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**BE caring THINK big FEEL inspired MAKE a difference**

Tuesday, November 1, 2022

We are starting to hear the “B” word creep into conversations about negative behaviors at school, especially at the primary level. In addition, there has been a recent social media peer conflict at the intermediate level that has caused disruption at school.

We thought it would be important to send home some information on:

* + - * Why self-regulation and restorative practice are important.
      * Is it Bullying?
      * What to do when things go wrong at school
      * Excerpts from our Code of Conduct.

Sincerely,

Ross Jacobsen, Principal

Allison Johnson, Vice-Principal

**Why teaching self-regulation strategies and restorative practices are important to a positive school environment:**

Self-regulation is the key to understanding how children start to learn how to play safely. When regulated (in the Green Zone) children are less impulsive and think before saying or doing something that might be hurtful. They are calm and in control of their emotions. However, learning to self-regulate takes time and not every child has had equal opportunities to learn from their mistakes and recognizing the consequences of their actions through COVID. Unfortunately, the effects of COVID isolation have led to many children not having ample opportunities to practice safe play before starting school. Many children entered Kindergarten over the last 3 years without being observed by an early learning expert in a pre-school environment. This has led to many children arriving to school without a referral to a medical professional for an assessment. These factors have helped to contribute to some very special and unexpected circumstances for our students in grades: K, 1 and 2.

As children get older, we hold them more accountable for their misbehavior. What we know as educators and parents, is that punishment alone is not the answer. If this were true, then the job of being a school disciplinarian or a parent would be easy! With each infraction, the adults would impose a certain amount of discomfort. If that punishment failed to change the behavior, then the adults would simply increase the level of suffering until the inappropriate behavior stopped. We know that the belief that punishment changes behavior is not supported by the evidence. Punishment only works superficially, primarily when the misbehaving students are in view of those in authority. Punishment fails to create empathy and an internal desire to be the best version of themselves, so as soon as they are out of sight (from the adults) the behavior resurfaces.

If we punish students by excluding them or humiliating them, they do not feel connected to the adults at school or to their well-behaved peers. Rather, they feel alienated and instead seek out bonds with others who have been excluded from the mainstream, creating their own negative subcultural at the school. The most significant shortcoming of punishment strategies is that they stigmatize students and label them as “bad.” While schools cannot condone and must confront inappropriate behavior, we must do so in way that allows offending students to reclaim their good name and re-join the school community. Shame and humiliation must be avoided at all costs, or the behaviors will likely continue into the future.

Changing hurtful behavior into helpful behavior is never the same for each child. In our experience, every child develops at their own pace, and they respond to different interventions. The days of “You are going to the Principal’s office!” are long gone. We believe that fear of punishment will not deter negative behavior in the long-term. As administrators, we see peer conflict and mean moments as opportunities to help solve problems, reset expectations, and enforce meaningful/natural consequences. At the end of the day, it is the relationship that matters most for all parties involved which is why we take a restorative approach to create opportunities for learning. Restorative processes solicit feelings from teachers, parents, school staff and other students so that the offender can understand the impact of their behavior. They must help repair the harm and face up to the consequences for their actions.

The goals of restorative practices are:

* Trying to foster an understanding of the impact of the behavior
* Seeking to repair the harm that was done to people and relationships
* Attending to the needs of the victim and others in the school
* Avoiding imposing on students intentional pain, embarrassment and discomfort
* Actively involving others as much as possible

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Our staff members are grateful to live, work and play in a community that really cares about others and wants to make a difference. We see happy thriving kids everyday, that sometimes need adult intervention to help solve their problems. When things go wrong, we take a restorative approach to repair the harm that has been done along with consequences that are age appropriate. As a community, we do a great job teaching our students self-regulation strategies and how to resolve their problems using their words. However, from time to time, we must intervene when there is a “mean moment” and/or a “peer conflict.”

