

FOUNDATIONS OF SUPPORTING SCHOOL SAFETY

INTERACTIVE RESOURCE GUIDE



SAFER
SCHOOLS
TOGETHER

erase | EXPECT RESPECT &
A SAFE EDUCATION





Copyright © 2024 Safer Schools Together. The reproduction of this material is strictly prohibited without the written permission of the copyright owners. All rights reserved. Disclaimer: Given the rapidly evolving nature of technology and social media applications, this information (especially social media platform-related) is current as of the date of publication. This is an interactive document. Click the underlined links to read more or navigate to the correlating section of the document.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
THE IMPORTANCE OF ERASE AND THE REPORT IT TOOL	2
CODES OF CONDUCT	4
Components of a Robust Code of Conduct.....	4
Legal and Governmental Alignment	5
Key Elements of a Strong Code of Conduct	5
NEVER UNDERESTIMATE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE	6
Understanding School Connectedness	6
Distinguishing Between Climate and Culture	6
The Physical and Social Environment.....	6
Addressing Disparities.....	7
Importance of Classroom Climate.....	7
Community and External Relationships.....	7
Continuous Improvement	7
SCHOOL SYSTEMS	8
Open versus Closed School Systems	8
The Physical Environment.....	9
BULLYING, MEAN BEHAVIOUR, AND PEER CONFLICT – KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE	11
Self-Harm vs Suicidal Ideation.....	12
Navigating the Digital Space	13
WORRISOME BEHAVIOUR AND WORRISOME ONLINE BEHAVIOUR REPORTS™ (WOBs)	15
SEXTING, SEXTORTION, AND CATFISHING	17
DIVERSITY IS ESSENTIAL	20
Trauma-Informed Practice	22
Understanding Trauma-Informed Practice	22
Strategies for Trauma-Informed Practice	23
Connect Before You Correct	23
Creating a Trauma-Informed School Environment	23
SUPPORT AND RESOURCES	24
Additional Resources	24

INTRODUCTION

The Foundations of Supporting School Safety guide is dedicated to ensuring the safety and well-being of our school communities. This comprehensive guide is designed for educators, administrators, and support staff, committed to creating a secure and nurturing environment for students and staff alike.

In today's educational landscape, the importance of school safety cannot be overstated. A safe school is critical for effective teaching and learning, providing a space where students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. "Foundations of School Safety" addresses this critical need by offering strategies, practical tools, and actionable insights to enhance and foster a culture of care and connectedness.

Schools and school districts continually seek ways to make every student feel valued, respected, safe, wanted, and connected. Many students come to school each day because school is the only place they feel physically safe, yet they are not emotionally connected. This guide will support ways to reach out to these students to help create feelings of being valued, respected, and wanted.

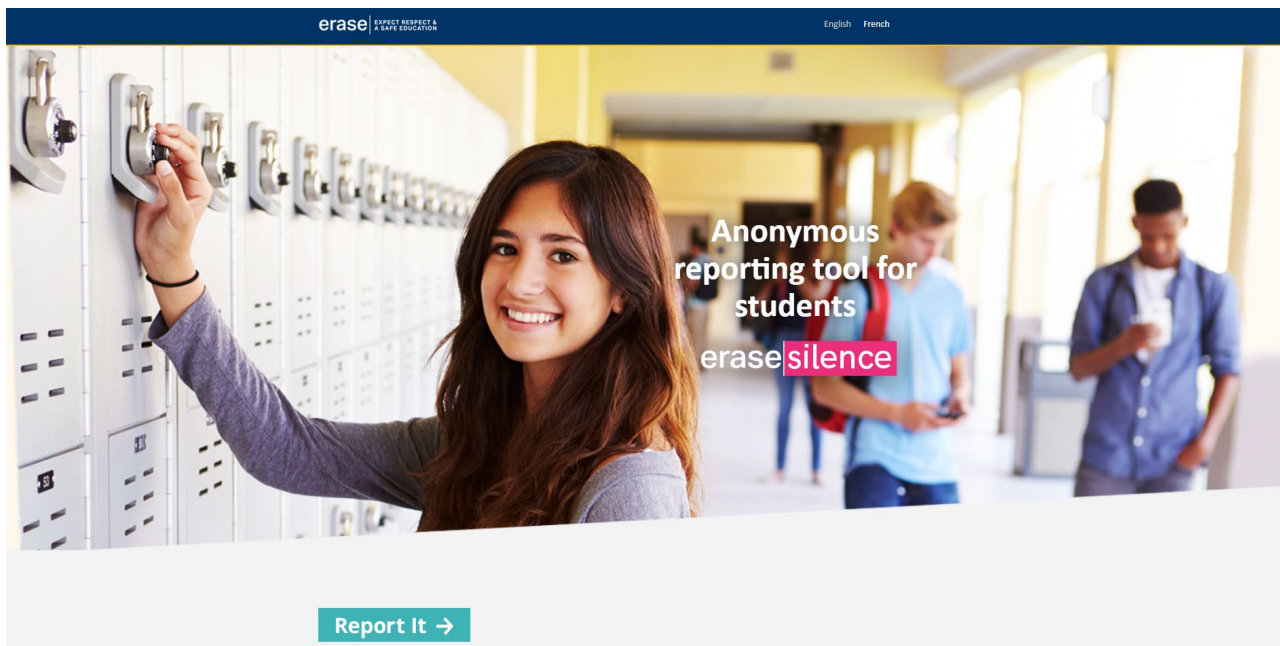
When students feel good about themselves, they are more likely to learn and engage with others in school activities and events. When schools focus on social-emotional learning and infuse it into the curriculum from kindergarten right up to graduation, academic achievement increases, incidents of bullying behaviour decrease, violence is reduced, attendance increases, and higher levels of student success are achieved.

Thank you for your commitment to school safety. Together, we can build a foundation of security and trust that empowers our students and staff to achieve their fullest potential.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ERASE AND THE REPORT IT TOOL

As a quick overview, ERASE stands for “Expect Respect and a Safe Education.” ERASE was formed by the Ministry of Education and Child Care initiative that started in 2012 as a response to high-profile and alarming events within local communities. These significant events highlighted the importance and the need for all of us to wrap around and proactively support our youth with intention. Being able to identify individuals at the start of a pathway to violence, creating cultures of safety, and looking at different ways that students can access support and get connected; these pillars all aim to reduce violence in our schools.

Another major component of ERASE is the student anonymous reporting tool which individuals connected to our schools can access. The Erase Report It tool requires us to create an action plan in terms of how we will communicate with schools and support youth who have had the courage to make a report and/or plans to de-escalate reported worrisome behaviours for all involved. It is critical that the Erase Report It tool is readily accessible and easy to find. Additionally, on the Ministry-supported ERASE website, you can download posters and other resources that can help promote the reporting tool within your schools.¹ A useful suggestion is to place the ERASE posters in bathrooms, as it is a great place for youth to access the tool without the worry of other peers seeing them. Another suggestion is to turn them into stickers so youth can put them on their laptops and binders to make the contact information more accessible. The reporting tool is only as good as the publicity and the familiarity people have with it, so it is critical that it is front and center, wherever it is on your website. It is also important to note that it is considered best practice in terms of Threat Assessment management to have an active, high-profile, responsive anonymous reporting tool in our schools.



