

The Merlin Therapeutic Day Program Policy for Bullying Prevention

Belief Statement:

The Merlin Therapeutic Day Program believes all students have a right to a safe and healthy learning environment. Our program has an obligation to promote and demonstrate mutual respect, tolerance, and acceptance for all students no matter race, gender, or disability.

Definitions of Bullying: Physical, Verbal, Emotional, Cyber

The Merlin Therapeutic Day Program will not accept nor tolerate behavior that infringes on the safety, social, emotional, and academic learning of any student. A student shall not intimidate, harass, or bully another student through words or actions. Such behavior includes, but are not limited to: direct physical contact, such as hitting or shoving; verbal assaults, such as teasing or name-calling; social isolation or manipulation, such as intentionally excluding a student or making them feel threatened; and cyber, such as any forms of bullying that occurs in an online space.

Roles and Responsibilities:

- **Students:** Expected to immediately report incidents of bullying to a trusted adult (special education administrator or designee, teacher, or other staff).
- **Staff:** Expected to act as role models, take all accusations seriously and enforce policies. Participate and engage in continuous professional development on bullying prevention and the promotion of positive behaviors; set clear expectations and class rules that adhere to and support a safe and healthy learning environment.
- **Parents:** Expected to respect the program's rules, support staff, communicate regularly, and encourage their children to speak up.
- **Bystanders:** If you see something, say something to a trusted adult (standing up and reporting all sightings of bullying).
- **Leadership:** Expected to take immediate action on all reports of bullying, follow up with all parties involved, and maintain confidentiality of all investigative information.

Statements of Procedures:

The Merlin Therapeutic Day Program expects students and/or staff to immediately report incidents of bullying to the Special Education Administrator or designee. Staff who witness such acts must take immediate steps to intervene, when safe to do so. We follow up on all concerns expressed by students, staff or parents and make sure we subsequently provide results of any investigation. Sometimes what is seen as bullying is simply unacceptable behavior and we address this differently. This policy applies to students on site, while traveling to and from Merlin or a Merlin-sponsored activity, during the lunch period, whether on or off site, and during a Merlin-sponsored activity.

To ensure bullying does not occur on site, The Merlin Therapeutic Day Program will provide staff development training in bullying prevention and cultivate acceptance and understanding in all students and staff to build the program's capacity to maintain a safe, caring, equitable, and inclusive learning environment.

Teachers should discuss this policy with their students in age and developmentally appropriate ways to assure them that they need not endure any form of bullying. Students have the right to expect they will spend their school day free from the fear of bullying, harassment, and intimidation. Bullying de-values, isolates, frightens, and affects students' ability to achieve. Students who engage in bullying or bullying behaviors are in violation of this policy and will receive immediate support to restore positive behavior and learning experiences. Ongoing complaints from the same student will result in subsequent updates to their Behavior Intervention Plan to readdress target behaviors or be subject to appropriate disciplinary action to ensure a restorative approach for supporting the student.

Continuous Improvement:

The Merlin Program will maintain a copy of the policy in the Parent Handbook, program's information packet, and website. The policy will be reviewed annually with the CEO, directors, and program leads to make any needed edits, update language to be in compliance with 105 ILCS 5/27-23.7(d), and ensure a safe, healthy, and caring learning environment for all students. All staff will receive annual bully prevention training; therefore, taking a program-wide approach which emphasizes respect and inclusion to prevent bullying. To this end, we are creating an environment which fosters positive relationships, better behavior and high expectations for all students.

Statement of Assurance:

The procedures for intervening in bullying behavior are taken seriously and will include reasonable efforts to keep a report of bullying and the results of investigation confidential. The Merlin Therapeutic Day Program prohibits retaliatory behavior against any complainant or any participant in the complaint process.

