



Updated March 2022

Policy Regarding Bullying Prevention

The Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School (the O-School) has always been dedicated to its role as a “safe haven” and, because of this, the Orthogenic School is proud to be a bullying-free environment. The Orthogenic School is committed to providing all members of the school community (students, families, staff), with a healthy environment, free from bullying and intimidation.

Bullying is NOT an acceptable part of our school culture – as it can deeply harm a person’s health and well-being. Bullying makes people feel “less than” – and this is NOT acceptable to the Orthogenic School community. In addition, bullying is contrary to state law and ISBE/district policy.

Bullying (including cyber-bullying) is here defined as any severe or pervasive physical or verbal act or conduct, including communications made in writing or electronically, toward a student or students that has or can be reasonably predicted to have the effect of one or more of the following:

1. Placing the student or students in reasonable fear of harm to the student’s or student’ person or property.
2. Causing a substantially detrimental effect on the student’s or students’ physical or mental health
3. Substantially interfering with the student’s or students’ academic performance
4. Substantially interfering with the student’s or students’ ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provide by the O-School.

Bullying may take many forms, including without limitation, one or more of the following: harassment, threats, intimidating, stalking, physical violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, theft, public humiliation, destruction of property, or retaliation for asserting or alleging an act of bullying. Bullying may take place face-to-face, behind someone’s back, or over the internet/on electronic devices (known as cyber-bullying). NOTE: This list is meant to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.

Any member of the Orthogenic School community who experiences or witnesses bullying should report it immediately to the Principal and Assistant Principal or, if they are both not available, to the Director of Compliance (Ellie Badesch – ebadesch@oschool.org).

The “Orthogenic School Grievance Policies (Client/Employee)” are options for any student, family member, or staff member who feels that he/she has been bullied or intimidated by an Orthogenic School employee. These policies (including the Grievance Forms themselves) are included in the Family Handbook, the Staff Orientation PowerPoint, and the HR Manual. (See “*Client Grievance Policy*” and “*HR Open Door Policy*” for more details).

To confront the issue of student/student bullying, the Orthogenic School is committed to transparency, training, and staff intervention at all levels:

1. Before starting at the Orthogenic School, students, families and staff members all receive a copy of the “Student Rights” – which include various protections against abuse, harassment, and discrimination. These “Student Rights” are also posted throughout the school. (See “*Student Rights Policy*” for more details).



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2. Students who are found to be bullying peers are immediately redirected and, when necessary, larger conversations, treatment interventions, and program consequences are implemented to ensure these behaviors cease permanently.
3. Students who are *being* bullied are protected by staff both in the moment and into the future. The student's safety is reassured and reinforced. Time/space to process the incident is provided. When necessary, a specific plan is put in place to ensure that the student feels safe and comfortable within the Orthogenic School.
4. Staff members are trained to protect vulnerable students and intervene in cases of bullying during the "O-School Orientation" program. New staff members are taught about the importance of our "safe haven" culture, which includes ensuring that students feel safe and secure at all times.
5. Trends in bullying (and student interactions in general) are closely monitored and discussed during staff meetings throughout the week – including the Clinical Staff Meeting, the Instructional Staff Meeting, and the Leadership Staff Meetings. Problematic trends related to bullying are addressed, and plans are created and implemented to ensure student safety at all times.

To report student/student bullying, in addition to reporting it in the moment, to the staff member present – please contact the Principal (Michelle Zarrilli – mzarrilli@oschool.org, 773-420-2887) or the Assistant Principal (Dana Hirchak – dhirchak@oschool.org, 773-420-2898) to ensure they are aware and can respond. Staff members are also responsible for reporting any bullying to Michelle Zarrilli and Dana Hirchak, to ensure they are aware, even if the student and family do not directly report it. Reporting can be done anonymously – through Michelle Zarrilli and Dana Hirchak (or their respective mailboxes) – if the student or students' feel that is a better option.

The school leadership will ensure families are informed – while ensuring compliance with the IMHDDCA (Confidentiality Law). In addition, they will ensure that the students' treatment teams (special education teacher, individual/group/family therapists) are made aware, and a plan is developed to support the student who was bullied, and ensure accountability for the student who was bullying. For bullying related to identity – the school leadership will also involve staff advisors of the GSA (Gender and Sexuality Alliance – for LGBTQ+ students) and the MSU (Multi-Cultural Student Union – for BIPOC students).

To ensure appropriate follow-up:

1. An investigation on the incident will be completed within 10 school days, if not earlier. This process will include staff members who work with these students, as appropriate.
 - a. If the incident is found to be outside of the school's jurisdiction or scope to investigate, the student/family will be provided with community resources, as needed. Any incident that involves bullying among current O-School students will be considered within the O-School's scope, even if it occurs at home or online.
2. Following the investigation, all stakeholders (including staff members, students, and families) will be given the opportunity to meet with school leadership to discuss the investigation, its findings, and actions being taken to respond.
 - a. When discussing the incident and reporting the findings of the investigation, the O-School will comply with all state and federal laws governing student privacy rights.



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The student or students' who have been bullied will be provided with clinical support (from school clinicians – Therapists/Case Managers), as needed.

Following any report of bullying, reprisal or retaliation are prohibited – and will be considered a separate/additional act of bullying, to be investigated and responded to (responses/consequences will vary based on situation and clinical needs). In addition, a false accusation of bullying (as a means of retaliation or a means of bullying) will result in an investigation, with program consequences, including loss of participation in O-School Leadership Groups/Student Work Program, social-emotional skill-building/learning activities, and discussions with staff/parents, as necessary – again based on the situation and clinical need.

While specific interventions are key, the most important way to decrease (and hopefully end) bullying and harassment is to create a school-wide culture of respect and kindness. This goal is the work of the entire school community, and it continues each day. As a therapeutic day school – the O-School has highly trained special education teachers and therapists to help respond to these incidents and provide support – as well as to set expectations (and promote skill-building) around kindness and inclusion throughout the year. In addition, interventions to address bullying will include clinical support, social-emotional skill building/learning, and staff-assisted mediated conversation, when appropriate.

To ensure this policy is effective, each spring, a meeting will be held with program leadership to evaluate the year's incident of bullying. In addition to reviewing the policy itself, the team will review our responses – and if they have been adequate. Specific focus will be placed on identity-related bullying (BIPOC, LGBTQ+ students).

The evaluation process will include factors such as frequency, stakeholder observations on school safety, identifications of trends in bullying (including specific areas, classrooms), the types of bullying that are occurring, bystander intervention (or participation). Conclusions from this evaluation will be provided to stakeholders (staff members, Board of Directors, students, and families) annually at the end of each school year.

This policy will be included in the Family Handbook (for students/families, received at admission) and as a part of O-School Orientation. In addition, it will be sent out each spring (to staff members, students/families, and the Board of Directors) – along with the report stemming from the annual evaluation process. At this point, the school will accept any/all feedback from stakeholders – and will determine if the policy needs to be updated. This policy will also be posted on the school's website (as of school year 2021-2022).