The "Report it" button provides children access to the “Get Help Now” feature, which is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the “Get Help” button offers more than just an anonymous reporting tool. It provides a few options for reporters:

¹ [ERASE Website](#)

- They can access a link to call 911.
- They can connect to a chat line and counseling services.
- They can utilize the "Report it" tool to create an anonymous report.

It is crucial to highlight that when individuals make a report, although they are not required to leave their name, they must identify the connected school. This detail is vital in determining who needs support when the tip is received. Additionally, reporters are asked to identify the subject of their concern, with an option to select "other" if none of the drop-down menu options apply. They can also name individuals involved and indicate whether they wish to remain anonymous, as mentioned earlier. One particularly useful feature is the ability to upload videos, pictures, and screenshots to provide more information about the report.

For example...

"A recent report through this tool involved a threat occurring on a bus. The report identified the students involved, described the incident, and noted other witnesses. Remarkably, the Safe School Coordinator received the report before the bus had dropped off the students, enabling an adult to meet the bus and address the issue immediately."

While such immediacy is not always possible, it underscores the importance of supporting the anonymity of reporters. Typically, the identities of those involved can be inferred from the names and the school provided. However, maintaining curiosity and healthy skepticism with anonymous reports is critical.

There could be many reasons which may impact our interpretation of a report. For instance, someone could be set up, and roles can shift between victim and bully. Additionally, a report might be a cry for help, with the primary concern differing from the stated threat. Furthermore, reporters may only have partial information, leading to biased narratives. An anonymous tip through ERASE is a valuable piece of data, offering an opportunity to learn about worrisome behaviours early. However, this information must be verified and explored through school and community partnerships. Thus, maintaining objectivity and curiosity when navigating these tips is essential, ensuring that the involved parties are appropriately addressed, as someone took the time and courage to make the report. It is our responsibility to take it seriously.

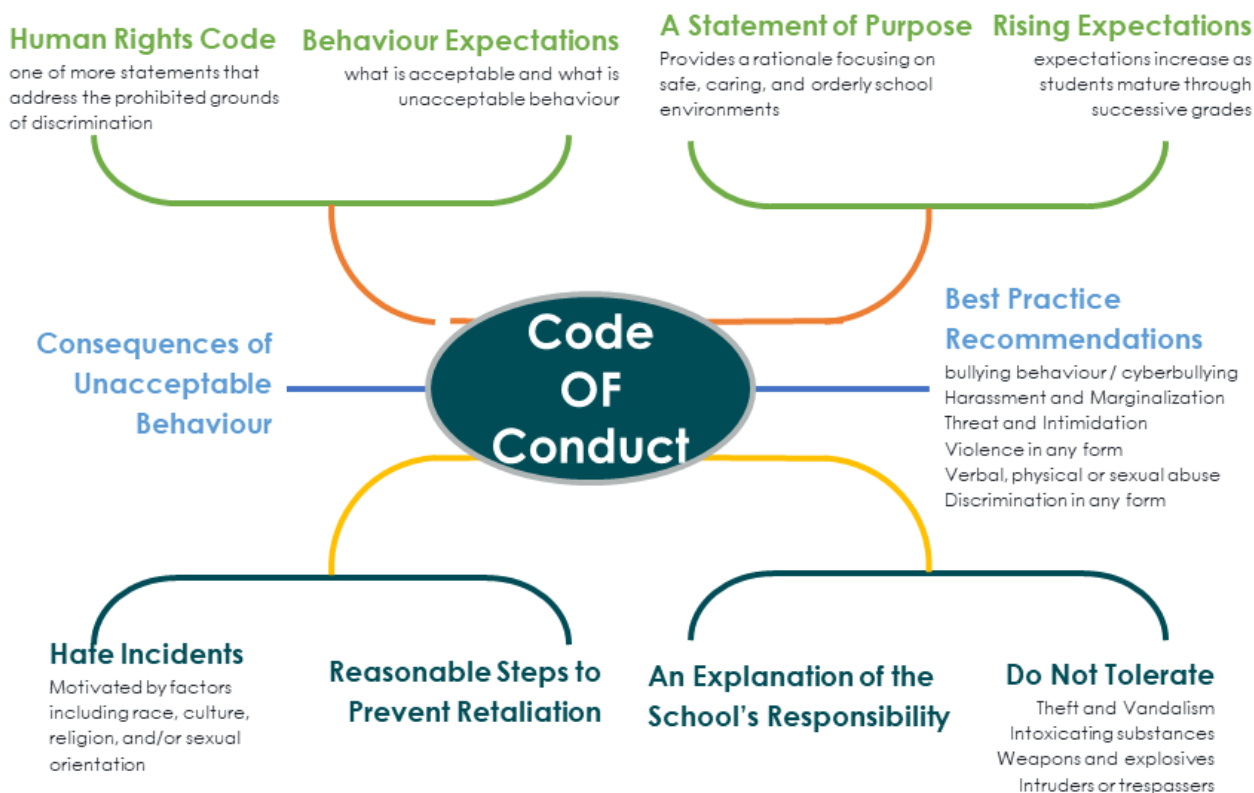
If you have any other questions about the Erase tools and resources, specifically about the Report It tips that you might receive, please feel free to contact us directly at Safer Schools Together. It is an important part of a school's culture and climate, and we need to create an environment where people feel safe to report anything and that these reports are going to be treated seriously.

CODES OF CONDUCT

Another aspect of the ERASE strategy is the commitment to strengthening codes of conduct for all schools in British Columbia. The province aims to ensure that all codes of conduct are explicit about the prohibited grounds of discrimination and align with our shared goals of preventing bullying and fostering safe and caring school communities. The ministry document, “Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools,” is an excellent resource that outlines the ERASE strategy and the essential components of a Code of Conduct.² We will review these components in general, but the resource provides an opportunity for a deeper exploration.

Codes of Conduct

The following core content must be contained in each Code of Conduct:



Components of a Robust Code of Conduct

A comprehensive code of conduct must reflect the entire school community and the ways everyone will interact—not just the students. Every school in the province is expected to have a publicly accessible code of conduct, best accessed through school and district websites. It should be distributed at the beginning of the year and to any new members during the school year, including board employees, parents of students, and the students themselves. For example, it should be included in school student and staff handbooks. It must also be displayed in prominent areas in the school, visible to visitors and ambassadors of the school, such as coaches and volunteers. Additionally, it should

² [Safe, Caring, Orderly Schools](#)

be reviewed annually with a cross-section of staff, parents, and students to assess its effectiveness and relevance in addressing current school safety issues.

Your task moving forward is to check your district websites and specific schools to ensure that these codes of conduct are easy to find and include the components below. It is essential that they are living documents as students and families will use them to question school decisions around discipline, so they must transparently reflect policies and processes.

