

Cyberbullying

A whole-school community issue

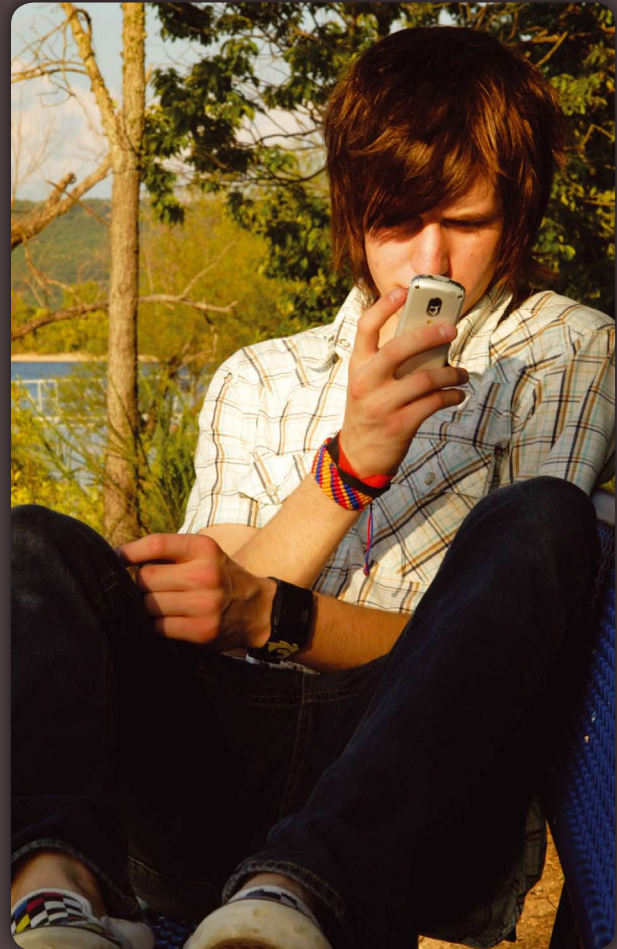
Introduction

Today's children and young people have grown up in a world that is very different from that of most adults. Many young people experience the internet and mobile phones as a positive, productive and creative part of their activities and development of their identities; always on and always there. Above all, information communication technologies support social activity that allows young people to feel connected to their peers.

Unfortunately, technologies are also being used negatively. When children are the target of bullying via mobile phones or the internet, they can feel alone and very misunderstood. They may not be able to identify that what is happening to them is a form of bullying, or be confident that the adults around them will understand it that way either. Previously safe and enjoyable environments and activities can become threatening and a source of anxiety.

As mobile phone and internet use become increasingly common, so has the misuse of this technology to bully. Research conducted in Australia and overseas indicates that cyberbullying is a feature of many young people's lives, with indications that this is trending up year by year. One study carried out for the Anti-Bullying Alliance in the UK found that 22% of young people reported being the target of cyberbullying.

This document explains how cyberbullying is different from other forms of bullying, how to respond and combat misuse through a shared responsibility, and how to promote and develop a culture of confident technology users to support innovation, e-safety and digital literacy skills.



'**Cyberbullying, A whole-school community issue**' is a summary of the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Guidance for schools on preventing and responding to cyberbullying, which was written in conjunction with Childnet International and published in 2007. It has been adapted and distributed under licence in Australia by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). This document seeks to give practical advice to young people, their carers and school staff about the issue of cyberbullying.

What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the use of Information Communications Technology (ICT), particularly mobile phones and the internet, deliberately to upset someone else.

What's different about cyberbullying?

Bullying is not new, but some features of cyberbullying are different from other forms of bullying:

- 1. 24/7 and the invasion of home/personal space.** Cyberbullying can take place at any time and can intrude into spaces that have previously been regarded as safe or personal.
- 2. The audience can be very large and reached rapidly.** The difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages means the scale and scope of cyberbullying can be greater than for other forms of bullying. Electronically forwarded content is hard to control, and the worry of content resurfacing can make it difficult for targets to move on.
- 3. People who cyberbully may attempt to remain anonymous.** This can be extremely distressing for those being bullied. The person cyberbullying may never be in the same physical space as their target.
- 4. The profile of the bully and target.** Cyberbullying can take place both between peers and across generations; teachers have also been targets. Age or size are not important. Bystanders can also become accessories to the bullying; for example, by passing on a humiliating image.
- 5. Some instances of cyberbullying are known to be unintentional.** It can be the result of not thinking (something sent as a joke may be deeply upsetting or offensive to the recipient) or a lack of awareness of the consequences – for example saying something negative online about another student, or friend that they don't expect to be forwarded or viewed outside their immediate group.
- 6. Many cyberbullying incidents can themselves act as evidence.** This is one of the reasons why it's important to know how to respond!

Cyberbullying and the law.

Responsibilities of schools. Bullying is never acceptable. Schools have a responsibility to provide a safe and supportive environment that protects the emotional and physical well-being of students. It is important that schools address all forms of anti-social behaviour, including cyberbullying. A failure to take action may place the wellbeing of students at risk, and could have legal implications for the school.

This responsibility is highlighted in the National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF) endorsed by all Ministers for Education in 2003. The NSSF outlines a nationally agreed set of guiding principles aimed at assisting schools achieve a shared vision of physical and emotional safety and wellbeing for all students in all Australian schools. It is a collaborative effort by the Australian Government and State and Territory government and non-government school authorities to address issues of bullying, harassment, violence, child abuse and neglect.

Civil and criminal law. Although bullying is not a specific criminal offence in Australian law, criminal and civil laws may apply to aspects of bullying behaviour. Some cyberbullying activities could be criminal offences under a range of different Commonwealth, State and Territory laws. For example, using a carriage service (such as a mobile phone) to make a threat, to menace, harass or cause offence could be a criminal offence under the Schedule to the Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth).

'I felt that no one understood what I was going through. I didn't know who was sending me these messages, and I felt powerless to know what to do.'

A student



Preventing Cyberbullying

The best way to deal with cyberbullying is to prevent it happening in the first place. The key first step is deciding who within the school community will take responsibility for the coordination and implementation of cyberbullying prevention and response strategies. It's best if this person is a member of the school's senior management team and/or the staff member responsible for coordinating overall anti-bullying activity. This person will need to have experience of making sure the whole school community contribute to, and are included in, activities.

There is no single solution to the problem of cyberbullying. These are the five key areas schools need to address together to put in place a comprehensive and effective prevention plan:

1. Understanding and talking about cyberbullying

The whole school community needs a shared, agreed definition of cyberbullying. Everyone needs to be aware of the impact of cyberbullying and the ways in which it differs from other forms of bullying. Young people and their parents should be made aware of students' responsibilities in their use of ICT, and what the sanctions are for misuse. Students and parents should know that the school can provide them with support if cyberbullying takes place out of school.

2. Updating existing policies and practices

Review and update the school's anti-bullying policy plus other relevant policies – for example, policies on behaviour, pastoral care and e-learning strategies. Review your existing Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) – the rules that students have to agree to follow in order to use ICT in school – and publicise them to parents and students. Keep good records of any incidents of cyberbullying. Be able to conduct searches of internet use records at school. Knowing that the school is taking such steps may act as a disincentive for bullies to misuse school equipment and systems.

'Having my daughter show me text messages from nearly everyone in her class, all saying derogatory things about her, was devastating.'

A parent

3. Making reporting cyberbullying easier

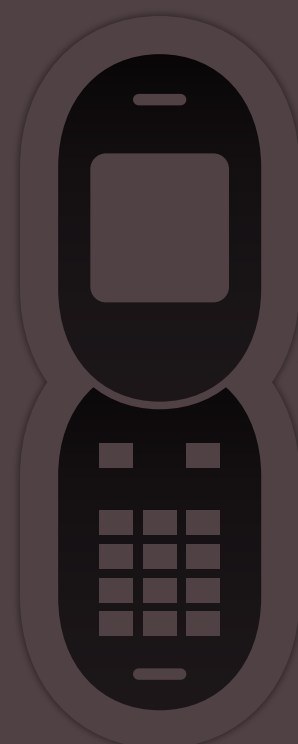
No one should feel that they have to deal with cyberbullying alone, but reporting any incident of bullying can be really hard for the person being bullied and for bystanders. Provide and publicise different ways of reporting cyberbullying in schools – for instance, a student council taskforce, peer reporting, anonymous reporting – and provide information about contacting service providers directly.

4. Promoting the positive use of technology

Technology is successfully being used to support engaging, positive and effective learning, and to realise and increase the potential of personalised learning by making learning more flexible, creative and accessible. Explore safe ways of using technology with learners to support self-esteem, assertiveness, participation and to develop friendships. Promote and discuss 'netiquette', e-safety and digital literacy. Show learners that the adults in the school understand the technologies they use – or get the students to teach them!

5. Evaluating the impact of prevention activities

Regular reviews are vital to make sure that anti-bullying policies are working and are up-to-date. Consider conducting an annual survey of students' experiences of bullying, including cyberbullying, and a parent satisfaction survey. Publicise progress and activities to the whole-school community – keep cyberbullying a live issue and celebrate your successes!





Responding to Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying, and therefore all schools should already be equipped to deal with the majority of cases through their existing anti-bullying policies and procedures. This section outlines key steps to take when responding to cyberbullying.

Supporting the person being bullied

- * Give reassurance that the person has done the right thing by telling someone, refer to any existing pastoral support/procedures and inform parents.
- * Advise on next steps:
 - Make sure the person knows not to retaliate or return the message.
 - Ask the person to think about what information they have in the public domain.
 - Help the person to keep relevant evidence for any investigation (e.g. by not deleting messages they've received, and by taking screen capture shots and noting web addresses of online cyberbullying instances).
 - Check the person understands simple ways to prevent it from happening again, e.g. by changing contact details, blocking contacts or leaving a chatroom.
- * Take action to contain the incident when content has been circulated:
 - If you know who the person responsible is, ask them to remove the content
 - Contact the host (e.g. the social networking site) to make a report to get the content taken down.
 - Follow steps set out in school mobile phone policies in relation to inappropriate use. Ask the student/s concerned who they have sent messages on to.
 - In cases of illegal content, contact the police, who can determine what needs to be kept for evidential purposes.

Investigating incidents

All bullying incidents should be properly recorded and investigated. Cyberbullying can be a very serious matter and aspects of this behaviour may constitute a criminal offence. For example, in Australia criminal sanctions may apply to the use of a carriage service (such as a mobile phone or the internet) to make a threat, or to menace or harass.

- * Advise students and staff to try and keep a record of the bullying as evidence. It can be useful to show parents, teachers, pastoral care staff and the police, if necessary, what has happened.
- * Take steps to identify the bully, including looking at the school systems, identifying and interviewing possible witnesses, and contacting the service provider and the police, if necessary. The police will need to be involved to enable the service provider to look into the data of another user.

Working with the bully and sanctions

Once the person bullying is identified, steps should be taken to change their attitude and behaviour as well as ensuring access to any support that is required. Factors to consider when determining the appropriate sanctions include:

- * The impact on the victim: was the bully acting anonymously, was the material widely circulated and humiliating, how difficult was controlling the spread of the material?
- * The motivation of the bully: was the incident unintentional or retaliation to bullying behaviour from others?

A school's anti-bullying policy should outline possible sanctions for students engaged in cyberbullying behaviour. A technology-specific sanction might include limiting internet access for a period of time or temporarily disallowing mobiles on school grounds.

'Thankfully, my son's school was very helpful: they identified the child who posted the video from another video he had posted; they have disciplined the other child and had him remove the video'.

A parent

Key Safety Advice

The whole school community has a part to play in ensuring cybersafety. Understanding children and young people's online lives and activities can help adults respond to situations appropriately and effectively. Asking children and young people to show adults how technologies and services work is a useful strategy that can provide an important learning opportunity and context for discussing online safety.



