

Boarders Well Being and Risk Management

St Brigid's College

Rationale

St Brigid's College is proud to offer families the opportunity for their daughters to board in a supportive community environment whilst they undertake their academic studies. The experience of being a boarder at St Brigid's Boarding House promotes independence and can enhance students' personal, social, emotional, spiritual and academic growth.

St Brigid's Boarding House acknowledges that a boarder may display, albeit infrequently, patterns of behaviour which can be challenging. The risks to the health, safety and educational progress of the boarder can be called into question, as can concerns about the harm, distress or other impacts experienced by fellow boarders and staff in the communal environment of St Brigid's Boarding House.

Policy

Structures and processes are in place at St Brigid's Boarding House to ensure an appropriate level of care and management for boarders exhibiting challenging behaviours and identified as being 'at risk'.

The needs and rights of the 'at risk' boarder as well as the needs, rights and wellbeing of all members of the boarding community are taken into account.

Challenging behaviours can be caused by biological, environmental, psychological and/or social factors. St Brigid's Boarding House staff will make every effort to identify the reasons and triggers for a boarder's challenging behaviour and to address these without delay in order to reduce the possibility of future problems.

St Brigid's Boarding House staff are committed to supporting boarders who are exhibiting challenging 'at risk' behaviours. Staff will be guided by the CHURCH belief in the dignity and worth of the human person.

As a boarder's challenging behaviour can have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of other boarders and staff, the proper exercise of pastoral care requires that the Head of Boarding ensure a just and reasonable balancing of the rights, needs, obligations and wellbeing of all concerned.

The College reserves the right to decide that the safest and most supportive environment for a boarding student at risk is with her family and in a home environment. In such circumstances, the decision will be made by the Principal and the Head of Boarding in consultation with the boarder's parents. Decisions regarding the duration of a boarder's leave from the boarding house and arrangements for how she will be supported academically will also be made.

Definitions

Challenging behaviour – is a broadly used term which in a boarding community context generally refers to a boarder's behaviour and interactions with peers and staff that repeatedly breach the Boarders Code of Conduct or is not conducive to community living. It can denote a range of behaviours such as self-injury, aggression, sexualised behaviour, the abuse of property or people or a combination of these behaviours.

Boarder at risk – refers to any situation or condition in which a boarder may suffer harm, or their welfare or safety may be deemed 'at risk'. Such circumstances include, but are not limited to: abuse, severe emotional distress, self-harm or suicidal ideation, reckless behaviours, drug or alcohol abuse, physical illness or disorders, criminal behaviours and mental health problems (e.g. severe anxiety, depression, disordered eating etc.).

A boarder may also be deemed as being 'at risk' when she is unable to demonstrate the capacity to live independently in a communal environment without causing harm or distress to self or others. Such circumstances include, but are not limited to, a boarder who:

- demonstrates bullying behaviours towards staff and students, online or in person;
- absconds from the Boarding House or does not ensure that staff members and parents know where she is; or
- lacks the ability to abide by Boarding House rules and thereby places herself or other persons at risk of harm.

Enabling Structures

Any boarder who is identified as having a serious welfare, health or safety concern is offered support by staff of both St Brigid's Boarding House and the College, with the support provided in a timely and appropriate way. Working in partnership with parents, the College understands that supporting boarders who are or may be 'at risk' is a shared endeavour.

Staff are to support all students using positive behavior techniques and consult with the College Psychologist and Head of Boarding when strategies and recommendations are needed.

Where a boarder repeatedly demonstrates challenging behaviour, the Head of Boarding will implement staged and structured intervention strategies. In these instances:

- the Head of Boarding will engage appropriate support services from the College, such as the College Psychologist, Youth Worker and College Nursing staff.
- Engage in external support service
- the boarder's parents will be advised and consulted, accordingly.
- the boarder's privacy and right to confidentiality will be protected as much as possible, with only necessary and relevant information shared with the appropriate people.
- Consent to share information to be granted by parents/guardians

Boarders presenting with clinical or long-term mental health issues may be referred to external agencies and professionals for assessment and appropriate support. In such circumstances, a boarder's parents will be consulted and their consent sought to take the necessary action.

1. Parent Partnerships

The importance of the partnership between the College and parents in supporting a boarder's learning and overall wellbeing is well understood and accepted. At St Brigid's College this partnership requires additional responsibilities and shared commitments to be jointly exercised.