Legal and Governmental Alignment

Codes of conduct should link government ministries in shared practice and align with our legal system. The primary document that must be clearly referenced is the BC Human Rights Code. Other important resources that can support the creation of the code of conduct and provide additional perspectives include the “94 Calls to Action” by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³

Key Elements of a Strong Code of Conduct

1. **Statement Supporting the BC Human Rights Code:** Codes of conduct must include one or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination.
2. **Statement of Purpose:** This provides a rationale for the code of conduct with a focus on safe, caring, and orderly school environments. This is not a motto but a comprehensive commitment. For example, “We, the students and staff at BC School of Excellence, are committed to promoting a safe learning environment that respects the rights of all individuals, values diversity, and is free from all forms of discrimination, including race, color, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, gender identity and expression, sex, sexual orientation, or age. This Code of Conduct encourages trauma-informed prevention, peaceful problem-solving, and a safe and welcoming environment.”
3. **Behaviour Expectations:** Clear guidelines on what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour at school, during school-related activities, or in other circumstances that impact the school environment.
4. **Rising Expectations for Behaviour:** Acknowledgment that behavioural expectations will increase as students mature through successive grades.
5. **Consequences for Unacceptable Behaviour:** Consequences should consider the student's age, maturity, and special needs (e.g., intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional, or behavioural disability), as well as the severity and frequency of actions.
6. **Restorative Focus:** Where possible and appropriate, the emphasis should be on being restorative rather than punitive.

Other recommendations for inclusion in school codes of conduct, based on best practices and provincial standards, are that codes acknowledge that safe and caring school communities are free from bullying and cyberbullying, harassment and marginalization, threats and intimidation, violence in any form, verbal, physical, or sexual abuse, and discrimination in any form. The code of conduct should also state that school communities will not tolerate theft and vandalism, intoxicating substances, weapons and/or explosives, and intruders or trespassers.

³ [94 Calls to Action](#)

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

The discussion on school and classroom climate and culture, as well as connectedness, is essential in understanding the variations within a school and across districts. These variations significantly impact the perceived and actual safety in our educational environments.

Understanding School Connectedness

School connectedness encompasses the relationships and interactions within schools and between schools and their broader communities. Schools that value and respect the perspectives and decision-making abilities of students, parents, and the community foster respectful climates. This inclusivity encourages community participation and promotes healthy behaviour in students. A strong sense of connectedness and positive climate allows for more focus on proactive interventions and positive relationships, reducing the need for constant crisis management.

Distinguishing Between Climate and Culture

Climate and culture are often used interchangeably, yet they represent different aspects of a school's environment. Culture refers to the group's personality, built over years, based on values and beliefs. Climate, on the other hand, is the group's attitude, which can change day-to-day and is easier to influence. While culture is a deeply ingrained part of the group, climate is perceptible and can be felt immediately upon entering a space. Improving school environments begins with changing the climate, which, over time, can lead to a shift in culture.

Culture	Climate
...is the groups personality	...is the group's attitude
...gives Mondays permission to be miserable	...differs from Monday to Friday, February to May
...provides for a limited way of thinking	...creates a state of mind
...takes years to evolve	...easy to change
...is based on values and beliefs	...is based on perceptions
...can't be felt, even by group members	...can be felt when you enter a room
...is part of us	...surrounds us
...is the way we do things around here	...is "the way we feel around here"
...determines whether or not improvement is possible	...is the first thing that improves when positive change is made

The Physical and Social Environment

Analyzing the physical and social environment of a school provides insights into its climate and culture. Consider the experience of individuals entering the school: the presence of welcoming signs, up-to-date posters, and visible indicators of school pride all contribute to a positive climate. Conversely, neglected or outdated displays can create a negative impression. Beyond visuals, the behaviour and visibility of staff in common areas, open classroom doors, and the accessibility of administrative staff all play crucial roles in shaping the school climate.

“Is it a Warning Bell or Welcoming Bell?” (Campbell 2012)

Addressing Disparities

It's not uncommon for different areas within the same school to exhibit varying climates. For instance, one entrance may be welcoming, with open doors and vibrant displays, while another may feel uninviting, with closed doors and minimal decoration. Recognizing and addressing these disparities is vital. Strategies to improve unwelcoming areas include relocating teachers and classrooms, increasing administrative presence, and enhancing the physical environment with art and student projects. This approach helps create a consistently positive school culture.

Importance of Classroom Climate

Classroom climate significantly impacts students' perceptions and behaviours. A supportive classroom environment, where students feel connected to their teacher, can be pivotal in their educational experience. Open doors before and after school hours, flexible and welcoming spaces, and opportunities for informal interactions are all important factors in fostering a positive classroom climate. Social emotional learning programs, consistent across the school or district, further enhance this environment by providing a common language and framework for behaviour and interactions.

Community and External Relationships

Connectedness extends beyond the school to include relationships with community partners. Positive school-community connections provide students with role models and open lines of communication, enhancing school safety. Students who feel safe and connected are more likely to report concerns, contributing to a safer school environment. Behavioural Digital Threat Assessment (BDTA) training underscores the importance of these connections in preventing and addressing potential threats.

Continuous Improvement

Improving school climate and culture requires ongoing effort and attention to both significant and minor issues. While major crises are often more visible and easier to address, small, daily interactions and interventions are crucial for long-term improvement. Schools must seek ways to make every student feel valued, respected, safe, and connected. This involves engaging with all students, including those who may not be vocal about their needs or concerns.

A comprehensive understanding of school climate, culture, and connectedness is essential for creating safe and supportive educational environments. By addressing both physical and social aspects, fostering positive relationships, and maintaining a proactive approach, schools can significantly enhance the well-being and success of their students. Leaders in the educational community must continuously strive to improve these elements, ensuring that every student feels valued and connected.

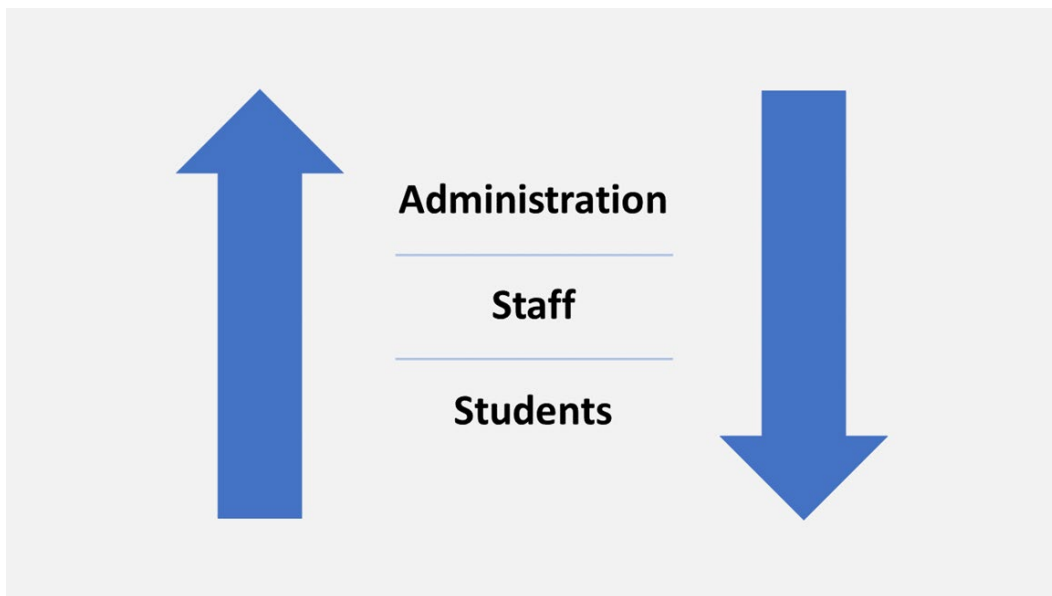
SCHOOL SYSTEMS

When discussing school systems, it is crucial to understand that not all school systems respond uniformly to crises or traumatic events. The concept of a school system responding involves recognizing that schools can have emotional and behavioural reactions to such events. This perspective requires examining the dynamic relationships among school administrators, staff, students, parents, and others within the organization, as well as how the school system interacts with external entities like policing systems and community agencies.

