

**Shrewsbury Public Schools
Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan
for Biennial Update**

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I. PURPOSE

The Shrewsbury Public Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan (“Plan”) is a comprehensive approach to addressing bullying and cyberbullying. The district is committed to working with students, staff, families, Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services, the Shrewsbury Police Department, and the community at large to prevent bullying and cyberbullying and to intervene appropriately and effectively when these behaviors do occur. In consultation with these constituencies, this Plan has been established in order to better prevent and respond to incidents of bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. It is the intention of the Shrewsbury Public Schools to go beyond basic compliance with the law in order to achieve its aspirational goal of “continuous improvement of learning environments” in order to honor its core value of “respect and responsibility.”

II. RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The superintendent of schools is responsible for ensuring that the district’s plan is communicated and implemented consistently throughout all schools. The principal of each school is responsible for the coordination and oversight of the Plan in his or her school; he or she may designate authority to an assistant principal or other appropriate staff to carry out elements of his/her responsibilities. All employees of the Shrewsbury Public Schools are responsible for helping to implement the plan by understanding the role they play in bullying prevention and intervention and acting in accordance with the Plan’s expectations.

III. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O requires the school district to provide ongoing professional development for all staff, including but not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, and paraprofessionals.

- A. Annual staff training on the Plan. Annual training for all school staff on the Plan will include staff duties under the Plan, an overview of the steps that the principal or designee will follow upon receipt of a report of bullying or retaliation, and an overview of the bullying prevention curricula to be offered at all grades throughout the school or district, once established pursuant to the law. This training may be conducted online, and staff members will acknowledge receiving this information through electronic sign-off. Staff members hired after the start of the school year will participate in this training as soon as possible after they are hired, or they may be exempted if they can demonstrate participation in an acceptable and comparable program within the last two years.
- B. Ongoing professional development. The goal of professional development is to establish a common understanding of tools necessary for staff to create a school climate that promotes safety, civil communication, and respect for differences. Professional development will build the skills of staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying. As required by M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, the content of schoolwide and districtwide professional development will be informed by research and will include information on:
 - (i) developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies to prevent bullying;

- (ii) developmentally (or age-) appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- (iii) information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among an aggressor, target, and witnesses to the bullying;
- (iv) research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment;
- (v) information on the incidence and nature of cyberbullying; and
- (vi) Internet safety issues as they relate to cyberbullying.

Professional development will also be provided to appropriate staff in order to address ways to prevent and respond to bullying or retaliation for students with disabilities that must be considered when developing students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). This will include a particular focus on the needs of students with autism or students whose disability affects social skills development.

Additional areas may be identified by the district or by a school for professional development in order to meet the district's goal of *continuous improvement of learning environments* and honor the district's core value of *respect and responsibility*.

- C. Written notice to staff. The school or district will provide all staff with an annual written notice of this Plan by publishing information about it, including sections related to staff duties, through the use of the district web site.

IV. ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES

A key aspect of promoting positive school climates is ensuring that the underlying emotional needs of targets, aggressors, families, and others are addressed. In order to meet these needs and enhance the district's capacity to prevent, intervene early, and respond effectively to bullying, the school district must provide services that respond to the dynamics of bullying and provide approaches to address the needs of targets and aggressors. This includes a strategy for providing counseling or referral to appropriate services for aggressors, targets, and family members of those students.

- A. Accessing counseling and other resources. While disciplinary action is a necessary element of bullying intervention as well as a deterrent, the state law specifies that the need for accountability must be balanced with the need to teach appropriate behavior and to provide supports to assist both the target and the aggressor. Each school will develop a process for determining when a student or students, including the target and/or the aggressor, shall have access to counseling from a school psychologist or school adjustment counselor. Interactions between school-based psychologists or counselors and students may occur as part of the routine engagement of staff to informally assist students with difficulties and problem solving during the school day, while longer term counseling services will involve notification of the parents/guardians of the student(s). It is important to note that school-based counseling services are limited in scope and are related to school-related issues, while more intensive or long term counseling for social-emotional issues should be provided by resources outside the school district. The school district may engage the services of individuals with expertise, such as social workers, counselors, psychologists or psychiatrists, to assist families with accessing appropriate outside counseling and mental health services.

When a school becomes aware of a problematic situation involving bullying that may require a coordinated response to provide intervention, support, and follow up for the students involved, the school will convene a team will include representation from the school administration, school psychologist and/or adjustment counselor, school nurse, and other education professionals as deemed appropriate by the principal. This consultation team may also include the school resource officer. The intervention team will make recommendations for access to resources and services within the school to assist students who are having difficulties related to bullying issues.