For children and young people

- 1:** Always respect others – be careful what you say online and what images you send.
- 2:** Think before you send – whatever you send can be made public very quickly and could stay online forever.
- 3:** Treat your password like your toothbrush – keep it to yourself. Only give your mobile number or personal website address to trusted friends.
- 4:** Block the bully – learn how to block or report someone who is behaving badly.
- 5:** Don't retaliate or reply!
- 6:** Save the evidence – learn how to keep records of offending messages, pictures or online conversations.
- 7:** Make sure you tell:
 - an adult you trust, or call a helpline like the Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 in confidence;
 - the provider of the service; check the service provider's website to see where to report incidents;
 - your school – your teacher or the anti-bullying coordinator can help you.

Finally, if you see cyberbullying going on stand up and speak out! Support the victim and report the bullying. How would you feel if no one stood up for you?












For parents and carers

- 1:** Be aware, your child may as likely cyberbully as be a target of cyberbullying. Be alert to your child seeming upset after using the internet or their mobile phone. This might involve subtle comments or changes in relationships with friends. They might be unwilling to talk or be secretive about their online activities and mobile phone use.
- 2:** Talk with your children and understand the ways in which they are using the internet and their mobile phone. See the seven key messages for children (on the left) to get you started.
- 3:** Use the tools on the service and turn on in-built internet safety features.
- 4:** Remind your child not to retaliate.
- 5:** Keep the evidence of offending emails, text messages or online conversations.
- 6:** Report cyberbullying:
 - Contact your child's school if it involves another student, so that they can take appropriate action.
 - Contact the service provider.
 - If the cyberbullying is serious and a potential criminal offence has been committed, you should consider contacting the police.



How is Technology Used to Bully?

Technology can be used both positively and negatively. The table below explores the range of ways today's technology can be used.

Technology:	Great for:	Examples of misuse:
 Mobile phones	Keeping in touch by voice or text, taking and sending pictures and film, listening to music, playing games, going online and sending emails. Useful in emergency situations and for allowing children a greater sense of independence.	Sending nasty calls or text messages, including threats, intimidation, harassment. Taking and sharing humiliating images. Videoing other people being harassed and sending these to other phones or internet sites.
 Instant Messenger (IM)	Text or voice chatting live with friends online. A quick and effective way of keeping in touch even while working on other things.	Sending nasty messages or content. Using someone else's account to forward rude or mean messages via their contacts list.
 Chatrooms and message boards	Groups of people around the world can text or voice chat live about common interests. For young people, this can be an easy way to meet new people and explore issues which they are too shy to talk about in person.	Sending nasty or threatening anonymous messages. Groups of people deciding to pick on or ignore individuals. Making friends under false pretences – people pretending to be someone they're not in order to get personal information that they can misuse in a range of ways – e.g. by spreading secrets or blackmailing.
 Email	Sending electronic letters, pictures and other files quickly and cheaply anywhere in the world.	Sending nasty or threatening messages. Forwarding unsuitable content including images and video clips, or sending computer viruses. Accessing someone else's account, e.g. to forward personal emails or delete emails.
 Webcams	Taking pictures or recording messages. Being able to see and talk to someone live on your computer screen. Bringing far-off places to life or video conferencing.	Making and sending inappropriate content. Persuading or threatening young people to act in inappropriate ways. Using inappropriate recordings to manipulate young people.
 Social network sites	Socialising with your friends and making new ones within online communities. Allowing young people to be creative online, even publishing online music. Personalising homepages and profiles, creating and uploading content.	Posting nasty comments, humiliating images / video. Accessing another person's account details and sending unpleasant messages, deleting information or making private information public. Groups of people picking on individuals by excluding them. Creating fake profiles to pretend to be someone else, e.g. to bully, harass or get the person into trouble.
 Video hosting sites	Accessing useful educational, entertaining and original creative video content and uploading your own.	Posting embarrassing, humiliating film of someone.
 Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)	School site, usually available from home and school, set up for tracking and recording student assignments, tests and activities, with message boards, chat and IM.	Posting inappropriate messages or images. Hacking into someone else's account to post inappropriate comments or delete schoolwork.
 Gaming sites, consoles and virtual worlds	Live text or voice chat during online gaming between players across the world, or on handheld consoles with people in the same local area. Virtual worlds let users design their own avatars – a figure that represents them in the virtual world.	Name-calling, making abusive / derogatory remarks. Players may pick on weaker or less experienced users, repeatedly killing their characters. Forwarding unwanted messages to other devices in the immediate vicinity.

