# Anti-bullying Policy

Approval

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| Wellbeing and Protection Committee | Head of wellbeing & safe sport | Wellbeing & safe sport | September 2026 |
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## 1. Introduction

Scottish Gymnastics believes that every individual has the right to take part in gymnastics in a safe and fun environment free from bullying, harassment and victimisation. Bullying can affect children, young people and adults and can have a significant impact on wellbeing, confidence, mental health, participation and performance. Scottish Gymnastics does not tolerate bullying of any kind.

Scottish Gymnastics recognises its obligations to children and young people under the UNCRC while also recognising its responsibilities to protect the wellbeing, dignity and rights of adult members, staff and volunteers.

Bullying can affect children, young people and adults and can have a significant impact on wellbeing, confidence, mental health, participation and performance.

This anti-bullying policy outlines Scottish Gymnastics' commitment to preventing and addressing bullying, supporting affected individuals, and promoting positive behaviour in all activities and environments associated with Scottish Gymnastics.

Underpinned by the principles of respect, equality, inclusion, and human rights, this anti-bullying policy draws upon Scotland's legislative context and national guidance, including Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People the national Standards for Child Wellbeing & Protection in Sport and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

### Best interests of the child (Article 3 UNCRC)

- Every decision must prioritise the wellbeing of children
- Anti-bullying efforts must be proactive, not just reactive

### Right to be safe (Article 19 UNCRC)

- Children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence, including physical, emotional, and psychological bullying
- This includes peer-to-peer bullying, as well as bullying from adults or authority figures in our sport

### Right to participate (Article 12 UNCRC)

- Children should have a say in how bullying is prevented and managed
- Mechanisms should be in place for children to report bullying safely and be heard

### Non-discrimination (Article 2 UNCRC)

- All children must be treated fairly, regardless of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic

### Right to education and development (Articles 28 and 29 UNCRC)

- Participation in gymnastics should support the holistic development of children and be free from harm or fear
- Gymnastics is an educational space where children learn life skills, and bullying undermines this purpose

## 2. Policy statement

Scottish Gymnastics recognises the right of every individual to participate in gymnastics free from intimidation, harassment, or bullying. We are committed to providing a safe, welcoming, and respectful environment for all members, staff, volunteers, gymnasts, coaches, officials, and parents/carers. We strive to create a culture where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, and where differences are celebrated. Bullying, whether physical, emotional, verbal, or cyber, undermines the foundations of trust and safety that are integral to the sport and our community. Bullying in any form is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Through implementation of this policy, Scottish Gymnastics seeks to advance equality of opportunity, foster good relations, eliminate discrimination and create an inclusive environment for all.

## 3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All Scottish Gymnastics members, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, ability, background, socio-economic status, or family circumstance
- Participants in all Scottish Gymnastics activities, including training, competitions, camps, meetings, and social media interactions
- Parents/carers and supporters of members, whose actions affect the wellbeing of children and young people, staff, volunteers or other adults
- Staff whether temporary, permanent or contracted, volunteers, coaches, officials, and visitors engaged in any Scottish Gymnastics activity or event

## 4. Purpose

This policy aims to:

- Prevent all forms of bullying within gymnastics by fostering an ethos of respect, inclusion, and positive relationships in an environment where bullying is not tolerated
- Provide clear procedures for reporting, investigating, and responding to bullying incidents
- Equip all members and stakeholders with the knowledge to recognise and respond appropriately to bullying. Scottish Gymnastics and member clubs take

all bullying incidents seriously, record them appropriately, and address them promptly and effectively
- Support and protect those affected by bullying, as well as to address the behaviour of those displaying bullying behaviours
- Empower those who witness bullying to take positive action
- Engage parents, carers, and the wider gymnastics community in anti-bullying efforts

Raising awareness of children and young people's wellbeing, recognising what needs to be done and the requirement to act on this when a child or young person needs our help and support is crucial. It is everyone's responsibility to make sure that children and young people know that:

- They are right to speak up
- Staff, volunteers and officials will listen to them and take their concerns seriously
- Speaking up will not affect their place in a team or selection for an event or a competition, regardless of whether representing their club or their country

If bullying does occur, all club members should be able to:

- Challenge this behaviour
- Report concerns
- Know that incidents will be dealt with promptly and effectively

Members should tell the club's safeguarding officer, a coach or trusted adult or can access advice from the Scottish Gymnastics wellbeing and safe sport team at safeguarding@scottishgymnastics.org.

