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TO : PARENTS/GUARDIANS
FROM : ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER
DATE : 20TH MARCH, 2017
SUBJECT : UNDERSTANDING BULLYING IN SCHOOLS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that most of us have been subjected to some form of bullying during both our childhood and adult lives. Bullying is a global problem that has been growing at alarming rates and it has taken new and more sophisticated forms and dimensions. Schools are no exception to this disturbing phenomenon. For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report of 2014 indicates that 70.6 percent of students have witnessed bullying in their school. Such statistics are a clear indication that the magnitude and gravity of bullying can and should never be undermined.

One of the core values at LICEF School is to ensure that our students '**physical, emotional, social and psychological well-being**' are neither in jeopardy nor compromised. Ours is a multicultural school that embraces every learner irrespective of his cultural and religious background. We fully understand the negative impact that bullying can have on a child's life in various areas of his/her life. Therefore, any one occurrence or event that negatively affects our learners' ability to learn in a conducive and enabling environment, is of serious concern to us.

We have observed, with increasing concern, that some of our students are involved in bullying others. Victims experience a lot of pain, fail to excel academically and are not truly happy. *'Whatever is hurtful to you, do not do to any other person.'* Have such noble thoughts died in our hearts? The impact of bullying cannot be overemphasized. The school will not tolerate this kind of behaviour from any student. It is against this background that we have found it necessary to re-address this issue and call for the participation and support of all students, teachers, parents, guardians and the community at large in combating this anti-social behaviour and in the final analysis, source for workable solutions.

1.1 BULLYING: A DEFINITION AND OVERVIEW

Bullying has been defined as *"unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or power imbalance"*. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Both parties, i.e.

those who are **bullied** and who **bully** others may have serious, lasting problems. In simple terms, bullying has been considered as an “*unacceptable behaviour* which occurs ‘lots of times, on purpose.’

In trying to understand bullying, it is important to distinguish it from regular childhood teasing and taunting. The measuring sticks in this regard are the severity and duration of bullying. It has been observed that children lack the social and empathetic skills that adults have. They acquire these traits and are influenced into becoming empathetic and kind individuals through positive role-modeling.

As adults, it is a serious misconception on our part to perceive bullying as a normal part of childhood. The idea that children, especially boys need to “toughen up”, should not be a part of our mindset. We are supposed to teach our children how to express their emotions in a healthy way and how to stand up for themselves in their day to day interaction with their peers. Children with low self-esteem are usually targets of bullying and this is reinforced when such victims show signs of fearfulness and helplessness.

2.0. TYPES OF SCHOOL BULLYING

In order to effectively deal with bullying, it is imperative to understand the different forms it takes. Articles on <https://www.stopbullying.gov> and NOBullying.com highlight in detail, the following facts on this issue:

There are four types of bullying:

- **Verbal bullying:** Saying or writing mean things. It includes excessive and malicious teasing, insulting remarks, name calling, embarrassing jokes and revealing intimate information, cursing, crude and inappropriate sexual comments, threats and taunting.
- **Physical bullying:** Involves hurting a person's body or possessions. It includes hitting, tripping, pinching, kicking, pushing and shoving, taking or breaking someone's things and making mean or rude hand gestures.
- **Social bullying:** (Sometimes referred to as relational bullying). Involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships and includes; ignoring a certain person, casting them out of a group, making them feel left out on purpose, spreading rumors about them and telling other kids not to be friends with them and embarrassing someone in public.
- **Cyber bullying:** Reinforced by easy access to social media. This form of bullying includes threats and inappropriate sexual comments via social media, texting, emailing and chat rooms.

It should be noted that bullying can occur between peers at school, in the community, or in social groups. Researchers note that there are differences in school bullying patterns between boys and girls. Boys tend to be more physical while girls are verbal and use social bullying methods to hurt others. This passive-aggressive type of bullying may be harder for adults to detect. On the other hand, surprising as it maybe, cases of teachers bullying students have also been reported in some schools.

2.1. WHERE AND WHEN BULLYING HAPPENS

Bullying can occur during or after school hours. While most reported bullying happens in the school building, a significant percentage also happens in places like the playground, on the bus and even in the toilets where graffiti can also be used as an instrument of bullying others. It can also happen travelling to or from school, in the child's neighborhood, or on the Internet. Bullying can equally take place during lessons in schools where discipline is lax and teachers are not very vigilant.

3.0. WHAT CAUSES SCHOOL BULLYING?

Some of the factors that may contribute to bullying include:

- Hereditary factors, peer relations, social situations in school and community, lack of warmth at home, too much or too little discipline and physical punishment. One's customs or socioeconomic status could also propagate feelings of superiority and inferiority.
- Trying to gain attention and secure friends. It gives one a false sense of power. Negative company sometimes compels strong kids to exert power over the weak. The victim's fear and submission reinforce the bullies' sense of domination.
- Poor social skills. This could be traced to emotional or **personality disorders**. They may have latent sociopathic tendencies which would make them a danger to their families and societies.

4.0. SIGNS THAT A CHILD MAY BE A VICTIM OF SCHOOL BULLYING

As parents/guardians and teachers, we need to be sensitive to a child's behaviour in order that we quickly identify the fact that a child is a victim of bullying. The following are signs we should all look out for:

- Personal items often "missing" or damaged.
- Frequently "losing" lunch pocket money.
- Frequent headaches or stomachaches.
- Avoiding after-school activities.
- Consistently going to school early or late.
- Pretending to be sick or constantly missing school.
- Is frightened of walking to or from school
- Begs to be driven to school.
- Changes in the child's usual routine.
- Is unwilling to go to school (school phobic).
- Begins to truant.
- Becomes withdrawn, anxious, or lacking in confidence.

- Starts stammering.
- Attempts or threatens suicide or runs away.
- Cries himself/herself to sleep at night or has nightmares.
- Begins to do make less effort with school work than previously.
- Comes home with clothes torn or books damaged.
- Asks for money or starts stealing money.
- Has lunch snatched by someone.
- Has unexplained cuts or bruises.
- Comes home hungry (money / lunch has been stolen).
- Becomes aggressive, disruptive or unreasonable.
- Is bullying other children or siblings.
- 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.
- Lacks eye contact.
- Becomes short tempered.
- Change in attitude to people at home.

These signs and behaviours could indicate other social, emotional and/or mental health problems, but bullying should be considered a possibility and be investigated accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Our hope is that you have learnt a lot about bullying in a school set up through the information presented in this circular. We need to continue working together as a team whose main objective is to win the war against bullying. We invite you to share your ideas concerning this matter with us. You are welcome to report cases of bullying to the school through the teachers, coordinators and heads. As a school we have a code of conduct and disciplinary committees. Hence we urge parents to report matters to the Heads of sections instead of taking matters in your own hands. Once again, our school does not accept any form of bullying. We shall update you on all policies and measures taken as regards bullying on a regular basis.

Our children are a treasure and it is our duty to protect them the best way we can.


M.Y. PATEL