When and How to Contact the Service Provider:

Mobile phones

Mobile phone companies may also be able to help in situations where a person is receiving unwelcome calls or text messages. They may be able to stop certain numbers from calling you, or provide you with a new phone number. The customer care numbers below may be of assistance.

Contacts

"3": 133 320

AAPT: 138 886

Optus: 1300 300 937

Telstra: 1800 805 996

Virgin: 1300 555 100

Vodafone: 1300 650 410

Social networking sites

(e.g., MySpace, Bebo, Facebook)

It is good practice for social network providers to make reporting incidents of cyberbullying easy, and thus have clear, accessible and prominent reporting features. Many of these reporting features will be within the profiles themselves, so they are 'handy' for the user. If social networking sites do receive reports about cyberbullying, they will investigate and can remove content that is illegal or breaks their terms and conditions in other ways. They can delete the accounts of those who have broken the rules.

Contacts of some social network providers:

Bebo: reports can be made by clicking on a 'Report Abuse' link located below the user's profile photo. Bebo users can also report specific media content like photos, videos, and widgets, to the Bebo customer services team by clicking on a 'Report Abuse' link located below the content they wish to report. Bebo can also be contacted via a 'Contact Us' page at www.bebo.com/ContactUs.jsp.

MySpace: reports can be made via the 'Contact MySpace' link, which is accessible at the bottom of the MySpace homepage:

<http://au.myspace.com> and at the bottom of every page within the MySpace site.

Video-hosting sites

It is possible to get content taken down from video-hosting sites, though the content will need to be illegal or have broken the terms of service of the site in other ways. On YouTube, perhaps the most well-known of such sites, it is possible to report content to the site provider. Reports, including reports about cyberbullying, can be made by clicking the 'Safety Center' link, or the 'Help Resources' option located at the bottom of the YouTube homepage. These will take you through to the 'Safety Resources' area. Inappropriate content can also be reported. In order to do this, you will need to create an account (this is free) and log in, and then you will have the option to 'flag content as inappropriate'. The option to flag the content is under the video content itself. YouTube provides information on what is considered inappropriate in its terms of service. See www.youtube.com/t/terms.

Instant Messenger

(e.g., Windows Live Messenger or MSN Messenger)

It is good practice for Instant Messenger (IM) providers to have visible and easy-to-access reporting features on their service. Instant Messenger providers can investigate and shut down any accounts that have been misused and clearly break their terms of service. The best evidence for the service provider is archived or recorded conversations, and most IM providers allow the user to record all messages.

Contacts of some IM providers:

MSN: When in Windows Live Messenger, clicking the 'Help' tab will bring up a range of options, including 'Report Abuse' and there is also an online feedback form at:

<http://support.msn.com/default.aspx?mkt=en-au> to report on a range of products including MSN Messenger.

Yahoo!: When in Yahoo! Messenger, clicking the 'Help' tab will bring up a range of options, including 'Report Abuse'.

Chatrooms, individual website owners / forums, message board hosts

It is good practice for chat providers to have a clear and prominent reporting mechanism to enable the user to contact the service provider. Users that abuse the service can have their account deleted. Some services may be moderated, and the moderators will warn users posting abusive comments or take down content that breaks their terms of use.

Conclusion

Technology is great and offers fantastic opportunities for children. However, the technology can be misused, and this can be very painful for those, both children and teachers, who are the targets of cyberbullying. Adults need to help children and young people prepare for the hazards whilst promoting the many learning and social opportunities available.

If you would like to see the resources, including the full guidance, produced by Childnet and the DCSF, see:

www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications
www.digizen.org

If you would like to see additional resources from the ACMA visit:

www.cybersmart.gov.au
www.wiseuptoit.com.au



'The internet and mobile phones have opened up huge opportunities for children – for creativity and learning. However, when these technologies are misused, the impact can be very damaging. We hope this guidance originally developed by Childnet and the DCSF will be of practical use and help us all fight cyberbullying'.

Chris Chapman, Chairman, the Australian Communications and Media Authority

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