

Dealing with bullying

Introduction

Montessori schools are of course no exception to bullying behaviour, but the Montessori approach to dealing with these issues helps children develop respect and empathy from the moment they begin to interact with the world.¹

Montessori schools place at the centre of their mission the belief that the full potential of every child can only be developed in a safe and nurturing environment, free from any form of bullying or harassment. As a Montessori community, we encourage respect for self, respect for others and respect for the environment.

We do this through the Grace and Courtesy programme, which guides children from an early age and encourages each person to become an independent, thoughtful and caring member of the community.

From the age of 6, children begin to realise the significance of their actions through the reasoning mind that emerges (the mind of the child between 3 and 6 is absorbing).

As they grow older, students begin to explore the Montessori values of freedom and responsibility, which link personal freedom with a willingness to take responsibility for own words and actions.

They also begin the Global Education programme, which introduces the child to the world beyond his or her own neighbourhood and ideas. They continue their peace education work by learning and developing their conflict resolution skills.

This carefully planned progression enables children to become ethical and independent thinkers with the skills, knowledge, strategies and willingness to stand up for what is right and to take action, including preventing or responding effectively to bullying or harassment.

¹ <https://chesapeakemontessorischool.com/conflict-classroom/>

FROM RULES TO CONSEQUENCES

This document helps to regulate the possible transgression of a rule. If we accept that transgressions of rules are part of the construction of personality, it is important to specify that they are only constructive when they meet a limit.

The primary role of the consequence is to set a limit in relation to and as a reminder of the rule, which in Switzerland is also in the law: breach of honour, art.173 and following of the Penal Code.

1. The consequence is only of educational value insofar as it makes the pupil responsible for his actions.
2. It should encourage reflection and awareness that every act has a consequence.
3. It can also have a preventive as well as a remedial role.

It is important to dissociate the consequences to be applied for rule breaking in general from the consequences that are linked to bullying behaviour. We are talking here about the procedure in relation to bullying behaviour.

Bullying in Swiss schools also refers to a series of repeated acts of aggression between pupils, characterised by:

- An intention to cause harm,
- Repetition over time,
- An imbalance of power (the victim cannot defend themselves effectively).

In order to be able to objectively observe the repetition, we note and collect in a binder the breaches of the rule "I do not hurt by words or by gestures or physically".

In order for the consequences to be useful, it is important to have a clear understanding of the consequences:

- The rules should be clearly defined, known to all, and therefore predictable, and as far as possible written down in a text.²
- That the consequences are proportional and in line with the rules broken.
- That the facts and the responsibility of those involved are clearly established.
- That any breach of the rules receives a rapid and adequate response.
- That they respect the dignity of the pupils involved.
- That the authority of all teachers and assistants is exercised over all students.
- That the teacher undertakes to inform the whole teaching team of any breach of the rules.
- That the whole teaching team collaborates by informing the appropriate person.

² In Montessori, not all rules are written down as there are always rules that evolve in a Montessori environment, the principle is to identify something that is not working, bring the children together and look for a solution together.

- That the teacher undertakes to inform the whole educational team of the reprehensible acts committed, with as a tool a written document which relates the breach of the rules (written trace, gathered in the binder of the rules of life present in each class)

The following are three procedures to be applied in parallel, involving the different individuals connected in one way or another to a specific bullying situation:

- Procedure A: the bullying child
- Procedure B: the victimized child
- Procedure C: the child witness

PROCEDURE A - Procedure for stopping bullying by the bullying child

If the rule, "I do not hurt with words or gestures or physically " is broken, the following progressive consequences are applied by the teacher:

Stage 1

- Discussion with written record of the problem by the teacher with the children concerned, where possible.³
- Oral warning

Stage 2

- Loss of autonomy (loss of the right to do something in connection with the transgression of the rule). Ex:
 - Temporary removal of the object in question or responsible for repeated conflicts.
 - Definitive withdrawal of the right to use the object if repeated.
 - Temporary or immediate removal from the class group or given area (classroom, gym, garden, etc.), particularly in the event of non-compliance with the rules or behaviour that puts one or more pupils in moral or physical danger.
- Reflection document⁴ (written text or drawing according to age)

Stage 3

Where possible, use the Shared Concern Method (from Anatol PIKAS), which consists of not talking about the facts with the bully but about the concern for the victim. Purpose: to get the bully to share a concern for the victim and to find solutions to help them. If the bullying does not stop by using this method after a maximum of 2 weeks, then other solutions should be used as follows.

Regular 5-minute meetings, held repeatedly over time, to monitor the situation until it improves.

Stage 4

- Convene the parents with the aim of finding help for the bullying child and a solution to eliminate the problem. This meeting should be constructive.
- Removal of class representative status (e.g. linked to the Eco-school project). If a pupil's behaviour, after a warning, repeatedly or seriously fails to respect certain

³ only the child's first version can be retained

⁴ The reflection paper can be proposed as an accompaniment to a restorative and/or preventive consequence. It aims to allow the pupil to distance himself, to understand the scope and nature of his action, to encourage him to explain himself and to express himself in writing or by drawing. It can also serve as a basis for discussion with the teacher and/or parents. It provides a formal framework for future apologies and commitments. Lastly, it allows for a record to be made.

school rules, he/she may be removed or temporarily suspended from his/her role, as he/she would then no longer be credible as a class representative.

In addition to the above-mentioned preventive consequences, remedial consequences may be added:

- Oral and/or written apologies.
- Replacement, repair or reimbursement of the damaged, lost and/or written object.

In case of inappropriate behaviour, the child will have to do the remedial work outside school hours, i.e. after lunch.

PROCEDURE B - Procedure for helping the child victim of a bullying situation

- The teacher will accompany the child in learning not to put him/herself in the position of a victim, by
 - o Using the stop gesture with the hand
 - o And calling out the name of the bully
- This behaviour helps the child to take a stronger stand against the bully.
- Suggest a buddy system where one child supports/helps another child
- Seek help from someone you trust (teacher, suggest a buddy system (where an adult is involved), if necessary with a friend.
- Provide the victim with adult support, empathetic listening, develop defence strategies (aim: to give the child the means to deal with the bully him/herself, learning that will be useful for the rest of his/her life).
- When the child confides at home, it is important to write down the child's first version and send it to the child's teacher so that it can be addressed by the teachers the next working day. We thank you for trusting the teachers to handle this in the best possible way.⁵
- Proposal to follow behavioural workshops, such as Tatout or other psychological help to help the child to impose himself.
- Regular 5-minute meetings, held repeatedly over time, to monitor the situation until it improves.

⁵ 5 Although tempting, parental intervention at this stage is strongly discouraged as it would only take into account one side of the story, whereas at school the story can be discussed by both parties. Teachers also have a more complete and comprehensive view of the situation and knowledge of any previous cases. Questions must remain open ended (not leading questions).

PROCEDURE C - Procedure for guiding a child witnessing bullying :

The witness can

- Ask the bully to stop the behaviour (they can do this with other friends to give them more leverage)
- Comfort the person who has been harmed
- Seek help from an adult
- Above all, do not stand by and watch the bullying behaviour. Teach them that witnessing without acting is condoning.
- Regular 5-minute meetings, held repeatedly over time, to monitor the situation until it improves.