## 5. Understanding bullying

Scotland's definition of bullying is: "Face to face and/or online behaviour which impacts on a person's sense of physical and emotional safety, their capacity to feel in control of their life and their ability to respond effectively to the situation they are in.

"The behaviour does not need to be repeated, or intended to cause harm, for it to have an impact. Bullying behaviour can be physical, emotional or verbal and can cause people to feel hurt, threatened, frightened and left out."

Respect for All: The National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People (2024)

While this definition originates from guidance for children and young people, Scottish Gymnastics applies the same principles to adult contexts. Bullying between adults, or between adults and children, may involve repeated or isolated behaviours that cause humiliation, intimidation, exclusion, distress or a loss of dignity.

- The actual behaviour (for example, actions, looks, messages, confrontations or physical interventions) does not always need to be repeated for it to have an ongoing impact. The fear of behaviour reoccurring may have a lasting impact
- Bullying is more likely to take place in the context of an existing imbalanced relationship but may also occur where no previous or current relationship exists
- Bullying may be carried out by an individual or can sometimes involve a group of people

Bullying behaviour can include the following:

- Being called names, teased, put down or threatened (face to face and/or online)
- Being hit, tripped, pushed or kicked
- Having belongings taken or damaged
- Being ignored, left out or having rumours spread about you (face-to-face and/or online)
- Undermining professional competence
- Sending abusive messages, pictures or images on social media, online gaming platforms or phones/tablets
- Behaviour which makes people feel like they are not in control of themselves or their lives (face-to-face and/or online)
- Being targeted because of who you are or who you are perceived to be (face to face and/or online)
- Increasing the reach and impact of bullying or prejudice through the recruitment and/or involvement of a wider group

Bullying can be motivated by prejudice or discrimination linked to protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, as well as other personal circumstances such as socio-economic disadvantage, care experience, family circumstance, or appearance. Within the context of children and young people, this includes disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, and pregnancy and maternity. Scottish Gymnastics also recognises bullying and discrimination experienced by adult members, staff and volunteers in relation to all protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Scottish Gymnastics and member clubs take all incident of prejudice-based bullying seriously and respond to them in line with this policy.

Bullying may occur:

- Between children and young people
- Between adults
- From adults towards children or young people
- From children or young people towards adults
- Between participants, parents/carers, coaches, officials, staff, volunteers and spectators

Bullying can be difficult to identify because it often happens away from others and those who are bullied often do not tell anyone. The mental health consequences of bullying for children and young people are well documented, and include reports of anxiety, depression, difficulty concentrating, sleep/ eating disorders, self-harm, somatic symptoms and suicidality. Bullying can have detrimental effects that persist into late adolescence and beyond and can contribute independently to mental health problems.

### What is not bullying?

Gymnastics clubs will deal with a variety of behaviours daily. However, while some of these behaviours may be reported or described by a child or young person, or their family, as bullying, it is important to recognise that not all such behaviour will be bullying or should appropriately be treated as such. There is added complexity in that some types of behaviour can overlap and/or without early intervention may escalate.

Children and young people will fall out and disagree with each other as they form and build relationships. Scottish Gymnastics does not regard these disagreements as bullying and recognises them as a normal part of growing up.

### Differentiating bullying from potential criminality

There is no **legal** definition of bullying in Scotland, and bullying is not in itself considered a crime. However, the nature of certain behaviour or actions that could be perceived or reported as bullying may include behaviour that is criminal in nature. Staff and volunteers must understand the facts and circumstances of a each situation to differentiate between bullying and potential criminal offences.

- **Physical behaviour**: peer-on-peer violence can be verbal abuse, physical aggression and/ or physical violence, which can have both short- and long-term impacts on the mental and physical health and wellbeing of all involved. If there is an intent to cause harm, regardless of whether or not an injury occurs, this may amount to an assault.

