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Bullying at Milnerton High Sparks National Reflection

Safety or Spectacle: When School Violence Goes Viral

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Opening Reflection

Schools are meant to be sanctuaries, places where young people grow, connect, and feel safe. But when violence erupts within those walls, especially in full view of peers and the public, it shakes more than just the individuals involved. It unsettles our collective sense of trust. The recent incident at Milnerton High School, captured and shared online, has done just that. It reminds us that safety is not just about fences and cameras, it's about culture, care, and the courage to intervene before harm is done.

What Happened

In October 2025, a video surfaced showing a Grade 10 learner at Milnerton High School being physically assaulted by peers. The footage, filmed on a cellphone and widely circulated on social media, prompted swift action: eight learners were suspended, and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) launched an investigation. The school confirmed that disciplinary procedures were underway, and the incident drew national media attention, sparking debate about bullying, school discipline, and the role of digital platforms in shaping public perception.

What It Reveals

This incident lays bare the emotional volatility of adolescence, the power of peer dynamics, and the fragility of school safety. It also reveals the double-edged nature of visibility: while social media can expose wrongdoing and demand accountability, it can also amplify trauma and complicate due process.

From a systems-thinking perspective, this is not merely a case of learner misconduct, it is a signal of deeper relational and structural gaps. It calls for a renewed focus on preventative strategies, trauma-informed care, and leadership that fosters psychological safety.

Why It Matters

Bullying is not new, but its public visibility is. When violence is filmed and shared, it becomes both a cry for help and a test of institutional response. Schools must act swiftly, but also wisely. Learners deserve protection, yes, but also fairness. Those who harm must be held accountable but not vilified beyond repair.

Philosophically, this moment touches on restorative justice, adolescent development, and the ethics of public shaming. It challenges us to ask: What does justice look like when all parties are still growing?

Reflective Responses

What does a proactive anti-bullying culture look like?

It looks like peer mentorship, open dialogue, and staff who notice the quiet signs before they escalate. It means embedding empathy into discipline and creating spaces where learners feel seen and supported.

How do we support learners who harm others?

By holding them accountable through restorative processes, not just punishment. By understanding the social and emotional drivers behind aggression. By offering pathways to repair, not just exclusion.

What systems must be in place to prevent recurrence?

- Clear anti-bullying policies and reporting channels
- Regular staff training in trauma-informed and relational discipline
- Learner-led initiatives that promote inclusion and respect
- Leadership that models calm, fairness, and responsiveness

Sidebar: Facts and Philosophy

Legal Context and Stats (2025):

- The South African Schools Act mandates safe learning environments and outlines disciplinary procedures for serious misconduct.
- A 2024 WCED report found that 38% of high school learners had witnessed or experienced bullying.
- The Children's Act (2005) affirms every child's right to dignity, protection, and development.

"Restoration begins when we see the humanity in those who have harmed, and those who have been harmed." - Prof. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela