2. major	3. severe
eg, physical threats or harm, intimidation, social exclusions (no sexual element)	eg, some physical threats or harm, intimidation, sexual statements or threats	physical harm requiring medical attention, sexual threats or inappropriate sexualised behaviour, statements that may incite suicide

Impact

1. moderate	2. major	3. severe
target likely to cope well and require minimal / short-term support	target likely to cope well with a period of additional school-based support	target vulnerable and / or likely to need ongoing or intensive support from school and / or specialist support

Frequency

1. moderate	2. major	3. severe
has never or rarely occurred before and is very unlikely to recur or be digitally replicated	similar incidents have occurred fewer than 3 times and / or are likely to recur or be digitally replicated	similar incidents have occurred 3 or more times and / or are very likely to recur or be digitally replicated

Assessment Total: _____

Are any of the domains scored a '3'?
YES / NO

(if yes, code the incident **RED**)

Rating (please circle)

YELLOW **ORANGE** **RED**
moderate major severe

24.6. Sample bullying incident assessments

MODERATE (YELLOW):

A student (the initiator) makes inappropriate and derogatory remarks to another student (target) based on his / her ethnicity. A group of students is watching (bystanders). One or two similar incidents involving the same students have occurred over the past few weeks and the target student has received a few negative text messages. The target student is confident and assertive. He / she has told the initiator that his / her behaviour is disrespectful and inappropriate and has reported all the incidents to his / her class teacher.

Assessment rating:

Frequency	2	Has happened previously and is likely to be replicated
Impact	1	Student is confident and able to cope well with peer / teacher support
Severity	1	Comments, although offensive, does not contain threats
Total	4	Moderate: Action – implement school bullying policy.

MAJOR (ORANGE):

A student (the initiator) makes inappropriate and derogatory remarks to another student (target) based on his / her ethnicity. A group of students is watching (bystanders). One or two similar incidents involving the same students have occurred over the past few weeks and the target student has received a few negative text messages. The target student is a migrant and is new to the community and to the school. He / she has not yet developed a strong peer network and is quite isolated. The remarks are particularly hurtful and intimidating and the student is feeling threatened and unsafe at school.

Assessment rating:

Frequency	2	Has happened on a few occasions and is likely to be replicated
Impact	3	Student is vulnerable
Severity	1	Comments are intended to intimidate
Total	6	Major: Action – implement school bullying policy and consider whether external support is needed.

SEVERE (RED):

A student (the initiator) makes inappropriate remarks to another student (target) based on his / her ethnicity and pushes him / her to the ground while continuing to threaten and verbally abuse him / her. There is a group of students watching (bystanders). Several similar incidents involving the same students have occurred over the past few weeks and the target student has received text messages. As a result of the fear of further bullying, the student's (target) school attendance has dropped and he / she feels very unsafe when at school.

Assessment rating:

Frequency	3	Has happened on several occasions and is being replicated
Impact	2	Student is fearful of further bullying and attendance is being affected
Severity	2	Comments intimidating and combined with physical aggression
Total	7	Severe: Action – implement school bullying policy and engage external support.

*Note: These examples are intended **only as a guide**. The individual circumstances of bullying incidents will vary. Incidents that appear similar may differ in their impact and seriousness. Social / relational bullying can result in just as much emotional and psychological harm to the target as physical bullying.*



"The assessment matrix is very useful. It makes you step back and go, 'Wait a minute, this is serious'. Almost like a moral compass."

Banks Avenue School

"The quick reference guide grabbed us. It's now sitting in the back of every teacher's PB4L folder."

"The quick reference guide was particularly useful when some parents insisted that bullying was occurring. We used the chart to show them, 'This is where it fits and this is what we'll do.'"

