

At our school

Villa Maria promotes inclusion, community spirit and the full development of each person.

Our commitment extends beyond the classroom, since we work actively with the families to recognize signs of distress, promote respectful and caring behaviours, and quickly respond to any concerns.

In order to provide a safe and healthy learning environment, Villa Maria has implemented a plan designed to prevent and counter any form of bullying, violence, violence of a sexual nature, harassment and discrimination.

Situation overview

Generally speaking, students feel well accepted at school. They have friends, good relationships with teachers and other Villa Maria personnel and feel equipped to succeed.

Students consider the school environment to be generally secure and most feel safe there. Still, almost half of the students consider sanctions imposed on their peers who have broken the school's rules of conduct to be inadequate and unequal.

Few students report the bullying or harassment they experience, often because of their own personality. Only slightly more than a third of victims speak about it, mainly to friends or relatives.

Priorities

In light of the findings emerging from the aforementioned overview of the situation, Villa Maria has established the following priorities:

- improve support for teachers,
- implement training on conflict resolution and strategies for responding to bullying, violence, violence of a sexual nature, harassment and discrimination,
- better communicate to students and parents the procedure for reporting bullying, violence, violence of a sexual nature, harassment and discrimination,
- implement workshops for developing students' socio-emotional skills,
- strengthen the implementation of coherent disciplinary measures, and,
- focus on high-risk zones where most incidents occur.

Observations relating to violence of a sexual nature

Villa Maria implements annual compulsory training for the school's management and staff in order to prevent and counter all forms of sexual violence.

Preventive efforts include workshops in the classroom and activities focused specifically on raising awareness of sexual violence.

The plan to counter and prevent bullying and violence prioritizes the protection of students using a number of approaches:

- promote early detection and intervention in problematic situations
- train personnel in proper intervention and support of victims
- maintain a confidential reporting system
- support victims and ensure their immediate safety, and
- clearly communicate the procedure for handling the reporting of incidents and complaints.



Here are a few definitions for a common understanding:

CONFLICT

An active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles.

DISCRIMINATION

Any intended or accomplished differential treatment of persons or social groups for reasons of certain generalized traits that results in some form of harm or disadvantage to the targeted persons or groups.

HARASSMENT

Any vexatious behaviour in the form of repeated and hostile or unwanted conduct, verbal comments, actions or gestures, that affects a person's dignity or psychological or physical integrity and that results in a harmful environment for that person. A single serious incident of such behaviour that has a lasting harmful effect on a person may also constitute harassment.

BULLYING

Any repeated direct or indirect behaviour, comment, act or gesture, whether deliberate or not, including in cyberspace, which occurs in a context where there is a power imbalance between the persons concerned and which causes distress and injures, hurts, oppresses, intimidates or ostracizes.

VIOLENCE

Any intentional demonstration of verbal, written, physical, psychological or sexual force which causes distress and injures, hurts or oppresses a person by attacking their psychological or physical integrity or well-being, or their rights or property.

VIOLENCE OF A SEXUAL NATURE

Sexual violence means any form of violence, with or without physical contact, expressing itself in the form of sexual practices or aimed at sexual assault. It also means any other form of misconduct, in particular in the form of blackmail, emotional manipulation, gestures, words, undesired behaviours or attitudes of sexual connotation, including gender and sexual diversity related misbehaviour, whether expressed directly or indirectly, including by any technological means (sexting involves the use of a cell phone or other messaging services to create, send or exchange sexual text messages, implied or explicit, that may contain short texts, photos or videos, i.e. a sext).

Our preventive and training means as well as safety measures to prevent and counter violence of a sexual nature

- Training activity for students on sexting held by socio-community officers of the Montréal Police Department (SPVM).
- Discussion periods and workshops held in the classroom on issues relating to violence of a sexual nature and consent.
- Training and a SEXTO intervention kit made available to members of Villa Maria's personnel.
- Distribution of information leaflets, posters in the establishment and information bulletins disseminated on Villa Maria's different platforms.
- Presentation to members of Villa Maria's personnel on the intervention procedure in cases of violence of a sexual nature.

Confidentiality

Villa Maria is committed to taking the measures needed to ensure the confidentiality of information received from all persons involved (including witnesses) regarding an incident of bullying, violence, violence of a sexual nature, harassment or discrimination.

In fact, Villa Maria's website offers options for the anonymous reporting of this type of incident.

Members of our staff and students' families will be reminded that they are prohibited from sharing information on an incident except on a strict "need to know" basis, taking into account the rights, feelings and privacy of all persons concerned.

Furthermore, should disciplinary measures be required, details of these measures will also be considered confidential.

TEAM UP for the well-being of all

Parents play an essential collaborative role in maintaining a safe school environment. Villa Maria also actively supports and encourages families to:

- recognize signs of distress in their children
- understand the distinction between conflict and bullying
- quickly report presumed incidents of bullying, violence, violence of a sexual nature, harassment or discrimination
- reinforce positive social behaviours in their children
- work closely with school personnel to come up with solutions when problems arise.

Actions to be taken when an act of violence, bullying or violence of a sexual nature is observed

ACTIONS

When an act of violence, bullying or violence of a sexual nature is observed, the following key actions must be taken:

- quickly report the incident to the school's management, triggering an investigation
- ensure the immediate safety of the victim
- in the case of a major event (violence of a sexual nature, for example), report it to the Montréal Police Department (SPVM)
- contact the parents
- document all details in a confidential manner
- provide appropriate intervention and support services, and
- impose the required disciplinary measures.

In cases of violence of a sexual nature in particular, victims are made aware of their right to contact the Commission des services juridiques, which is responsible for applying the Legal Aid Act, as well as file a complaint with the police department and the Regional Student Ombudsman.

SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE MEASURES

Villa Maria implements several support and guidance measures:

- universal prevention program
- one-off individual support on social skills, emotional control and anger management
- action/intervention plans and behavioural agreements
- referral to outside professionals (social workers, psychologists) if necessary
- support services for witnesses to incidents
- regular checks to prevent escalation or reprisals
- ongoing communication with the families and students involved.

POSSIBLE SANCTIONS

Villa Maria imposes a range of sanctions while maintaining a collaborative approach with families. Possible sanctions include, among others:

- discussion with management, stakeholders and teachers
- loss of privileges, including field trips and other school activities
- written reflections and behavioural agreements
- restorative justice and community work
- demerit points
- in-house or home suspension
- possible expulsion, and
- possibility of being denied readmission the following school year.

FOLLOW-UP

Villa Maria ensures strict follow-up on all reports thanks to a structured process:

- All incidents are quickly documented and investigated.
- Parents/guardians are contacted as soon as an incident occurs.
- The immediate safety of the victim is ensured.
- Appropriate interventions and support are implemented.
- Measures are taken to protect against potential reprisals.
- Villa Maria's management and a special education technician ensure regular monitoring of the students involved, and
- consultation with outside professionals (social workers, psychologists), may be recommended if necessary.

To report an incident

Students and parents can report incidents of bullying, violence, violence of a sexual nature, harassment or discrimination anonymously:

- by completing an incident report form on the school's website
- directly to any member of the school's management or personnel
- by using the drop box located outside the offices of the guidance counsellors.



Violence of a sexual nature

In addition to the regular procedure, an incident can also be reported directly to the Regional Student Ombudsman, either verbally or in writing.

Please note that any person who has been the victim of violence of a sexual nature or their family can report the situation to the police department or youth protection services (DPJ), whether or not the situation has been reported to Villa Maria or the Regional Student Ombudsman. In fact, reports and complaints addressed to Villa Maria are no substitute for possible intervention by the police department or youth protection services.



Contact Persons at Villa Maria

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External Resources

POLICE DEPARTMENT (SPVM)

SPVM-BULLYING

TEL JEUNES (parents' line)

INFO-SOCIAL 811

YOUTH PROTECTION SERVICES (DPJ)

COMMISSION DES SERVICES JURIDIQUES

REGIONAL STUDENT OMBUDSMAN

NATIONAL STUDENT OMBUDSMAN

To file a complaint

STEP NO. 1

Report an incident of bullying, violence or violence of a sexual nature to the school's **Assistant Director**.

The school's Assistant Director must respond to a complaint within 10 working days from the time it is received.

STEP NO. 2

If the complaint has not been handled or if the person filing the complaint is dissatisfied: speak to the person responsible for following up on complaints at Villa Maria: **Annie Archambault**.

The person responsible for following up on complaints must respond within the following 15 working days.

STEP NO. 3

If the complaint has not been handled or if the person filing the complaint is not satisfied, contact the **Regional Student Ombudsman**.

Furthermore, should there be dissatisfaction with the handling of a complaint filed with Villa Maria, any person can resort to the procedure for the handling of complaints set forth in the *Loi sur le protecteur national de l'élève*.