**What to do when things go wrong at school:**

We ask this of the parents whose child has been affected by negative behaviour at school:

1. Let us investigate before making any assumptions about intent.
2. It isn’t helpful to keep a scorecard of negative events. School staff should be notified immediately.
3. Be open to different interpretations about the same incident.
4. Be open to the fact that your child may not have disclosed the entire story to you.
5. Avoid calling other children bullies or labelling incidents as bullying behaviour.
6. It isn’t helpful to make suggestions about how we deal with the “other” parent(s).
7. Avoid soliciting support from other parents.

Our teachers, parents/guardians and support staff do an excellent job guiding our students on how to be a good friend and how to play safely. Our approach to solving peer conflicts is based on a restorative model where:

1. students accept responsibility for their actions,
2. reflect on what they were thinking then and now,
3. who has been affected by what they’ve done and in what way,
4. what they need to do to make things right.

**Applicable excerpts from the Smiling Creek Code of Conduct:**

*The purpose of the Code of Conduct is:*

* To establish and maintain safe, caring and orderly environments for purposeful learning at Smiling Creek Elementary
* To clarify and outline expectations for student behaviour while at school, while going to and from school, and while attending any school function or activity at any location
* To assist children in developing socially responsible behaviour, showing a developing awareness of their role as ethical decision–makers and moral citizens

*Acceptable conduct* is demonstrated by modeling respectful and responsible behavior.  These expectations apply to behavior at school, during school-organized or sponsored activities, and behavior beyond these times (including on-line behaviour) that negatively impacts the safe, caring or orderly environment of the school, and/or student learning.

*Acceptable conduct includes:*

* respecting self, others and the school
* helping to make the school a safe, caring and orderly place
* informing a “tellable” adult, in a timely manner (in advance, if possible) of incidents of bullying, harassment or intimidation
* engaging in purposeful learning activities in a timely manner
* acting in a manner that brings credit to the school

*Unacceptable conduct:*

As per Section 8 of Human Rights Code of British Columbia, students shall not discriminate against others on the basis of the race, religion, colour, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, family status, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or physical or mental disability.  Furthermore, as per Section 7 of the Human Rights Code of British Columbia, no student shall publish or display anything that would indicate an intention to discriminate against another, or expose them to contempt or ridicule, on the aforementioned bases.

Students may be subject to discipline under the school and/or District Code of Conduct for any conduct which has the effect of negatively impacting the school environment, whether that conduct occurs on or off School District property, at a school sponsored function or activity, or otherwise.

Examples of unacceptable conduct include:

* Behaviours that:  
  -              interfere with the learning of others  
  -              interfere with an orderly environment  
  -              create unsafe conditions
* are disrespectful of others
* Acts of:  
  -              bullying (includes but is not limited to physical or verbal intimidation, verbal harassment and  cyber-bullying, occurring on or off school property  
  -              physical violence  
  -              retribution against a person who has reported incidents
* Illegal acts, such as:  
  -              possession, use or distribution of illegal or restricted substances  
  -              possession or use of weapons  
  -              theft of or damage to property

Behaviours cited above are only some examples and not an all-inclusive list.

*Rising expectations:*

* There will be a progression of expectations held for students as they become developmentally more responsible for their actions.
* As students advance through the grades, they will be expected to continue to meet expectations in the Social Responsibility Performance Standards for their appropriate grade level.  Students/Families are informed on their progress through comments on their report cards and informally through meetings, e-mails, and phone calls.
* Over the kindergarten to grade 5 years, we expect increasing personal responsibility and self-discipline and will apply increasing consequences for inappropriate behaviour.
* Special consideration may apply to students with identified special needs if these students are unable to comply with our code of conduct due to having a disability of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioral nature.

*Consequences:*

* Responses to unacceptable conduct are consistent and fair.  Consequences will be applied to unacceptable student conduct.  The consequence will be implemented based on the severity and the frequency of the behaviour.  Progressive discipline and restorative justice methods will be implemented to alter the inappropriate and/or unsafe behaviour.  Consequences and the support will be preventative, restorative and designed to educate the developing child.  Students will, as often as possible, be encouraged to participate in the assignment of meaningful consequences.
* Special considerations may apply to the imposition of consequences on a student with special needs if the student is unable to comply with this Code of Conduct, due to a disability of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional, or behavioural nature.