

The Bullying Breakthrough Language Guide

A guide for school leader language shifts



Your words are your leadership in motion. In moments of conflict, fear or confusion, people listen less for policy and more for tone.

Language either amplifies panic or restores confidence.

This guide gives you the exact phrasing to help staff, students and parents see bullying through a culture-first lens – not a punishment-first one.

If you usually say...	Try saying this instead...	Why it works
"We're cracking down on bullying."	"We're building a culture where bullying struggles to survive."	This moves the conversation from threat to purpose.
"We have zero tolerance."	"We have a fair-process culture that handles harm seriously and constructively."	This sets realistic expectations, makes promises you can keep and builds trust.
"We'll investigate and deal with it."	"We'll listen, explain and make things right."	Focuses on empathy and accountability.
"This is another initiative."	"This is our way of leading culture, not adding workload."	Neutralises any pervading staff cynicism.
"It's not bullying, just conflict."	"Let's unpack what's happening and see if harm's been repeated, intentional and about power."	We want to emphasise our intention to educate rather than dismisses.



With Staff

From Compliance to Consistency

People mirror the language of their leaders.

In staff meetings, drop any anti-bullying slogans and talk about relational consistency.

"Every one of us is a culture builder. The way we handle small stuff sets the tone for the big stuff."

"Consistency isn't about sameness; it's about shared values."

Language cue:

"When conflict happens, our job isn't to find who's wrong – it's to restore what's right."



With Parents

From Panic to Partnership

Parents fear inaction more than anything.

Replace defensive language with clarity and calm.

"We take every report seriously, but we respond in ways that build safety, not shame."

"You'll always get a fair process from us – and you can hold us to account on that."

Language cue:

"We don't do zero tolerance. We do fair process and real personal accountability."



With Students

From Threat to Responsibility

Kids (even more so teenagers) read tone like a lie detector.

Show confidence, care and cultivate a pathway back.

"We expect you to make things right when harm's been done - that's real strength."

"It takes courage to repair, not take revenge."

Language cue:

"You belong here. Let's fix this so you can stay in the tribe."



With Community

From Defence to Leadership

When the media or community calls, don't feed the frenzy.

Speak from vision, not reaction.

"We're proud of how our culture supports kids to learn conflict resolution, rather than fear it."

"Our focus is on a school where every relationship matters."

Language cue:

"We lead our culture, but we don't police it."