- **Sexual behaviour**: when someone is coerced or pressurised to do something sexual or is touched inappropriately, this is **not** bullying. This is sexual assault or abuse and a form of gender-based violence (GBV).

- **Online behaviour**: there are various legal provisions designed to protect individuals from online harassment, abuse, and harm; therefore, some online behaviour may therefore be illegal.

- **Hate Crime**: bullying can be motivated by prejudice similar to hate crime. The distinction between bullying and hate crime is that for hate crime, the behaviour aggravated by prejudice must be motivated by malice and ill-will towards a group of people due to a relevant characteristic or intended to stir

up hatred, and be criminal in nature, such as assault, graffiti or a breach of the peace.

It is recognised that behaviour will be context specific and should be considered on a case-by-case basis. In identifying what response is appropriate, it will often be necessary for staff and volunteers to use their professional judgement to identify the nuanced differences between types of behaviour. Each set of circumstances will be fact specific, and staff and volunteers should ensure they have gathered all relevant information before making a determination, remembering that the nature of some behaviours may constitute criminal offences. Staff and volunteers must seek advice from Police Scotland if they believe a crime may have been committed or a child or young person has been seriously harmed.

## 6. Legal and national policy context

This policy is informed by Scottish and UK legislation, including but not limited to:

- Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016
- Carers (Scotland) Act 2016
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- Communications Act 2003:
- Defamation and Malicious Publication (Scotland) Act 2021
- Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004
- Equality Act 2010
- Malicious Communications Act 1988
- Online Safety Act 2023
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Scottish Government Guidance: “Respect for All” (updated 2024)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024

All actions taken under this policy must align with statutory obligations and promote the rights, safety, and dignity of every child and young person.

## 7. Prevention strategies

Scottish Gymnastics commits to a proactive approach to bullying prevention by:

- Promoting values such as respect, integrity, teamwork and fairness in all activities
- Encouraging all clubs, gyms, events, and competitions to operate in line with this policy and the Scottish Gymnastics Code of Practice for Coaches and Officials
- Promoting open communication, where individuals feel safe to raise concerns and are listened to without fear of retribution

- Encouraging member participation in developing and reviewing anti-bullying strategies, activities and codes of conduct
- Encouraging clubs, gyms and event organisers to:
  - Display anti-bullying information in visible places, and including relevant material in induction and welcome packs and training modules as appropriate
  - Implement regular awareness programmes for gymnasts, parents/carers, coaches, volunteers and staff about bullying, its effects, and the importance of active bystander intervention
  - Cultivate an anti-bullying culture by:
    - Adults always being good role models for children
    - Encouraging all gymnasts to share their concerns and help those being bullied to speak out and tell a coach, the safeguarding officer or other trusted adult who can support them
    - Having written policies and codes of conduct that set out the expected standards of conduct and the consequences of any breach
    - All club members and parents should sign to accept the club's policies and procedures upon joining the club and annually thereafter
    - Ideally, the club safeguarding officer should raise awareness about bullying, why it matters and the consequences
  - Undertake relevant training to understand and respond to bullying and its effects

## 8. Training

Adults play a significant role in supporting individuals affected by bullying. Knowing there is an someone they can trust to help them if they are being bullied is an essential part of being able to cope with it for many individuals. For some however, the stigma surrounding bullying and discrimination can discourage them from seeking help and making it harder to seek support. Therefore, it is essential that all adults involved in gymnastics clubs understand the impact of bullying, recognise the signs and are equipped to provide informed and supportive responses when concerns arise.

RespectMe, Scotland's national anti-bullying agency provides a Learning Academy that provides a comprehensive suite of e-learning courses to help build knowledge and confidence when responding to bullying concerns. All adults involved in gymnastics clubs are encouraged to access this free training to build their skills and knowledge to support their gymnasts effectively in the event of a bullying incident.