Different schools exposed to the same traumatic stimuli can exhibit vastly different responses. It is essential in our work to analyze these systems to make these differences more predictable and comprehensible. Failing to do so can lead to responses that appear inappropriate or unpredictable. When examining school systems, we are looking at the interactions and communication flow within the school. Schools can be more open or closed, and trauma within these communities can impact not only individuals but also the systems as a whole.

Open versus Closed School Systems

A healthy, open school system is characterized by the absence of a complicated trauma history and bidirectional information sharing. In such systems, there is a clear leadership structure, but information flows in all directions. For example, if there is a crisis in a classroom, the teacher or educational assistant feels comfortable reporting it to an administrator, and the administrator feels at ease engaging informally with staff, students, or visitors. In times of crisis, leadership is often temporarily shared, especially when individuals have specific expertise. This is seen in threat assessment teams where everyone feels comfortable sharing information rather than deferring to the most formal leader. Open schools are considered the safest because there is a greater potential for information to be shared when a threat arises.



However, open school systems can face challenges if they experience multiple, unresolved crises or traumas. These challenges often manifest as excessive communication without structure. In such situations, staff may overestimate the impact of community events on the school and seek district support for issues that could be managed internally. Informal leaders may emerge with significant social power, leading to gossip and multiple narratives around a single event. The primary issue here is the lack of information filtering and staff acting independently or "going rogue." To support an open school in this direction, it is crucial to share clear, consistent communication and recovery plans with

all staff and the community, encouraging struggling staff to seek private counselling to maintain professional interactions.

Conversely, in a closed school system, information sharing is top-down, allowing for quick dissemination of information, but details may be lost as information is not always shared with leadership. Relationships with district supports are cordial but not collaborative, and services are usually intended for students only. There tends to be a "suck it up" mentality regarding mental health for staff and students. While closed schools can be efficient in crises, early intervention opportunities are often lost due to rigid communication channels.

Closed systems with a complicated trauma history maintain a clearly defined leadership role, but informal leadership structures are also rigid. Parental involvement is limited, and most parents and community partners are viewed as outside the system. Requests for services are less frequent, and the system copes by employing high levels of denial. There is a focus on appearing unaffected by past or current traumas, with limited counselling support and little interest in outside services. Building trust with closed schools can be a sensitive and time-consuming process, starting with concrete and measurable interventions to establish a supportive relationship.

The Physical Environment

The physical environment of schools also plays a significant role in shaping school systems, impacting culture and climate. Certain areas within and outside the school are typically viewed as safe or unsafe by students and staff. Videos of fights or assaults often occur in the same spaces, indicating these areas have become perceived as justifiable places for violent acts or targeted bullying. Avoidance of certain areas, such as memorial walls for deceased students and staff, is also common. Understanding these trends is important for maintaining a safe school environment.

Students report that the physical environment significantly influences their sense of safety, particularly regarding the cleanliness of the school, overall building maintenance, overcrowding, and the presence of graffiti. At SST, we have heard from students that specific areas feel unsafe due to certain students' presence, often unnoticed by adults. Power differentials between groups, like sports teams, can create unsafe areas for other students, leading to perceptions of unequal rules around safety and belonging. Building strong relationships with students is essential to gather this feedback and address these issues.

Identifying unsafe areas can be addressed by increasing adult presence in those spaces. Notably, washrooms are often identified as dangerous places, with students avoiding them and planning their timetables to minimize their use. Increased supervision in these areas is necessary.

Another effective strategy is to involve students in mapping out safe and unsafe areas within the school. Younger students can colour-code these areas, while older students can provide more detailed feedback, considering factors like time of day and the nature of the activities. This data can inform staff and community partners about areas needing improvement to enhance school culture, climate, and safety.



West Middle School

“Where do you feel safest? Where do you feel unsafe?”

Anonymous Threatening Communications (ATCs) represent another challenge in maintaining a safe school environment. ATCs include threats to commit violent acts against individuals, groups, or locations, often found on bathroom walls, buildings, social media, or letters. While these threats typically lack specificity and commitment, identifying the threat maker is crucial to prevent crises and provide support.

Threat assessment teams should consider the language of commitment, detail level, justification, delivery method, and plausibility of the threat. Although identifying the author can be difficult, steps like handwriting analysis and examining unique phrases can help. Maintaining a binder of such information can aid in identifying patterns and authors, especially during a rash of threats.

An example of dealing with ATCs involves a case where graffiti in a bathroom threatened a student named CJ, who had a history of reporting bullying and victimization. The investigation revealed that CJ herself might have authored the threat as a cry for help, leading to the discovery of ongoing sexual abuse. This highlights the importance of recognizing behaviours as potential cries for help and responding with appropriate support and interventions.

Understanding school systems' responses to crises and traumas, the impact of physical environments, and strategies for addressing anonymous threats are critical components of creating safe and supportive school environments. By fostering open communication, addressing physical safety concerns, and recognizing cries for help, schools can better navigate crises and support their communities effectively.

BULLYING, MEAN BEHAVIOUR, AND PEER CONFLICT – KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE

When it comes to discussing peer conflict, mean behaviour, bullying, and cyberbullying behaviours, we must gain a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics and the significant impact of bullying behaviours on its targets, aggressors, and bystanders.

To effectively intervene and support youth involved in bullying, it is essential to clearly differentiate between these behaviours. This clarity enables informed decision-making when implementing interventions. Let's begin by examining peer conflict. Conflict among peers is a natural part of development, where disagreements may escalate to mean behaviour or physical actions. Typically, peers involved in conflict share similar power dynamics, such as age, size, and social status. They are equally affected by the conflict and can often resolve issues with adult guidance through conflict resolution, fostering empathy and perspective-taking skills.



Mean behaviour, on the other hand, involves intentional actions that harm others, such as name-calling, exclusion, or privacy violations. While not premeditated, mean behaviour can cause significant harm and requires prompt, respectful intervention. Addressing mean behaviour promptly can prevent it from escalating into a pattern and helps redirect youth towards positive interactions. Counselling support may also be necessary to address underlying issues contributing to mean behaviour.