Oxford Crescent School

Responding to Bullying Incidents

Quick Reference Guide

Rating	What the bullying behaviour looks like ...	Response/action needed
Severe School should seek external advice and support	<p>Severe bullying incidents (RED) are likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve physical or psychological harm requiring medical and / or mental health attention involve serious sexual threats or any inappropriate sexualised behaviour be part of a series of bullying incidents be very likely to recur and / or be replicated through digital technology <p>The target is likely to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> particularly vulnerable and / or likely to require intensive, on-going school-based or specialist support <p>The initiator is likely to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> vulnerable and require intensive follow-up <p><i>Note: there may be other aggravating factors that have led to the incident being rated RED</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reassure students that they have done the right thing by reporting the incident activate your school bullying policy and processes for responding to incidents engage your Board of Trustees and parents and whānau early refer incident to the Police – call 111 or your local Police station for advice contact Child, Youth and Family if you have concerns about possible neglect or abuse contact NetSafe if you require urgent advice or support around cyberbullying identify a media spokesperson and activate your school's media protocol DO NOT investigate or interview students before seeking advice from the Police or Child, Youth and Family
Major School may need to seek advice or support	<p>Major bullying incidents (ORANGE) are likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve physical threats or harm, and / or intimidation involve some inappropriate sexual statements or threats have occurred previously and be likely to recur or be replicated through digital technology <p>The target is likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> have the resilience to cope with a period of additional school-based support in place <p><i>Note: there may be other aggravating or mitigating factors that have led to the incident being assessed as ORANGE</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reassure students that they have done the right thing by reporting the incident activate your school bullying policy and processes for responding to incidents engage your Board of Trustees, parents and whānau early contact other agencies for advice if you are uncertain whether or not they should be involved follow your school's media protocol, identify a media spokesperson and engage with media as required contact your school health guidance service if you have concerns about a student who is particularly troubled by bullying, eg, for a mental health assessment
Moderate School can manage response internally	<p>Moderate bullying incidents rated (YELLOW) are likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve minor physical threats or harm, intimidation, or social exclusion have no inappropriate sexual element have never or rarely occurred before be very unlikely to recur or be digitally replicated <p>The target is likely to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> resilient and able to cope well with minimal / short-term school-based support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reassure students that they have done the right thing by reporting the incident activate your school's bullying policy and processes for responding to incidents engage your Board of Trustees and parents and whānau early identify a media spokesperson in case of media interest
Mild Student can respond appropriately	<p>Mild bullying incidents rated (GREEN) are likely to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve mild physical threats or harm, intimidation, or social exclusion have no inappropriate sexual element have never or rarely occurred before be very unlikely to recur or be digitally replicated <p>The target is likely to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> resilient and able to cope well with peer support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> student knows strategies and can respond appropriately peer support and / or minimal adult intervention may be needed student knows how to report, and is reassured that they have done the right thing report of incident is recorded and followed up according to school's policies and processes

Note: Most incidents of bullying behaviour can be appropriately responded to by students themselves, or by classroom or duty teachers. This quick reference guide is intended to be used with the Bullying Assessment Matrix – mainly for incidents that require a higher level of response. It focuses on actions schools may need to take over and above attending to the immediate needs of students and implementing their relevant policies and processes to respond to bullying incidents and ensure targets of bullying are adequately supported.

Key Ministry of Education (MOE) contacts

**Associate Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement and Support**

Jill Bond

DDI: 463 2839

Cell: 027 4950 282

Email: jill.bond@minedu.govt.nz

and, if necessary:

Traumatic incident team: 0800 848 326 (24 hrs)

Other key agency contacts

NZ Police

Call **111** or your local police station:

(Insert number of your local police station. Info at: www.police.govt.nz/stations)

Child, Youth and Family

Line for schools (Ed Assist) **0508 332 774**

edassist@cyf.govt.nz

Or general line: **0508 326 459**

NZ Police will refer to CYF under the joint Child Protection Policy if a statutory social work response is needed.

NetSafe

0508 638 723 (office hours)

queries@netsafe.org.nz

Director of Education:

Area: _____

Director of Education: _____

Phone: _____

(Insert your region and name and number of your Director of Education.
Info at: www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/contact-us/regional-ministry-contacts/)

and, if necessary:

Traumatic incident team: 0800 848 326 (24 hrs)

NZ Police

Call **111** or your local police station:

(Insert number of your local police station. Info at: www.police.govt.nz/stations)

Social Workers and Youth Workers in Schools

Seek advice from your school's social worker or youth worker if applicable, or Child Matters www.childmatters.org.nz

NetSafe

0508 638 723 (office hours)

queries@netsafe.org.nz

Other key contacts in our community:

1. Organisation / service: _____

Names: _____

Phone: _____

2. Organisation / service: _____

Names: _____

Phone: _____

3. Organisation / service: _____

Names: _____

Phone: _____

4. Organisation / service: _____

Names: _____

Phone: _____

