

# PROTECTIVE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS THAT REDUCE BULLYING



Improving the visibility of teachers on yard duty through the use of fluorescent vests or a distinctive item can increase line of sight for students and perceived safety.



Mirrors are a cost-effective way to increase children's line of sight and reduce blind spots.



Uniform use of colour and materials on school grounds can increase sense of ownership and identity. It also helps identify the school community in the wider community.



Displaying student artwork can reduce defacing of blank wall space.



Good lighting benefits learning and increases line of sight.



Improve line of sight by removing visual barriers from windows such as posters. Window views have also been linked to student wellbeing.



Grouped seating encourages social interaction and positive behaviours.



Maintenance of school grounds is important to establishing ownership and identity. Well placed bins and storage areas helps children to keep their school clean and tidy.



Positive signage can provide cues about the kinds of behaviours and activities that can occur in a space.



Plants and rocks can beautify an area and increase nature play. Landscaping can also be used to establish natural access.

# PROTECTIVE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS THAT REDUCE BULLYING

## What are protective physical environments?

Protective physical environments are settings that have been designed to reduce unsafe behaviours, and increase positive behaviours.

Protective physical environments can improve children's wellbeing. Children in school environments that have protective design features have reported:

- increased feelings of safety
- lower incidents of bullying
- lower incidents of missing school due to concerns about safety.

## Protective physical environments incorporate three key design elements:

- 1 Line of sight.** Increasing the line of sight helps educators to scan large areas of activity effectively, and allows them to respond quickly as behaviour incidents emerge. Increasing the line of sight also deters behaviours of concern, makes it easier for children to seek help, and increases children's sense of safety.
- 2 Natural access** is about who can and cannot come into certain spaces. Signage, hard barriers (fences, walls, paths) and soft barriers (plants, seating, equipment) can provide cues to children and young people about who can be in the space, how to move through the space, and the kinds of behaviours / activities that can occur in the space.
- 3 Ownership and identity.** The use of school colours and logos, art work and signage can help identify the school community. The use of murals, flags, plants and equipment can help demonstrate school values about inclusion and respect.

## Using data to create protective physical environments

Schools can draw from rich sources of data to inform decisions about protective physical environments. Sources of data include:

- surveys of students, families, and staff
- school behaviour data (including office referrals)
- Wellbeing and Engagement Collection survey results
- audits of injury reports, critical incident reports and risk assessments
- Mapping where unsafe behaviours occur on school grounds.

Use data to help your school answer these questions:

- Where do bullying incidents occur? Consider hallways, playground, toilets.
- When do bullying incidents occur? e.g. transitions between classes, lunch breaks, just before / after the school bell.
- Which areas of the school are hardest for staff on duty to supervise?
- Where do students say they feel most safe / unsafe?

## Effective design:



### Corridors and Hallways

- Brighten dark corridors and hallways through the use of lights and natural daylight.
- Use sensor lighting to make motion more visible, especially in low-traffic areas.
- Improve visibility by using mirrors so that children can see themselves and see around blind spots.
- Avoid placing storage lockers and cupboards in areas that children need to move through regularly or in areas with limited line of sight.



### Playgrounds

- Reduce social congestion by scheduling different times for different groups to use the play equipment



### Yard areas

- Reduce large, undefined areas through line markings (including line markings for games).
- Increase seating in groups to encourage social interactions.
- Encourage natural performances through the addition of raised platforms / stages.
- Add interactive features in landscaping to increase nature play.
- Increase the visibility of staff on duty through the use of fluorescent vests or a distinctive item.



### Walls and exteriors

- Use murals and student artworks to showcase school values and identity.
- Use flags, artwork, nature gardens and design features that show cultures and local histories that are important to the school community.
- Encourage creativity by having interactive artworks that children can continue to add to. Consider using chalk, paper, fabric and non-permanent materials.



### Bathrooms

- Remove doors from handwashing areas or place wash basins outside the bathrooms to improve visibility and reduce lingering.
- Increase privacy and reduce intrusiveness by extending the length of toilet cubicle doors.
- Remove graffiti to discourage vandalism and encourage maintenance of the bathrooms.