Recognizing that both peer conflict and mean behaviour are part of growing up, provides opportunities for learning communication and empathy skills. Schools play a crucial role in teaching conflict resolution and fostering social-emotional learning to support healthy peer interactions.

Bullying differs significantly from peer conflict or mean behaviour. It involves a power imbalance where one individual repeatedly and intentionally harms another, causing distress. Bullying can manifest physically, verbally, socially, or through cyber means, targeting differences in appearance, culture, identity, or other factors. Key elements of bullying include:

- an imbalance of power
- an intention to harm
- persistence over time, necessitating systematic intervention to prevent escalation and harm.

Research highlights the severe impacts of bullying, including physical symptoms, absenteeism, anxiety, depression, and in extreme cases, suicide. Both victims and perpetrators can experience long-term psychological effects, underscoring the importance of early intervention and supportive strategies.

Bystanders play a key role in bullying situations, with the majority of incidents occurring in their presence. Their responses can either escalate or de-escalate situations, significantly influencing the social acceptability of bullying behaviours. Encouraging assertive bystander interventions or reporting to adults results in mitigating the bullying's impact and fostering a supportive school environment.

Effective bullying prevention strategies involve educating students on assertive communication, promoting a positive school climate, and empowering bystanders to intervene effectively. By equipping students with social-emotional skills, schools can create an environment that reduces bullying and supports positive peer relationships.

The distinctions between conflict, mean behaviour, and bullying are needed for implementing targeted interventions that promote empathy, assertiveness, and a supportive school culture. By fostering a safe, inclusive environment and providing students with the tools to navigate conflicts constructively, schools can effectively reduce the prevalence and impact of bullying.

Discussing self-harming and/or suicidal behaviours as a consequence of bullying is a challenging yet essential topic that demands our attention. First and foremost, always understand your boundaries and comfort zones, and clearly identify your school, district, and community partners who can provide comprehensive support for these vulnerable youth.

Self-Harm vs Suicidal Ideation

SUICIDE	SELF INJURY
Intent to end life	Intent to feel relief from intense feelings or numbness
Lethal means used	Non-lethal means used
Often a single event	Repeated behaviour
No sense of relief after attempt	Immediate sense of relief after self-injuring
Feeling hopeless and helpless	A sense of having some control over emotions
In response to a feeling of inescapable and unending pain	In response to feeling overwhelmed by emotions or feeling numb

It is important for all of us to differentiate between self-harm and suicidal ideation. Some may incorrectly link self-harm, also known as non-suicidal self-injurious behaviour, with suicide. However, these are distinct behaviours that often get conflated due to their manifestation of emotional distress. Generally, individuals who engage in self-harm do not intend to end their lives, whereas suicide is an act of seeking relief from suffering, often driven by hopelessness, depression, or impulsive decisions.

Both self-harm and suicidal ideation are serious indicators of distress and a cry for help. While self-harm may serve as a coping mechanism to alleviate stress temporarily, it does not necessarily indicate a severe mental health issue such as suicidal ideation, which signifies a profound crisis requiring immediate intervention by mental health professionals. Knowing these differences is needed to provide appropriate support. Effective intervention involves not only addressing the behaviour itself but also identifying and addressing the underlying issues that contribute to these

harmful coping mechanisms.

Navigating the Digital Space

Moving forward, it is vital for Safe School Coordinators and mental health leaders to acknowledge how online dynamics have also profoundly altered our school environments. Understanding the digital landscape enables us to identify risk factors and support students navigate these complexities effectively. There are some key aspects of online behaviour that can aid in identifying students in distress and managing incidents like cyberbullying and its associated consequences. Safe School Coordinators should be well-versed in Digital Threat Assessment, including basic and advanced training available through Safer Schools Together and Erase.

Hashtags (#) are crucial tools for categorizing and discovering content based on keywords. Users employ hashtags to enhance their post's visibility and reach within a platform or search engine. They facilitate conversations, group identifications, and content discovery, offering insights into how students perceive themselves and the issues impacting them. For instance, hashtags that seemingly relate to individuals like "Ana," "Mia," "Deb," and "Sue" may actually encode messages related to specific challenges, such as eating disorders, under the guise of terms like "my secret family."⁴ This coded language helps circumvent online restrictions and can manifest in various forms beyond social media, such as conversations, artwork, or journal entries.

Understanding these online behaviours is essential for school counsellors and administrators, as they may encounter these issues directly within school environments. Awareness allows for proactive intervention and support, helping students access appropriate mental health resources and guidance.

Platforms like TikTok are renowned for trending hashtags, which provide insights into emerging behavioural patterns. Awareness of concerning hashtags can assist in establishing baseline behaviours and identifying potential risks early on. While these tags can facilitate positive community-building, they may also inadvertently promote harmful behaviours like suicidal ideation or self-harm.

The fear of missing out (FOMO) plays a significant role in students' online behaviours and emotional well-being. Social media platforms often present idealized versions of life, exacerbating feelings of inadequacy or isolation among teens. Research indicates a correlation between excessive social media use and mental health issues like anxiety and depression, though causation remains debated.

Moreover, platforms like Snapchat, X, TikTok, and Instagram are prime venues for cyberbullying and social assassination, where individuals are targeted through defamatory posts, hate speech, or malicious ratings. Unlike traditional bullying, these attacks persist beyond school hours and geographical boundaries, complicating intervention efforts.

Cyberbullying is overt or covert bullying behaviour using digital technologies. Examples include harassment via a mobile phone, setting up a defamatory personal website, or deliberately excluding someone from social networking spaces. Cyberbullying can happen at any time. It can be in public or in private and sometimes is only known to the target and the person perpetuating the bullying behaviour.

⁴ [Secret Society 123](#)



Regardless of how technology is involved, it is the positive relationships developed in the school community that are essential (Campbell, 2012)

Cyberbullying has changed the traditional face of bullying behaviours in schools in three significant ways—Access, Scope, and Anonymity (ASA).

- **Access:** It is virtually impossible for targets to get away from children and youth who engage in cyberbullying behaviours. Most students who engage in cyberbullying behaviours have access to all types of technology and can reach their targets almost all the time. Targets do not have a safe haven as they do in cases of traditional bullying.
- **Scope:** Unlike traditional bullying behaviour, due to technology, the cyber-bullying audience has few— if any—barriers and the audience quickly grows almost exponentially.
- **Anonymity:** Cyberbullying is not a face-to-face interaction, and those who engage in cyberbullying behaviours hide behind technology. Anonymity, which is inherent in electronic communication, promotes a lack of inhibition. As a result, standard behaviour restraints can disappear, allowing adolescents to act harsher than they would in real life.

Addressing cyberbullying requires collaborative efforts involving educators, community partners, and law enforcement. Coordinated responses ensure swift action to mitigate harm and protect victims in accordance with evolving online norms and legal frameworks.

Ultimately, cultivating a supportive school climate hinges on fostering trust and open communication among students and staff. Encouraging a culture where students feel safe to report online threats or bullying incidents is paramount. By staying informed and proactive, we can effectively safeguard our students' well-being in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

WORRISOME BEHAVIOUR AND WORRISOME ONLINE BEHAVIOUR REPORTS™ (WOBs)

One of the most critical steps in breaking down barriers of silence is creating a safe school environment focused on building relationships and investing in our community. School staff and our police liaison officers represent our best investment in helping students feel connected and willing to share uncomfortable truths. A student's sense of belonging and acceptance through these connections does more to foster safe, healthy, and caring schools than anything else we can do.

However, it's important to acknowledge that despite our efforts, some issues may still go unnoticed. Therefore, we must establish protocols and policies to better identify concerning behaviours and ensure timely intervention without overreacting or overlooking potential threats.

How do we recognize worrisome behaviours in our school? Do our staff members understand what constitutes concerning behaviour and know what steps to take if they observe something alarming? What role do students play in reporting such behaviours, and do they know whom to approach with their concerns? These questions are pivotal and should be addressed at your next staff meeting to enhance communication and awareness within your school community.

We must continually remind our staff that any behaviour causing concern should be reported, regardless of how insignificant it may seem. Maintaining an open and ongoing dialogue with staff throughout the year is crucial, especially considering that behaviours can vary widely depending on community context. Encourage your staff to share any observations or concerns they have encountered in the past to keep these lines of communication active and effective.

It's also important to assess whether your district schools have formal or informal methods for reporting such information. At SST, we hear how much significant information is informally passed through the halls. However, relying on physical proximity as the sole determinant for reporting worrisome behaviour is not an effective strategy. There needs to be a clearly communicated process that all staff members understand and find easy to use for sharing information.

As we delve deeper into Behavioural and Digital Threat Assessment (BDTA) methodologies, we strongly recommend comprehensive training. Our understanding of what constitutes worrisome behaviour should encompass monitoring student social media activities. Social media provides insights into individuals' behavioural baselines that are often not apparent in face-to-face interactions, as online behaviour tends to lack the filters people apply in person. Integrating digital assessments with behavioural assessments allows us to obtain a more accurate understanding of an individual's risk factors.

SOCIALIZING



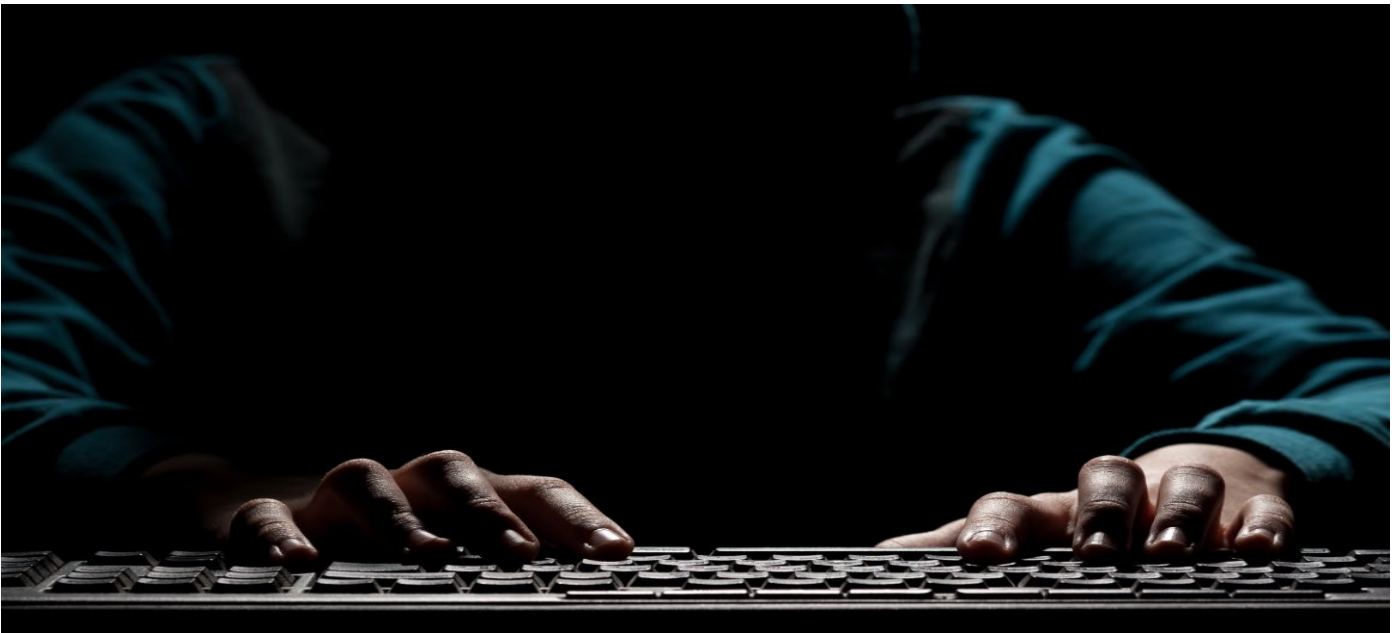
Consider implementing a list of behaviours that mandate immediate threat assessment activation. Would every staff member recognize and report such incidents? Initiating these discussions ensures that each staff member plays an integral role in identifying potentially dangerous situations or behaviours.

Understanding the concept of "leakage" is crucial in emphasizing why it's vital for all staff members to be vigilant about identifying worrisome or threat-related behaviours. When individuals inadvertently reveal clues about their feelings, thoughts, fantasies, attitudes, and intentions—this is the phenomenon known as leakage. Recognizing these clues can potentially prevent acts of violence by intervening early and providing necessary support.

SEXTING, SEXTORTION, AND CATFISHING

When we consider worrisome behaviours, it includes anything under the category of bullying or cyberbullying. Another aspect of online worrisome behaviours that we need to be aware of is sextortion and sexting. It is necessary to understand the difference between sexting and sextortion as both have serious implications.

Sextortion is a form of blackmail or extortion. It involves individuals who coerce another (particularly youth) into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual acts via webcam, then blackmail them with the threat of distributing these images and videos if they do not pay money or provide more sexual content. This extortion often begins with the blackmailer pretending to be someone interested in the victim, usually starting on a public social platform like Instagram before moving to a private platform such as Snapchat. The blackmailer, posing as an age-appropriate individual, initiates an intimate relationship and eventually sends a photo, asking the victim to reciprocate. These initial photos are typically stock images or AI creations, a tactic known as catfishing. Almost immediately after the victim sends an intimate photo, the extorter demands money or additional images/videos, threatening to leak the content online or share it with the victim's family and friends if they do not comply. To terrify the youth into submission, the extorter may share screenshots of their contacts or other identifying information such as their school or home address. The demands can range from a few hundred dollars to as much as \$7,500, often requested through online payment providers like PayPal, gift cards like Amazon, or direct e-transfers. The shame attached to this process means adults often remain unaware until the situation becomes unmanageable.



Our partners at Cybertip have provided us with staggering data on the magnitude of sextortion in Canada. Between January 2023 and December 2023, there were more than 2500 reports of sextortion, with 87% of victims identifying as male.⁵ Boys are typically extorted for money, while girls are extorted for more images. Furthermore, 79% of extortion cases started on Instagram before moving to Snapchat.⁶

⁵ [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca)

⁶ [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca)

Given these statistics, it is essential to educate our students on the risk factors for sextortion. These include:

- Being asked to shift platforms, especially to more private chat applications
- Requests for links to PayPal or Amazon wish lists
- Having random followers
- Older male followers or commentators
- Suggestive comments indicating grooming

Victims of sextortion suffer significant emotional and physical consequences, including feelings of fear, isolation, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, and numbness. They also face an increased risk of substance use and physical symptoms such as nausea, headaches, weight changes, and difficulties with sleeping, concentration, and memory. One in four victims who are extorted seek medical attention, yet many never report the assault.

In contrast, sexting involves sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photographs, or videos. While often perceived as consensual, it does not necessarily lead to a blackmailing dynamic like sextortion. However, given the permanence of online messaging and the ease of further distribution, this behaviour can indeed be worrisome. As individuals become more explicit with their sexting content, their ability to control the messaging, image, and content decreases. This underscores the need for conversations with students about the sexual age of consent and sexting.

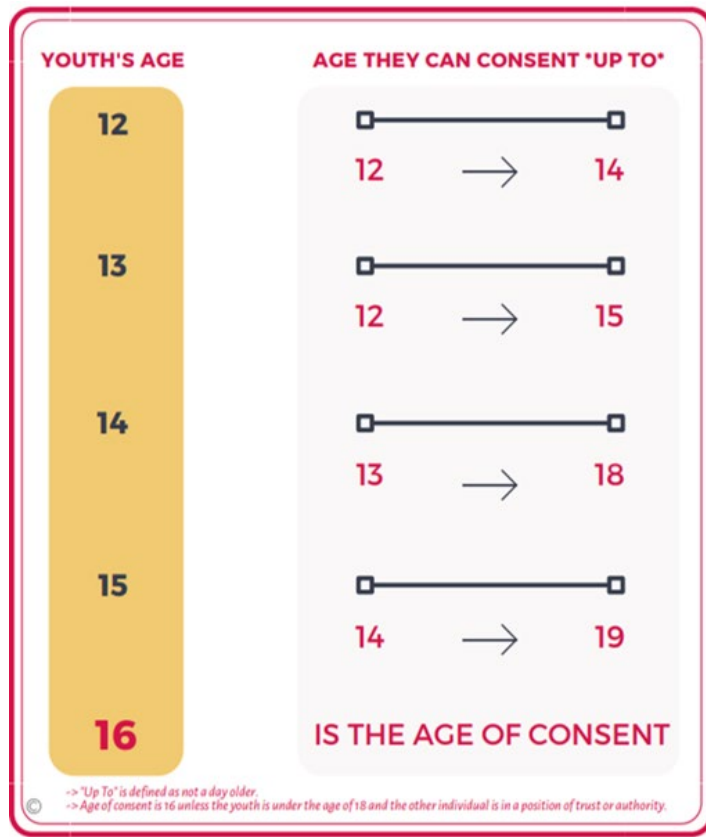
The age of consent for sexual activity is 16 years old, raised from 14 years on May 1st, 2008, by the Tackling Violent Crime Act.⁷ However, the age of consent is 18 when the sexual activity exploits the young person, such as in cases involving prostitution or relationships of authority, trust, or dependency (e.g., with a teacher, coach, or babysitter).⁸ Sexual activity can also be deemed exploitative based on the relationship's nature and circumstances, including the young person's age, the age difference between the young person and their partner, or the relationship's development, especially if it was rapid, secret, or online.

To clarify, individuals under the age of 12 cannot legally consent to sexual activity. At ages 12 or 13, they can consent to sexual activity with someone less than two years older, and at ages 14 or 15, with someone less than five years older. At 16, individuals reach the general age of consent, except where there is a relationship of authority, trust, or dependency, which remains unlawful even with the younger person's consent.⁹ This complexity underscores the importance of ongoing conversations with students to ensure they understand these laws before encountering potentially fraught situations.

⁷ [Tackling Violent Crime Act](#)

⁸ [Age of Consent](#)

⁹ [Age of Consent](#)



Sexting, sextortion, and the age of consent are still relatively new areas for us to navigate in supporting youth. For example, in Victoria, BC, a case involved a boyfriend showing his new girlfriend explicit photos of his ex, leading to threats and widespread distribution of the images. This incident resulted in charges of uttering threats and distribution of child pornography, illustrating how we use existing laws to address new digital issues. Changes to the Criminal Code of Canada, such as Bill C-13, now account for the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, making it an indictable offence to publish, distribute, transmit, sell, make available, or advertise an intimate image without the depicted person's consent.¹⁰ However, there is still no specific crime for cyberbullying in Canada, and other Criminal Code provisions are used to address such behaviours, including criminal harassment, uttering threats, making or distributing child pornography, libel, counselling or aiding suicide, assault, and unauthorized computer use. It is essential to have ongoing conversations with police partners to understand how these laws can support addressing bullying behaviours.

In addressing sextortion and problematic sexting, we must have ongoing discussions about consent. Students need to understand that in relationships, both parties have the right to express their comfort levels and boundaries. If one person does not want to do something, the other must respect and accept those boundaries. Ignoring these boundaries and applying pressure is a sign of control and is harmful. Supporting students in practicing consent in lower-stakes situations, such as sharing school supplies or clothing or having a picture taken at a sports event, helps them become more comfortable setting and respecting boundaries in more serious contexts.

¹⁰ [Bill C-13 Overview](#)

DIVERSITY IS ESSENTIAL

We are now going to shift and examine a few other themes that can impact our work in schools. First, we'll explore the theme of diversity and the philosophical intent behind some of our curricula, then move into issues surrounding racism and hate that are becoming trends in some of our school communities.

Ideally, diversity would define our schools rather than divide them. However, building a culturally and socially accepting school system is an ongoing effort that requires us to leave excuses and stereotypes behind. Our cultures are evolving, and to foster positive, sustainable cultures that respect everyone, we need to actively engage with all members of our school communities. Every September, a new group of students enters kindergarten. While the school system has little effect on how children enter, we can significantly influence how they leave in terms of valuing diversity.



Diversity can manifest in various ways, including age and generational influences, developmental and acquired disabilities, religious and spiritual affiliations, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, national origin, and gender spectrum. Our school communities can strengthen their ability to honour diversity through the following priorities: addressing racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression in our school environments; developing and implementing strategies that publicly recognize the cultural traditions and practices of every major group in our community; and supporting processes that allow each group to address their priorities while helping different groups find common ground to address shared concerns.

Understanding the dynamics between a group's characteristics and issues related to power, privilege, and oppression, and integrating that knowledge into valuing diversity strategies, is a key goal for our work in schools. Children are not born hateful; prejudice, hatred, and intolerance can be learned, but so can sensitivity, understanding, empathy, and tolerance. The ERASE strategy embraces various pieces of legislation and policy that promote and strengthen the diversity of our students and the inclusiveness of our schools. This connects back to earlier discussions on the importance of a strong code of conduct. Besides codes of conduct, the School Act directs that all learners should develop their potential and acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic, and pluralistic society and a prosperous, sustainable economy. The school system must

strive to ensure that differences among learners do not impede their participation in school and the achievement of these goals.