Scottish Gymnastics recommends regular training for all levels of the organisation, covering:

- Recognition and prevention of bullying, discrimination, and harassment
- Effective communication strategies and conflict resolution
- Reporting and responding to safeguarding concerns

## 9. Roles and responsibilities

Scottish Gymnastics will:

- Respect the rights of children as paramount
- Lead on creating an inclusive ethos nationally by working together to develop positive relationships amongst children and adults that are mutually respectful, responsible and trusting and promote emotional health and wellbeing
- Seek to prevent, reduce and respond effectively to bullying behaviour, through the implementation of this policy and guidelines
- Require clubs, members of staff, officials, volunteers and members of the Board to adopt and abide by this policy
- Provide access to training and support for member clubs, coaches, officials, volunteers, staff and members of the board to adopt at least good practice to prevent, reduce and respond to bullying
- Address the needs of all individuals involved in reported experiences of bullying behaviour within a framework of respect, responsibility, resolution and support
- Respond to any concerns raised including by children who have experienced poor practice/misconduct or abuse caused by an adult's behaviour
- Highlight bullying based on prejudice and perceived differences, to ensure our practices are effective in dealing with these issues
- Oversee the effectiveness of this policy and ensure compliance with legal duties
- Regularly monitor and evaluate the implementation of this policy and guidelines and include children's views in this process

Gymnastics clubs will:

- Ensure the policy is implemented
- Lead on creating an inclusive club ethos

Staff, volunteers, coaches and officials will:

- Promote positive behaviour
- Take reasonable and appropriate action to prevent and respond to bullying behaviour
- Respond to concerns
- Model good conduct

Safeguarding officer will:

- Act as the main point of contact for concerns, coordinate investigations, and Provide guidance to clubs
- Model respectful behaviours
- Identify and address any reported bullying behaviour
- Support all children and young people

Members/Young People will:

- Treat others with respect
- Report concerns
- Support peers

Parents and Carers will:

- Encourage respectful behaviour
- Reinforce anti-bullying messages
- Work in partnership with settings
- Support the ethos of the policy, report concerns, and contribute to a respectful environment

## 10. Reporting bullying

Bullying behaviour may become apparent in several ways:

- Through observation
- An individual may disclose
- A third party may have reported an incident, or may have a strong suspicion
- You may have a suspicion

Scottish Gymnastics encourages anyone who experiences, witnesses or suspects bullying behaviour to report it as soon as possible. Scottish Gymnastics and member clubs take all reports seriously and handle them sensitively and confidentially.

Reports can be made by:

- Speaking directly to a coach, club official, adult volunteer, staff member or line manager
- Contacting the designated safeguarding officer in confidence
- Submitting a written concern form online to Scottish Gymnastics' wellbeing and safe sport team or by emailing details to safeguarding@scottishgymnastics.org

## 11. Anonymous reporting

Scottish Gymnastics recognises that some individuals may be reluctant to report bullying behaviour for fear of retaliation or embarrassment. Where possible, anonymous reports will be accepted and investigated, though this may limit the steps that can be taken.

## 12. Responding to reports and allegations

**Please note:** it is not your responsibility to decide whether an individual is being bullied but **it is your responsibility to act if you have concerns**.

When Scottish Gymnastics of a club receive a report of bullying behaviour they will:

- Take all reports of bullying seriously and take immediate steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those involved
- Acknowledge the concern swiftly and reassure the reporting individual that it is not their fault and that it is okay to tell
- Conduct a fair and thorough investigation, involving all relevant parties as appropriate
    - Listen to what the individual says and take what they say seriously. Make sure you clearly understand what has been said, especially if the individual has learning or physical difficulties which may affect their ability to communicate or, if English is not their first language, so you can pass on the information appropriately
    - Tell them that you can be trusted and will help them, although you can't promise to keep what you have been told to yourself, but you will only share it with people who need to know so that they can help
    - In cases of online/electronic bullying, advise individuals who are experiencing bullying behaviours by text, email or online to retain the communication (screenshot) or to print it out[1]
    - Explain what will happen next, and how they are going to be kept informed.
- If the allegation of bullying involves a coach, the Scottish Gymnastics' head of wellbeing and safe sport must be contacted for advice
- Keep comprehensive records of all reported incidents, investigations, and actions taken in accordance with data protection and safeguarding protocols by creating appropriate records in the case management system
- Communicate the outcome of the investigation and any actions taken
- Confidentiality will be respected as far as possible, balanced with the duty of care to keep children and young people safe
- Where appropriate, restorative approaches will be used to repair relationships and reduce recurrence
    - Speak with those experiencing and those displaying bullying behaviour separately
    - Talk with the individuals who have been displaying bullying behaviour. Explain the situation and try to get them to understand the impact and consequences of their behaviour
    - In some cases, it might be worth considering seeking an apology from those involved in bullying behaviour (for example, where those on the receiving end wish reconciliation). Apologies are only of real value however, when they are genuine
- Be sensitive and use good judgement when it comes to informing parents/carers of those whose negative behaviour is impacting on others
- Sanctions, support, and follow-up will be tailored to the needs of those involved, ensuring both accountability and care

