

Workshop 1: What is Bullying?

Defining bullying

This section sets out the definition of bullying used in [*Bullying prevention and response: A guide for schools*](#).

1. This guide is based on the widely-accepted definitions of bullying behaviour that emphasise the following four characteristics.
 - *Bullying is deliberate* – there is an intention to cause physical and / or psychological pain or discomfort to another person.
 - *Bullying involves a power imbalance* – there is an actual or perceived unequal relationship between the target and the initiator that may be based on physical size, age, gender, social status or digital capability and access.
 - *Bullying has an element of repetition* – bullying behaviour is usually not one-off. It is repeated over time, with the threat of further incidents leading to fear and anxiety. Repeated acts of bullying may involve single acts with different targets, as well as multiple acts with the same target.
 - *Bullying is harmful* – there is short or long-term physical or psychological harm to the target (eg, as a result of coercion or intimidation).
2. Bullying is one particular form of aggressive behaviour and can be covert or overt in nature. Other forms of aggression that schools may need to address are sexual abuse and physical violence. Not all forms of verbal or physical aggression are bullying. For example, a student's use of sexist or racist terms constitutes racist or sexist behaviour; if the student did not deliberately intend to cause harm by using those terms it is not bullying behaviour. Similarly, theft is theft; it is not necessarily bullying. There will always be an element of professional judgment at play in determining whether specific incidents are bullying, or not.
3. Bullying behaviour is not an individual action. It is influenced by the actions and values of peer groups, schools, families and whānau, communities and societies. Therefore, it is important to explore how the community around students might impact on their behaviour.
4. For example, a school seeking to positively influence student behaviour might:
 - ask staff and school leaders to model inclusive values and respectful ways of communicating
 - ensure students are consulted about their concerns and possible solutions to bullying
 - ensure students are taught effective ways of understanding and relating to others
 - foster engagement with families, whānau and the wider community in addressing the issues.
5. It is also important to acknowledge that bullying can have rewards for the initiators of bullying behaviour. It can increase their social status, while lowering the social status of their. The culture of the school will strongly influence the extent to which this occurs.

"The definition of bullying is important and it's essential to put your expectations out there – and frequently, not just at the beginning of the school year."

Dannevirke High School