In recent years, diversity related to sexual orientation and gender identity has created divisions in some districts. This can be a complex issue to navigate as a school district and community. Regarding SOGI curriculum, accepting and embracing alternative lifestyles and sexual orientations is not about teaching or promoting values but about creating an atmosphere where it's unacceptable to make fun of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and two-spirited identities, just as it is unacceptable to make racist or sexist remarks. We aim to reach a place where calling someone "gay" elicits the same response from our systems as a racist or hate-filled remark.

Regarding racism and targeted hate, Safer Schools Together has a publication called "A Trauma-Informed Response to Racism and Targeted Hate" that provides holistic, thoughtful wrap-around support for both targets and perpetrators in cases of discrimination. Supporting both the victim and the perpetrator is crucial because, as with bullying and cyberbullying, there is fluidity between the roles of victim and aggressor, particularly in the age of instant publicity through social media. The aggressor can quickly become victimized through retaliation and may need support as well. We must remember that these are all children with their own stories and histories.



One dynamic we see, particularly with racism and targeted hate posts, is the cultural phenomenon of cancel culture. Cancel culture involves the mass withdrawal of support or shaming of someone for something perceived as socially unacceptable. It can range from friends posting about each other online, premeditated exposures where students sit on content for weeks waiting for the right time to call someone out, or students making private posts or messages public. It can involve hate and threats from strangers and even fabricated content to elicit negative reactions. Some of us have may have dealt with situations of cancel culture in our own school communities or even personal life. Another aspect of cancel culture is doxing, where personal information about someone is released online as a punitive measure. We have seen situations where someone who initially made a hate-filled comment at school was cancelled online, leading to a physical attack in the community. We have a responsibility to educate our children on how to properly speak up against racial inequality or racial hate speech and provide them with safe, respectful channels to report these issues without subjecting others to public shaming.

We are in the business of educating our youth, and this means they will make mistakes and may think they are doing the right thing. It is important to take every opportunity to fine-tune how we address those we believe to be racist,

hateful, and/or violent. We must foster daily conversations about race and equality, making these issues integral to everyday life, not just topics discussed on the news or at protests. Our job is to provide students with the opportunity to grow up without fear of persecution based on their skin, colour, or country of origin. The most effective way to achieve this is by creating a community environment based on acceptance, drawing back to discussions on school connectedness and systems. Another tool for creating a safe environment for these conversations is the importance of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in our schools.

When students feel safe, they are more likely to learn, and when they feel good about themselves, they are more likely to engage with others in school activities and events. Schools that focus on SEL and infuse it into their curriculum from kindergarten to graduation see increased academic achievement, reduced incidents of bullying, decreased violence, improved attendance, and better grades. This supports the creation of an open school system promoting community engagement and leading to students becoming well-adjusted, productive citizens. As we know, SEL and mental health are closely linked to both the curriculum and the core competencies in BC's curriculum framework. SEL means children learn over time how to resolve differences, self-regulate, and develop an emotional vocabulary to express their feelings. If you are considering an intentional SEL framework for your schools and districts, there are many programs available that align well with our core competencies. Safer Schools Together suggests looking for a program that is affordable and can be built out over time, so we use the same language and framework as children progress through different ages and stages, reinforcing and building upon these messages. In BC, we are fortunate to have access to many SEL frameworks such as the Circle of Courage, the CASEL model, Second Step, Mental Health Literacy, and Zones of Regulation, which can be integrated into our culture and school climate. It is most effective if an entire district uses the same program, ensuring consistent language and framework for learning these crucial skills as children transition from class to class and school to school.

Trauma-Informed Practice

A strong foundation in social-emotional learning (SEL) within our schools and districts is crucial for building students' capacity to address issues such as racism, hate, bullying (both traditional and cyber), peer conflicts, and other challenges. SEL is an integral component of a broader trauma-informed approach in our classrooms and schools.

Understanding Trauma-Informed Practice

Being trauma-informed means recognizing that every individual brings their own experiences and stories into the school environment, some of which may involve trauma. Trauma can be categorized into "Big T" and "Small T" trauma:

1. **Big T Trauma:** These are major, public events, such as a community fire leading to family displacement. These events often garner community support and lack stigma, allowing individuals to build resilience and recover more quickly.
2. **Small T Trauma:** These refer to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect, serious mental health issues or substance misuse by a caregiver, or the alienation of a parent due to incarceration, divorce, or separation. Research indicates that 1 in 4 individuals has at least one ACE.¹¹ These experiences are often stigmatized and less visible, significantly impacting how individuals perceive and interact with the world. Repeated trauma can alter brain development and stress responses,

¹¹ [Ace Score Stats](#)

leading to a state of hyperarousal where students are in constant "fight or flight" mode, impairing their ability to learn and respond appropriately to stress.

Strategies for Trauma-Informed Practice

To support students in transitioning from hyperarousal to a state where they feel safe and are able to learn and resolve conflicts, we can implement the following strategies:

1. **Teach Breathing Techniques:** Research shows that breathing exercises can quickly signal to the brain that the body is safe, reducing hyperarousal.
2. **Use Visual Supports:** Visual aids can help students follow instructions better when in a hyper-aroused state, as the brain's ability to process auditory information is compromised.
3. **Foster Safe Adult Connections:** Ensuring that each student has a trusted adult in the school helps build attachment and safety, which is crucial for reducing hyperarousal and enabling learning.

Connect Before You Correct

A key principle in trauma-informed practice is to connect with students before correcting them. Negative interactions that embarrass or shame students require at least ten positive interactions to repair the damage. Non-adversarial discipline, which maintains the student's dignity and involves them in problem-solving, is essential. This approach prevents co-escalation and helps maintain a calm environment where students can learn and self-regulate.

Creating a Trauma-Informed School Environment

Our goal is to create environments where students practice skills that make them feel safe, shifting from a survival brain to a learning brain. While this may seem like creating an artificial environment, repeated practice in a safe setting builds neural pathways for coping behaviours and skills that students can transfer to the real world.

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Remember, you are not alone in this work. Safe School Coordinators and Safer Schools Together staff are available to provide support. Additional training, such as Behavioural and Digital Threat Assessment® and Trauma-Informed Classrooms and Schools, can further enhance your capacity and confidence in this work.

Thank you for your dedication to keeping our students and schools safe.

Additional Resources

Safe, Caring and Orderly School

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teaching-tools/student-safety/scoguide.pdf>

ERASE Report-It Tool

<https://erasereportit.gov.bc.ca/add/report-it>

94 Calls to Action

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf

SST Professional Resources (PW: sst*1016)

<https://saferschoolstogether.com/resources/professional-resources/>

Bystander Effect Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbo0LlanJ-M>

Consent for Kids

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3nhM9UJjc>

Parent/Caregiver Resources

<https://saferschoolstogether.com/resources/parent-resources/>

Maintaining School Safety: A Guide For School and Police Personnel in B.C.

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/erase/documents/maintaining-school-safety-guide.pdf>

K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/erase/documents/k-12-anti-racism-strategy.pdf>