[1] Where any digital images are of a sexual nature, do NOT ask the child to forward these; instead, ask them to retain for the Police.

- Once you have completed your report, pass it on to the club safeguarding officer for action

Please note that strategies and solutions do not come in 'one size fits all.' Each case is unique and requires an individual response to the individual situation. What might work in one situation might not work in another. You may have to adopt different strategies before finding one that is effective.

Where concerns involve children, safeguarding procedures will apply. Where concerns involve only adults, the matter may additionally be managed through disciplinary, conduct, grievance or complaints procedures as appropriate.

## 13. Support for affected individuals

Scottish Gymnastics and member clubs will provide support and guidance to anyone affected by bullying, including:

- A safe space to express their feelings and experiences
- Signposting to independent advice and counselling services, as needed
- Information about their rights and ways to stay safe
- Opportunities to discuss concerns confidentially
- Collaboration with families to ensure ongoing support at home
- Partnership working with external agencies (e.g., Childline, Respect Me, school, police, etc.) as necessary
- Assistance in restoring positive relationships and reintegrating into activities.
- Regular follow-up to ensure wellbeing and prevent recurrence
- Workplace support measures where applicable

## 14. Responding to bullying behaviour

Scottish Gymnastics or the relevant club will impose appropriate consequences or sanctions where bullying behaviour is substantiated. This may include:

- Education and behaviour management interventions.
- Suspension or removal from the club and/or Scottish Gymnastics activities.
- Referral to disciplinary procedures in line with the Scottish Gymnastics Codes of Conduct and/or the Code of Practice for Coaches and Officials or Scottish Gymnastics employee disciplinary policy.
- In serious cases, referral to statutory authorities (e.g. Police Scotland, social services).

The aim of the response is to educate and rehabilitate individuals where possible to prevent recurrence.

### Moving forward:

- Aim to restore positive relationships and only consider imposing sanctions as necessary

- Encourage and support those displaying bullying behaviour to change this behaviour. Ask them to consider the impact their actions are having. If there is no change then the club must initiate their disciplinary proceedings, seeking advice from Scottish Gymnastics' wellbeing and safe sport team at the *beginning* of the process
- In cases of serious bullying, the incidents must be referred to Scottish Gymnastics' head of wellbeing and safe sport at safeguarding@scottishgymnastics.org
- Update the written records with details of the action taken and outcome

## 15. Support for those displaying bullying behaviour

Recognising that those displaying bullying behaviour may also require support. Interventions may also include:

- Actively listen to understand what the cause of the behaviour is and help them to develop healthier ways to cope with difficult feelings
- Helping individuals understand the impact of their actions
- Restorative discussions involving all parties
- Behavioural support and positive role modelling
- Where appropriate, and with the young person's consent, engage parents in monitoring the situation and guiding more positive behaviour
- Developing a wellbeing plan that sets out responses, monitoring progress and adjusting the plan as necessary
- Referral to specialist services where underlying issues are identified

## 16. Recording

All incidents involving bullying behaviour must be fully recorded and retained in line with data protection and retention policies. The safeguarding officer, staff member or investigating officer must record details of the reported incident. This must include capturing the main information about the behaviour that took place/is alleged to have taken place. It is not necessary for an allegation to be substantiated before it is recorded.

