

How Safe is Your School?

An effective way for parents to contribute to child and youth safety is through participation on their school development and/or safe and caring schools committee. This would be the place to evaluate how well your child's school is creating and maintaining a safe and caring environment. What is your school doing well? What could use improvement? The answers to these and the following questions will help your safe school committee focus on the most important issues.

- To what extent do students, teachers, administrators, support staff, parents and visitors feel welcome, cared about and a part of life at your school?
- What are the behavioural expectations for students? For adults, staff, volunteers? Are these expectations displayed?
- Is the environment accepting of diversity? In other words, is it safe for people to be themselves, regardless of gender, race, language, degree of affluence or sexual orientation?
- How does your school demonstrate respect for diversity?
- What incidents of bullying have occurred in the past year? Two years? How were these incidents recorded and addressed? What follow-up took place?
- To what extent is awareness of bullying being taught to students? In what subject areas?
- How does your school teach social skills related to preventing bullying or intervening when bullying occurs?
- What opportunities does your school provide for staff, students, parents, and other members of the community to get together to discuss initiatives and responses to bullying? Are these effective?
- What is your school's policy and process for intervening if there is a bullying incident? In what ways, and how quickly, have parents and students been informed and involved?

The *Focus on Bullying* resource recommends a seven-step plan for how a working group, such as your safe school committee, can engage teachers, parents, and students in the creation of a comprehensive plan to prevent bullying in elementary school communities.

Although the steps are numbered, schools are encouraged to adapt and rearrange these steps as necessary to suit local requirements and existing programs:

- Step 1:** Establish a working group.
- Step 2:** Involve parents.
- Step 3:** Involve students.
- Step 4:** Create a school statement.
- Step 5:** Build a supervision plan.
- Step 6:** Develop a response plan.
- Step 7:** Implement and monitor the plan.