



Shikshantar Peer Dignity and Respect Policy

Shikshantar is committed to creating, providing and sustaining a safe, supportive and conducive environment to all its students and team members. With our students coming from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, it becomes imperative for us not only to promote a culture of accountability, dignity and respect for all but also provide a clear framework and procedure to be followed should any issues arise.

Purpose of the Policy:

Bullying, harassment, discrimination, or victimisation hinder the development of a positive and inclusive culture and environment. It negatively impacts the affected child's self-worth and wellbeing. When certain behaviour patterns get established, it becomes important to define boundaries with a purpose. This policy confirms that the school does not and will not accept any behaviour or action which undermines a child's value and dignity. **The school will take any allegation of inappropriate behaviour extremely seriously and will take the necessary action, while providing support to all involved.**

The school takes a serious cognizance of the following:

- I. **Bullying:** We define bullying as “**repetitive, intentional hurting or acts of physical or verbal abuse that undermine, intimidate, humiliate, take advantage of or injure another child. It can happen face to face or online.**” The school maintains a zero tolerance policy towards acts of bullying. This includes:
 - **Verbal:** personal insults, demeaning remarks, humiliation in front of others, nicknames, ridicule, threats etc., Passing disparaging remarks or letters/chits and singling out a child in the group/class, body shaming, commenting on the looks or appearance of another individual
 - **Non-verbal:** provocative, indecent or offensive gestures, exclusionary behaviour such as forming groups and singularly excluding another child, hiding the belongings of a peer/another child and causing emotional trauma, writing inappropriate /abusive words on another child's notebooks, textbooks, locker or furniture
 - **Physical:** hitting, kicking, punching, biting, hair pulling, throwing objects at, or otherwise causing physical harm to another member of the school

- II. **Cyber Bullying:** Cyber Bullying is sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone, causing embarrassment or humiliation. It may be done:
 - on social Media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Tik Tok
 - over text messages and messaging apps
 - on online forums, chat rooms, and message boards, such as Reddit
 - on email
 - in online gaming communities

III. Harassment

- **Verbal:** unwelcome suggestive jokes and innuendos, requests for favours or threats
- **Non-verbal:** suggestive pictures/notes/gestures; spreading rumours about a person's sexual behaviour or orientation
- **Electronic:** unwelcome sexually suggestive messages, pictures, videos or memes shared via any electronic media
- **Physical:** unwelcome physical contact, seeking non-consensual physical touch or deliberate invasion of the personal space

IV. Use of inappropriate language in school: The students are expected to use respectable and socially acceptable vocabulary with their peers, facilitators and all other members of the school team. The following are unacceptable:

- Racial, homophobic, transphobic, Islamophobic slurs and sexist remarks
- offensive remarks on one's sexual orientation, religion, language or community
- Abusive language directly or indirectly involving an individual child or relating to his/her family members
- using offensive vocabulary unacceptable in a social context
- spreading rumours or encouraging others to spread them

V. Inappropriate gestures, touch or exposure in school: Subtle, non-verbal and/or obscene gestures can make one feel uncomfortable, violated, or afraid, even when not directed towards oneself specifically. This includes, but may not be limited to:

- hand gestures that simulate sexual activity
- obscene gestures made using lips, eyes, tongue or any other body part
- uncomfortable leering or staring at another person

VI. Inappropriate behaviour in school, school bus or school trips: This includes bullying, verbal or physical abuse, indulging in inappropriate touch or gestures, use of inappropriate language or harassing peers/staff members/parents on-duty in the school bus or escorting students on a school trip. Children are expected to listen to the helper Didi and parents on bus duty in the bus and follow all rules as per the transport policy.

VII. Coercion to indulge in substance abuse: The school will take a serious note of a student encouraging or pressurising their peers to indulge in substance abuse, physically in school or through social media. This includes asking peers to hide/store banned substances or threatening them for reporting a misconduct to the authorities.

Strengthening the Culture of Peer Dignity and Respect in Shikshantar

Since its inception, Shikshantar has envisioned to create and nurture a learning community in which each child is recognised for their own strengths, creating an environment free of judgement and conformity. Our Vision is to enable each child to develop a character that engages with the world with self-worth and acceptance of the other. We also believe that acceptance of the self and conflict resolution through dialogue opens pathways to peace. Believing in the philosophy of inclusion and facilitating an inclusive environment for children, we have students with varying abilities and from different socio-economic backgrounds.

In the Middle and Senior School, the concept of personal space, boundaries and their violation are taken forward through Circle Time discussions and projects. Strengthening the culture of peer dignity in school further:

- Student based initiatives are taken up from time to time. Student Council Committees like *Family Society and I* (FSI) have been conducting sessions for the junior students to sensitise and empower them towards issues of bullying and harassment.
- Periodic issues of the FSI newsletter *Unlearn* provide the students a platform to talk about issues such as self-care, consent, bullying and stereotyping.
- Sessions with resource persons and experts invited from outside are organised in order to sensitise the students and train the facilitators and all the other members of the school team.

Reporting discomfort/ bullying:

The students may report any discomfort or concerns to their facilitators or any member of the school team. The school assures them the right to feel and be safe and expects them to support others to feel and be safe.

A 'drop your worries box' is accessible to children to share their concerns if they do not feel comfortable voicing their concern. They can also write their full name and group on a paper and drop it in the box, if they need any help to deal with social, emotional and mental stress. The school team will approach the child to provide a listening ear and a helping hand.

Response and action:

We believe in involving children as far as possible in resolving conflicts. Therefore, the first step is dialoguing/counselling the child. If the reported misbehaviour is a repeated pattern, the parents of the child may be called for a meeting to discuss the matter with the Curriculum Coordinator/Academic Supervisor/Head of School.

The consequences for indulging in the aforementioned inappropriate behaviour intentionally/repeatedly may be as follows:

1. Dialoguing/counselling the child. We believe in involving children as far as possible in resolving conflicts.
2. Depending on the nature of the incident, the child can be asked to move away from the class and sit to reflect and settle, or even send the child home for the day.

3. If the child's behaviour is aggressive – hitting, kicking, causing physical harm to self or others, the facilitator is authorized to hold the child and address the self-harm/harm to peers.
4. For students of Middle School, the school can ask the parents to be present in school and provide support.
5. Depending on the nature of the incident, the parents may be informed through a phone call/ email and may be called for a meeting.
6. Repeated behaviour manifestations in the school bus can lead to suspension from the school transport.
7. The student may be disallowed from participating in co-curricular activities within or outside school, especially if they demonstrate an inability to reflect on their conduct.
8. The student may not be allowed to go on school trips if their behaviour undermines the safety and security of other students of the school.
9. In case of severe cases, where a child's presence jeopardises the safety, security or dignity of other members of the school community, suspension or even rustication from school may be considered.
10. Parents should not confront the child/children involved in bullying or their parents. This can complicate the situation and distress the child, and lead to unwanted complications in resolution.
11. If required, the school will involve the School Safety and Security Committee to meet with the involved children and their parents to understand the situation.
12. **Legal threats of any nature from parents or threatening behaviour will not be accepted or tolerated.**

All reports regarding misconduct related to harassment, bullying discrimination and/or victimisation will be treated seriously. We continue to strive towards making Shikshantar a safe space where individuality is celebrated and students and staff members can take joy in being truly themselves. We are, therefore, committed to taking appropriate steps to deal with any behaviour, intentional or unintentional, that constitutes bullying or harassment.