### What information should be recorded?

It is important that a thorough picture of the bullying incident be recorded. When recording bullying incidents, the following information must be included:

- The individual people involved, as well as staff or other adults, including witnesses
- Where and when alleged bullying behaviour has taken place
- The type of bullying experienced, e.g. name-calling, rumours, threats etc.
- Any potential underlying prejudice(s), including details of any protected characteristics associated with the people involved

- Whether the impact of the incident experienced indicates any personal wellbeing concerns or the need for additional support for those involved
- The outcome, including if the issue was resolved, not resolved or unfounded
- Actions taken, including resolution

In line with the UNCRC, children and young people have the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously, therefore where possible, the person creating the record should agree its content with the child or young person wherever possible.

Scottish Gymnastics may refer to this record if future concerns arise. Where there is a repeated pattern of bullying behaviour involving the same individual or group, a formal disciplinary response will be required in line with Scottish Gymnastics Disciplinary Policy.

## 17. Communication and engagement

This policy will be made available to all stakeholders and displayed prominently within gymnastics settings. Regular communication with members, parents/carers, coaches, officials, volunteers and the wider gymnastics community is essential for raising awareness and sustaining a culture of respect.

Scottish Gymnastics is committed to ensuring that those affected by this policy have opportunities to contribute to its development, implementation and review. This includes children and young people, parents/carers, staff, volunteers, coaches, officials, and clubs.

Scottish Gymnastics will gather feedback through consultations, surveys, focus groups and engagement events. Consultation findings will be considered when reviewing this policy, and significant themes and actions arising from stakeholder feedback will be recorded.

## 18. Children and young people's engagement

Scottish Gymnastics consulted with members of the Scottish Gymnastics youth forum in the development of this policy. Young people highlighted the importance of being listened to, having multiple ways to report concerns, understanding what happens after a report is made, and feeling confident that reporting bullying would not affect selection or participation opportunities.

## 19. Monitoring, evaluation and review

To ensure effectiveness, Scottish Gymnastics will monitor and review this policy regularly. Key performance indicators include:

- Number and nature of reported bullying incidents
- Outcomes and resolutions of investigations

- Feedback from those involved and the wider membership, as well as parents/carers, staff, volunteers, coaches, officials or any other stakeholder
- Three-yearly policy reviews involving representatives from all stakeholder groups
- Updates to reflect recommended good practices and legislative, technological, or societal changes

## 20. Confidentiality and data protection

Scottish Gymnastics and member clubs will handle information relating to bullying incidents in line with data protection requirements. All information relating to bullying incidents will be handled in line with Scottish Gymnastics' Data Protection Policy and relevant legislation. Information will only be shared on a need-to-know basis with relevant parties.

## 21. Links to other policies

This Anti-Bullying Policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Scottish Gymnastics Code of Conduct
- Scottish Gymnastics Code of Practice for Coaches & Officials
- Child Wellbeing and Protection Policy
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures

## 22. Further support and resources

For more guidance or support, the following resources may be helpful:

- ACAS- 0300 123 1100
- Childline: 0800 1111 childline.org.uk
- Children First Supportline: 08000 28 22 33; webchat (halfway down page) childrenfirst.org.uk
- Children & Young People's Commissioner: cypcs.org.uk
- Equality and Human Rights Commission: equalityhumanrights.com
- LGBT Youth Scotland: lgbtyouth.org.uk
- NSPCC: nspcc.org.uk
- Police Scotland (in emergencies): 999
- RespectMe (Scotland's Anti-Bullying Service): respectme.org.uk
- Samaritans- 116 123
- Scottish Gymnastics wellbeing and safe sport team: safeguarding@scottishgymnastics.org
- Young Scot: young.scot

## 23. Conclusion

Scottish Gymnastics is dedicated to safeguarding the welfare of all its members and ensuring that the sport is an enjoyable, positive experience for everyone. By working together and upholding the principles outlined in this policy, we can create an environment where bullying is not tolerated and every individual feels valued, respected, and empowered to reach their full potential, free from the fear or experience of bullying.