O·SCHOOL
THE SONIA SHANKMAN ORTHOGENIC SCHOOL

Policy Regarding Bullying Prevention

Submission: January 10, 2025

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 members), 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 the policy of the non-sectarian nonpublic school and is consistent with subsection (a-5) of this Section [free exercise of religion]. Nothing in this Section is intended to infringe upon any right to exercise free expression or the free exercise of religion or religiously based views protected under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution or under Section 3 of Article 1 of the Illinois Constitution.

Bullying (including cyber-bullying, see below) 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 provided 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").

"Cyber-bullying" specifically means bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, including without limitation any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data, or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic system, photoelectronic system, or photo-optical system, including without limitation electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages, or facsimile communications. "Cyber-bullying" includes the creation of a webpage or weblog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person or the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages if the creation or impersonation creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying in this Section. "Cyber-bullying" also includes the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be

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accessed by one or more persons if the distribution or posting creates any of the effects enumerated in the definition of bullying in this Section.

NOTE: These lists and definitions are meant to be illustrative and non-exhaustive.

Bullying based on any of the following protected characteristics is prohibited at the Orthogenic School:

Actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, military status, sexual orientation, gender-related identity or expression, physical appearance, socio-economic status, academic status, pregnancy, parenting status, homelessness, unfavorable discharge from military service, association with a person or group with one or more of the aforementioned actual or perceived characteristics, or any other distinguishing characteristic.

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 Employee Handbook. *(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).*
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 members 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 and Instructional Staff Meetings and the Leadership Team Meetings. Problematic trends related to bullying are addressed, and plans are created and implemented to ensure student safety at all times.

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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 of 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.
3. If a student is involved in an alleged incident of bullying (as victim or perpetrator), parental notification will occur within 24 hours, after the O-School's Leadership Team is made aware of the allegation. The school will make all efforts to notify a parent/guardian, using all contact information the school has available for the family. This includes information related to any threats, suggestions, or instances of self-harm determined to be the result of bullying.

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.

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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 various restorative measures, clinical support, social-emotional skill building/learning, and staff-assisted mediated conversation, when appropriate.

"Restorative measures" means a continuum of school-based alternatives to exclusionary discipline, such as suspensions and expulsions, that (i) are adapted to the particular needs of the school and community, (ii) contribute to maintaining school safety, (iii) protect the integrity of a positive and productive learning climate, (iv) teach students the personal and interpersonal skills they will need to be successful in school and society, (v) serve to build and restore relationships among students, families, schools, and communities, and (vi) reduce the likelihood of future disruption by balancing accountability with an understanding of students' behavioral health needs in order to keep students in school. (vii) increase student accountability if the incident of bullying is based on religion, race, ethnicity, or any other category that is identified in the Illinois Human Rights Act.

To ensure this Bullying Prevention Policy is effective, each spring, a meeting will be held with program leadership to evaluate the year's incidents of reported bullying, if there are any. In addition to reviewing the policy itself, the team will review the school's 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). Data will also be shared with ISBE, as required.

The Bullying Prevention Policy is consistent with other Orthogenic School policies and is based on the engagement of a range of school stakeholders, including students and parents or guardians.

The Bullying Prevention Policy will be included in the Family Handbook (for students/families, received at admission) and as a part of O-School Orientation.

The Bullying Prevention Policy is posted on the school's website and will be reviewed annually and updated, as needed. The policy is also included in the Weekly Update newsletter, sent out to parents/guardians each Friday.

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