- B. Community supports. The school district is fortunate to have strong existing relationships with community supports such as Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services and the Shrewsbury Police Department. When situations involving bullying occur, the school district may reach out to these organizations for assistance in developing a comprehensive action plan to remedy the situation. Further, the district may help families with students who are Medicaid-eligible to access community service agencies, or assist families in accessing wraparound programs that provide a variety of social services. The district will develop a protocol for schools to use to determine whether community supports may be appropriate and to ensure timely access to the proper resources.
- C. Students with disabilities. As required by M.G.L. c. 71B, § 3, as amended by Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010, when the Individual Education Plan (IEP) Team determines the student has a disability that affects social skills development or the student may participate in or is vulnerable to bullying, harassment, or teasing because of his/her disability, the Team will consider what should be included in the IEP to develop the student's skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying, harassment, or teasing.
- D. Referral to outside services. The school district will use its referral protocol for referring students and families to outside services. Clear protocols will help students and families access appropriate and timely services. Referrals must comply with relevant laws and policies. Personnel who may assist with such referrals may include administrators, psychologists, counselors, clinical coordinators, and/or consulting psychiatrist.

V. INSTRUCTION IN BULLYING PREVENTION

The law requires each school or district to provide age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention in each grade that is incorporated into the school's or district's curricula. These curricula must be "evidence-based." Effective instruction will include classroom approaches, whole school initiatives, and focused strategies for bullying prevention and social skills development, per guidelines published by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) The district considers the following suggested guidelines from the DESE:

- A. Specific bullying prevention approaches. Bullying prevention curricula will be informed by current research which, among other things, emphasizes the following approaches:
 - using scripts and role plays to develop skills;
 - empowering students to take action by knowing what to do when they witness or become aware of other students engaged in acts of bullying or retaliation, including seeking adult assistance;
 - helping students understand the dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying, including the underlying power imbalance;

- emphasizing cybersafety, including safe and appropriate use of electronic communication technologies;
- enhancing students' skills for engaging in healthy relationships and respectful communications; and
- engaging students in a safe, supportive school environment that is respectful of diversity and difference.

B. Instructional programming currently in place. The Shrewsbury Public Schools will continue to utilize a variety of instructional approaches already in place to teach students how to prevent bullying and how to report or intervene appropriately. These include:

- Health instruction that occurs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels which includes specific instruction in anti-bullying, ways to empower bystanders or those who become aware of bullying, strategies for responding to bullying situations, etc.
- Instruction regarding the district's technology acceptable use policy that includes learning about appropriate and inappropriate use of the Internet.
- The use of social curricula, including elements from *Responsive Classroom* in the elementary grades and early middle school grades.
- The use of all school meetings or student assemblies where staff emphasize expectations regarding bullying prevention, students present information or act out scenarios, guest speakers address the topic, etc.

C. Communication of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan to students. After this plan is adopted, schools will communicate the student-related elements of the plan to students using methods and language that are developmentally and age appropriate, and will do so each year during the initial phase of the school year. This communication may be through classroom activities, all school meetings or student assemblies, and through written documents, such as handbooks.

D. General teaching approaches that support bullying prevention efforts. The DESE suggests that the following approaches are integral to establishing a safe and supportive school environment. These underscore the importance of bullying intervention and prevention initiatives:

- setting clear expectations for students and establishing school and classroom routines;
- creating safe school and classroom environments for all students that respect human differences, including differences related to disability, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or race, religion, appearance, socioeconomic status (including homelessness) or other characteristics or traits of an individual;
- using appropriate and positive responses and reinforcement, even when students require discipline;
- using positive behavioral supports;
- encouraging adults to develop positive relationships with students;
- modeling, teaching, and rewarding pro-social, healthy, and respectful behaviors;
- using positive approaches to behavioral health, including collaborative problem-solving, conflict resolution training, teamwork, and positive behavioral supports that aid in social and emotional development;
- using the Internet safely; and
- supporting students' interest and participation in non-academic and co-curricular activities, particularly in their areas of strength.

VI. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO BULLYING AND RETALIATION

A. Reporting bullying or retaliation. Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. Oral reports made by or to a staff member shall be recorded in writing. A school or district staff member is required to report promptly to the principal or designee any instance of bullying or retaliation the staff member becomes aware of or witnesses. Each school will utilize a procedure for staff to provide such reports by use of a written form and/or an online tool. In accordance with the law, reports made by students, parents or guardians, or other individuals who are not school or district staff members, may be made anonymously, with the understanding that no student shall be subject to discipline based solely on an anonymous report. Each school will make a variety of reporting resources available to the school community which may include, but is not limited to, a web-based reporting tool, a voice mail box, a dedicated mailing address, and/or an email address. The school will communicate the availability of these tools and the policies for reporting when they are established and then at the beginning of each school year thereafter and will be included in student handbooks and on the district and school web sites. This information will also be provided in other prevalent languages other than English used by families in the school district.

1. Reporting by staff

A staff member will report promptly to the principal or designee when he/she witnesses or becomes aware of conduct that may be bullying or retaliation. As is the case with any inappropriate behavior, staff members will intervene as needed to stop the problematic behavior and then communicate the behavior to the administration. It is important that situations that raise concern or suspicion regarding potential bullying be reported, as multiple reports from different sources may alert the administration to a pattern of which individual staff members would be unaware.

2. Reporting by students, parents or guardians, and others

The school or district expects students, parents or guardians, and others who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying or retaliation involving a student to report it to the principal or designee. Reports may be made anonymously, but no disciplinary action will be taken against an alleged aggressor solely on the basis of an anonymous report. Students, parents or guardians, and others may request assistance from a staff member to complete a written report. Students will be provided practical, safe, private and age-appropriate ways to report and discuss an incident of bullying with a staff member, or with the principal or designee.

B. Responding to a report of bullying or retaliation.

1. Safety

Before fully investigating the allegations of bullying or retaliation, the principal or designee will take steps to assess the need to restore a sense of safety to the alleged target and/or to protect the alleged target from possible further incidents. Responses to promote safety may include, but not be limited to, creating a personal safety plan; pre-determining seating

arrangements for the target and/or the aggressor in the classroom, at lunch, or on the bus; identifying a staff member who will act as a “safe person” for the target; and altering the aggressor’s schedule and access to the target. The principal or designee will take additional steps to promote safety during the course of and after the investigation, as necessary.

The principal or designee will implement appropriate strategies for protecting from bullying or retaliation a student who has reported bullying or retaliation, a student who has witnessed bullying or retaliation, a student who provides information during an investigation, or a student who has reliable information about a reported act of bullying or retaliation.

2. Obligations to Notify Others

- a. Notice to parents or guardians. Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor of this, and of the procedures for responding to it. There may be circumstances in which the principal or designee contacts parents or guardians prior to any investigation. Notice will be consistent with state regulations in 603 CMR 49.00.
- b. Notice to another school or district. If the reported incident involves students from more than one school district, charter school, non-public school, approved private special education day or residential school, or collaborative school, the principal or designee first informed of the incident will promptly notify by telephone the principal or designee of the other school(s) of the incident so that each school may take appropriate action. All communications will be in accordance with state and federal privacy laws and regulations, and 603 CMR 49.00.
- c. Notice to law enforcement. At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, if the principal or designee has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the principal will notify the local law enforcement agency. Notice will be consistent with the requirements of 603 CMR 49.00 and locally established agreements with the local law enforcement agency. Also, if an incident occurs on school grounds and involves a former student under the age of 21 who is no longer enrolled in school, the principal or designee shall contact the local law enforcement agency if he or she has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor.

In making this determination, the principal will, consistent with the Plan and with applicable school or district policies and procedures, consult with the school resource officer, if any, and other individuals the principal or designee deems appropriate.

- C. Investigation. The principal or designee will investigate promptly all reports of bullying or retaliation and, in doing so, will consider all available information known, including the nature of the allegation(s) and the ages of the students involved.

During the investigation the principal or designee will, among other things, interview students, staff, witnesses, parents or guardians, and others as necessary. The principal or

designee (or whoever is conducting the investigation) will remind the alleged aggressor, target, and witnesses that retaliation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action.

Interviews may be conducted by the principal or designee, other staff members as determined by the principal or designee, and in consultation with the school counselor, as appropriate. To the extent practicable, and given his/her obligation to investigate and address the matter, the principal or designee will maintain confidentiality during the investigative process. The principal or designee will maintain a written record of the investigation.

Procedures for investigating reports of bullying and retaliation will be consistent with school or district policies and procedures for investigations. If necessary, the principal or designee will consult with legal counsel about the investigation.

- D. Determination and notification. The principal or designee will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances. School personnel must weigh all of the evidence objectively to determine whether the alleged events occurred and, if they did, whether the events constitute bullying or retaliation. The determination must be based upon all of the facts and circumstances and the perspective of a reasonable person. Courts have determined that, when applied to children, the "reasonable person" standard is that of a reasonable person of like age, intelligence, and experience under like circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the principal or designee will take steps reasonably calculated to prevent recurrence and to ensure that the target is not restricted in participating in school or in benefiting from school activities. The principal or designee will: 1) determine what remedial action is required, if any, and 2) determine what responsive actions and/or disciplinary action is necessary.

Depending upon the circumstances, the principal or designee may choose to consult with the students' teacher(s) and/or school counselor, and the target's or aggressor's parents or guardians, to identify any underlying social or emotional issue(s) that may have contributed to the bullying behavior and to assess the level of need for additional social skills development.

The principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and, if bullying or retaliation is found, what action is being taken to prevent further acts of bullying or retaliation. All notice to parents must comply with applicable state and federal privacy laws and regulations. Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of student records, the principal or designee cannot report specific information to the target's parent or guardian about the disciplinary action taken unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations. School personnel may, however, share information with the family of the target regarding the process that was followed to investigate and determine whether bullying occurred; what general measures are being taken to protect the target from further acts of bullying or retaliation; and what is being done to ensure that the target is reassured, receives help, and is provided with appropriate ways to communicate ongoing concerns.

- E. Responses to bullying. This section enumerates strategies for building students' skills and other individualized interventions that the school or district may take in response to remediate or prevent further bullying and retaliation.

1. Teaching Appropriate Behavior Through Skills-building

Upon the principal or designee determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the law requires that the school or district use a range of responses that balance the need for accountability with the need to teach appropriate behavior. M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O(d)(v). Skill-building approaches that the principal or designee may consider include:

- offering individualized skill-building sessions based on the school's/district's anti-bullying curricula;
- providing relevant educational activities for individual students or groups of students, in consultation with guidance counselors and other appropriate school personnel;
- implementing a range of academic and nonacademic positive behavioral supports to help students understand pro-social ways to achieve their goals;
- meeting with parents and guardians to engage parental support and to reinforce the anti-bullying curricula and social skills building activities at home;
- adopting behavioral plans to include a focus on developing specific social skills; and/or
- making a referral to the school's intervention team, or for a formal evaluation.

2. Taking Disciplinary Action

If the principal or designee decides that disciplinary action is appropriate, the disciplinary action will be determined on the basis of facts found by the principal or designee, including the nature of the conduct, the age of the student(s) involved, and the need to balance accountability with the teaching of appropriate behavior. Discipline will be consistent with the Plan and with the school's or district's code of conduct.

The range of disciplinary action includes, but is not limited to, one or more of the following: verbal warnings, written warnings, reprimands, reflective writing assignments intended to educate the aggressor, detentions, Saturday school, short-term or long-term suspensions, or expulsions from school as determined by the school administration, subject to applicable procedural requirements. Nothing in this plan is intended to prevent the school administration from taking disciplinary action against a student for conduct that does not meet the definition of bullying or cyberbullying, as defined above, but nevertheless is inappropriate for the school environment. Disciplinary actions will be in accordance with administrative disciplinary policies and applicable state and federal laws.

Discipline procedures for students with disabilities are governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), which shall be followed in conjunction with state laws regarding student discipline.

If the principal or designee determines that a student knowingly made a false allegation of bullying or retaliation, that student may be subject to disciplinary action.

3. Promoting Safety for the Target and Others

The principal or designee will consider what adjustments, if any, are needed in the school environment to enhance the target's sense of safety and that of others as well. It is up to the principal or designee's judgment as to what steps may be taken to promote a safe school environment, and the administrator may consult with the target, counselor or psychologist, teachers, etc. in determining what approaches might be used (such as providing a regular

adult contact for check-ins for the target, providing increased supervision of a certain location, etc.).

Within a reasonable period of time following the determination and the ordering of remedial and/or disciplinary action, the principal or designee will contact the target to determine whether there has been a recurrence of the prohibited conduct so that the administrator may determine whether additional supportive measures are needed.

VII. COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES

- A. Parent education and resources. The school or district will offer education programs for parents and guardians that are focused on ways that families can support bullying prevention and intervention efforts related to school-based bullying as well as cyberbullying. The programs will be offered in collaboration with PTOs, School Councils, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, Shrewsbury Youth and Family Services, local law enforcement agencies, and other appropriate organizations. The district will provide resources on its web site, including information and tips regarding how to monitor students' use of communication technology (texting, social networking, web posting, etc.).
- B. Notification requirements. Each year the school or district will inform parents or guardians of enrolled students about the anti-bullying curricula that are being used. This notice will include information about the dynamics of bullying, including cyberbullying and online safety. The school or district will send parents written notice through the handbook each year about the student-related sections of the Plan and the school's or district's Internet safety policy and will be available in the language(s) most prevalent among parents or guardians. The school or district will post the Plan and related information on its website.

VIII. PROHIBITION AGAINST BULLYING AND RETALIATION

The law requires this Plan to include a statement prohibiting bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation. The statement must be included in the Plan and included in the student code of conduct, the student handbook, and in yearly staff communication.

A. Statement prohibiting bullying, cyberbullying, and retaliation: The Shrewsbury Public Schools holds a core value of "respect and responsibility" and, as such, is committed to the continuous improvement of learning environments. In order to achieve these aspirations, the Shrewsbury Public Schools is committed to providing school environments where students are not subject to bullying and cyberbullying and the effects of such actions. Acts of bullying and cyberbullying are prohibited:

- (i) on school grounds; on property immediately adjacent to school grounds; at a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function or program whether on or off school grounds; at a school bus stop; on a school bus or other vehicle owned, leased or used by the school district; or through the use of technology, including use of the school district's network for World Wide Web/Internet/intranet access; use of a personal

electronic device when present at the locations cited above; or use of an electronic device owned, leased or used by the school district, and

- (ii) at a location, activity, function or program that is not school-related, or through the use of technology, including through the World Wide Web/Internet or use of an electronic device that is not owned, leased or used by the school district, if the acts create a hostile environment at school for the target, infringes on the rights of the target at school or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, or who provides information during an investigation of bullying, or who witnesses or has reliable information about bullying, also is prohibited.

As stated in M.G.L. c. 71, § 37O, nothing in this Plan requires the district or school to staff any non-school related activities, functions, or programs.

IX. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are provided by the DESE and are utilized by the Shrewsbury Public Schools:

Aggressor is a student who engages in bullying, cyberbullying, or retaliation.

Bullying, as defined in M.G.L. c.71, s. 37O, is the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

- (i) causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
- (ii) places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or of damage to his property;
- (iii) creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- (iv) infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- (v) or materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Bullying may include conduct such as physical intimidation or assault, including intimidating an individual into taking an action against his/her will; oral or written threats; teasing; putdowns; name-calling; stalking; threatening looks, gestures, or actions; cruel rumors; false accusations; and social isolation.

Cyberbullying, as defined in M.G.L. c.71, s. 37O is bullying through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which shall include, but not be limited to, any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature transmitted in whole or in part by a wire, radio, electromagnetic, photo electronic or photo optical system, including, but not limited to, electronic mail, internet communications, instant messages or facsimile communications. Cyberbullying also includes:

- (i) the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person;

- (ii) the knowing impersonation of another person as the author of posted content or messages, if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated above in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying; and
- (iii) the distribution by electronic means of a communication to more than one person or the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons, if the distribution or posting creates any of the conditions enumerated above in clauses (i) to (v), inclusive, of the definition of bullying.

Cyberbullying may include conduct such as sending derogatory, harassing or threatening email messages, instant messages, or text messages; creating websites or posting comments on websites that ridicule, humiliate, or intimidate others; and posting on websites or disseminating embarrassing or inappropriate pictures or images of others.

Hostile Environment, as defined in M.G.L. c. 71, s. 37O, is a situation in which bullying causes the school environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a student's education.

Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying.

Target is a student against whom bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation has been perpetrated.

Staff includes, but is not limited to, educators, administrators, counselors, school nurses, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, athletic coaches, advisors to extracurricular activities, support staff, or paraprofessionals.

X. RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAWS

Consistent with state and federal laws, and the policies of the school or district, no person shall be discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town or in obtaining the advantages, privilege and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. Nothing in the Plan prevents the school or district from taking action to remediate discrimination or harassment based on a person's membership in a legally protected category under local, state, or federal law, or school or district policies.

In addition, nothing in the Plan is designed or intended to limit the authority of the school or district to take disciplinary action or other action under M.G.L. c. 71, §§ 37H or 37H½, other applicable laws, or local school or district policies in response to violent, harmful, or disruptive behavior, regardless of whether the Plan covers the behavior.