In the context of managing the challenging behaviour of a boarder, the College expects that the **boarder's parents will:**

- provide the Head of Boarding with information pertaining to their daughter's health and development upon initial enrolment in the Boarding House, including information about past traumas or any mental health difficulties;
- when there is a known issue requiring support prior to the initial enrolment, the family makes arrangements for their child to receive appropriate support for the duration of their stay in boarding.
- provide the Head of Boarding with information pertaining to their daughter's current health and wellbeing, e.g. an eating disorder;
- understand that the Boarding House is a communal environment and there are limits to the support that can be provided for boarders with acute health concerns or extremely challenging behaviours;
- attend meetings regarding concerns, take up appropriate referrals, and allow information sharing between the College and external clinicians;
- arrange external support for their daughter when the Principal, the Head of Boarding and/or specialist College staff have formed a belief that this is necessary;
- accept that they may need to provide alternate accommodation or have their daughter at home for a period of time;
- support this policy in its entirety.

Equally, parents can expect that the **Head of Boarding and St Brigid's Boarding House will:**

- work to create an inclusive boarding environment where respectful and safe conduct is expected of everyone;
- will try to identify and respond to the causes of the challenging/at risk behavior by working to understand the cause of the behavior and work with the recommendations of the College Psychologist and support services. Staff will work to deescalate a conflict when it occurs;
- implement appropriate interventions and sanctions for the challenging/at risk behaviours in a timely manner in order to minimize or prevent harm;
- communicate concerns and provide parents with information and incident reports in a timely manner;
- provide parents with appropriate referrals to external mental health clinicians, where necessary;
- provide the boarder with emergency support if needed, e.g. Hospital Emergency Unit, 000;
- protect a boarder's privacy as much as possible and only disclose necessary information to appropriate College personnel and external agencies;
- only recommend to the Principal that a boarder take leave from the Boarding House and be cared for at home after every reasonable effort has been made to care for and support the boarder.
- In a high risk situation, staff will prioritize the safety of the boarding community (boarders and staff). They will do this by working to deescalate the situation and request support as needed.

2. College Collaboration

St Brigid's College is well resourced with support staff to assist both the boarder at risk and the staff caring for her. The College Psychologist may undertake a risk assessment or provide direct counselling services to the boarder.

Boarders presenting with clinical or ongoing issues will normally be referred, via the Head of Boarding or the College Psychologist to outside specialist providers.

Designated senior staff provide regular and structured support to the Head of Boarding and staff. This is particularly the case when staff are dealing with a boarder's very challenging behaviours and/or when they seek direction about management strategies.

This policy is consistent with and aligned to several College policies – Self-harm and Suicide Prevention, Mental Well Being promotion and Harm Prevention and Pastoral Care Policy as well as Boarding House documents – Boarding Code of Conduct.

4. Short-term Leave Arrangements

When there are immediate concerns that a boarder may seriously harm herself, or someone else, the boarder's parents will be notified and asked to collect their daughter from the Boarding House. The boarder may require a period of leave from the College and Boarding House so that her health and wellbeing concerns can be assessed and treated and specific incidents investigated.

The Head of Boarding or the College Psychologist will provide parents with referral and emergency contacts information. During her absence, the College will keep in contact with the boarder and her parents. The boarder's academic progress will be closely monitored.

Discussion will occur between key staff and boarder's family regarding her enrolment status at the boarding house.

Prior to the boarder returning to the Boarding House, a specialist involved in the care of the boarder will be required to write a letter advising that she is well enough to return. He/she will also be asked to provide recommendations for ongoing support. Relevant staff members will meet with the boarder and parents to ensure that the boarder's needs are identified and that she is supported in her transition back into the Boarding House. The boarder will be monitored and supported by a team of staff from the College and Boarding House. This team will maintain contact with parents.

If serious concerns for the boarder are ongoing and her safety cannot be assured within the Boarding House, then the Principal reserves the right to consider the student's ongoing enrolment in the Boarding House.

5. Professional Learning

St Brigid's Boarding House staff periodically attend College-sponsored professional learning programs on adolescent health and wellbeing. Staff receive training on risk behaviours and mental health conditions that are prevalent in the adolescents are examined, along with preventative and/or intervention programs that can improve and sustain the long-term health and wellbeing of adolescents. The College is committed to facilitating this learning in order to build capacity amongst staff for understanding and managing a boarder's challenging behaviours.

Recommended Staff Resources

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/improving_behaviour_teenagers.html/context/1140

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/conflict_management_teenagers.html/context/1096

Related Policies

- Self-harm and Suicide Prevention
- Mental Well Being promotion and Harm Prevention (Erin has in draft form)
- Pastoral Care Policy

Policy Status

Approved by:

Person Responsible:

Scheduled Review Date: