

GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH CYBERBULLYING

VIRTUAL BULLYING

With more and more of us using email, social networking and mobile phones bullying does not have to happen in person. Silent phone calls or abusive texts, postings on a social network or emails can be just as distressing as being bullied face to face.

Cyberbullying is sending or posting harmful or cruel text or images using the Internet or other digital communication devices. It differs from other kinds of bullying in several significant ways. These include: the invasion of home and personal space, the difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages, the size of the audience, their perceived anonymity and even the profile of the person doing the bullying and their target.

Cyberbullies can communicate their messages to a wide audience with remarkable speed, and can often remain unseen and unidentifiable. Cyberbullying can follow children and young people into their private spaces and outside school hours; there is no safe haven for the person being bullied. Cyberbullying takes place between children and between adults, but also across different age groups. Young people can target staff members or other adults through cyberbullying; there are examples of school staff being ridiculed, threatened and otherwise abused online.

Categories of cyberbullying:

- Text message bullying involves sending unwelcome texts that are threatening or cause discomfort.
- Picture/video-clip bullying via mobile phone cameras is used to make the person being bullied feel threatened or embarrassed, with images usually sent to other

people. 'Happy slapping' involves filming and sharing physical attacks.

- Phone call bullying via mobile phones uses silent calls or abusive messages.
- Sometimes the bullied person's phone is stolen and used to harass others, who then think the phone owner is responsible. As with all mobile phone bullying, the perpetrators often disguise their numbers, sometimes using someone else's phone to avoid being identified.
- Email bullying uses email to send bullying or threatening messages, often using a pseudonym for anonymity or using someone else's name to pin the blame on them.
- Chat room bullying involves sending menacing or upsetting responses to children or young people when they are in a web-based chat room.
- Bullying through instant messaging (IM) is an internet-based form of bullying where children and young people are sent unpleasant messages as they conduct real-time conversations online.
- Bullying via websites includes the use of defamatory blogs (web logs), personal websites and online personal polling sites. There has also been a significant increase in social networking sites for young people, which can provide new opportunities for
- cyberbullying. Other examples include identity theft, unauthorised access, and impersonation, harassment or stalking, ostracising, peer rejection and exclusion, unauthorised publication of private information or images, and manipulation.

Bullying can seriously affect an individual psychologically and in some instances can lead to feelings of suicide; although bullying is not a specific criminal offence, there are criminal laws which apply to harassment and threatening behaviour.

What can you do as a parent?

- Don't wait for something to happen before you act. Make sure your child understands how to use these technologies safely and knows about the risks and consequences of misusing them.
- Make sure they know what to do if they or someone they know are being cyberbullied.

- Encourage your child to talk to you if they have any problems with cyberbullying. If they do have a problem, contact the school, the mobile network or the Internet
- Service Provider (ISP) to do something about it.
- Parental control software can limit who your child sends emails to and who he or she receives them from. It can also block access to some chat rooms.
- Moderated chat rooms are supervised by trained adults. Your ISP will tell you whether they provide moderated chat services.
- Make it your business to know what your child is doing online and who your child's online friends are.
- Report concerns immediately to the Police or CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) <http://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

It is important that parents and carers ensure that their children are engaged in safe and responsible online behaviour. Some suggestions for parents to stay involved are:

Keep the computer in a public place in the house. Periodically check on what your child is doing.

- Discuss the kinds of Internet activities your child enjoys.
- Be up front with your child that you will periodically investigate the files on the computer, the browser history files, and your child's public online activities.
- Search for your child's name online, look at his or her profiles and postings on teen community sites, review web pages or blogs.
- Tell your child that you may review his or her private communication activities if you have reason to believe you will find unsafe or irresponsible behaviour.
- Watch out for secretive behaviour as you approach the computer, such as rapidly switching screens, and for attempts to hide online behaviour, such as an empty history file.

What can you do as a student?

- If you are being bullied, remember bullying is never your fault. It can be stopped and it can usually be traced.
- Don't ignore the bullying. Tell someone you trust, such as a teacher or parent, or call an advice line.
- Try to keep calm. If you are frightened, try to show it as little as possible. Don't get angry, it will only make the person bullying you more likely to continue.
- There is plenty of online advice on how to react to cyberbullying for example, www.kidscape.org and www.wiredsafety.org have some useful tips

Text/Video Messaging

- You can turn off incoming messages for a couple of days.
- If bullying persists you can change your phone number (ask your Mobile service provider).
- Do not reply to abusive or worrying text or video messages - your Mobile service provider will have a number for you to ring or text to report phone bullying. Visit their website for details.

Email

- Never reply to unpleasant or unwanted emails.
- Don't accept emails or open files from people you do not know.
- Ask an adult to contact the sender's ISP by writing abuse@and then the host, eg. abuse@hotmail.com.

Web

- If the bullying is on the school website, tell a teacher or parent, just as you would if the bullying was face-to-face.

Chat Room & Instant Messaging

- Never give out your name, address, phone number, school name or password online.
- It's a good idea to use a nickname. Do not give out photos of yourself either.
- Do not accept emails or open files from people you do not know.
- Remember it might not just be people your own age in a chat room.
- Stick to public areas in chat rooms and get out if you feel uncomfortable.
- Tell your parents or carers if you feel uncomfortable or worried about anything that happens in a chat room.
- Think carefully about what you write - don't leave yourself open to bullying.

ALWAYS TELL AN ADULT Three Steps to Safety

1. Respect other people—online and off. Do not spread rumours about people or share their secrets, including phone numbers and passwords.
2. If someone insults you online or by phone, stay calm—and ignore them, but tell someone you trust.
3. 'Do as you would be done by'! Think how you would feel if you were bullied. You are responsible for your own behaviour—make sure you don't distress other people or cause them to be bullied by someone else.

Advice for staff dealing with Cyberbullying

- The person being bullied will usually have examples of texts or emails received, and should be encouraged to keep these to aid in any investigation. There are also additional reporting
- routes available, through mobile phone companies, internet service providers and social networking sites.
- Some forms of cyberbullying involve the distribution of content or links to content, which can exacerbate, extend and prolong the bullying. There are advantages in trying to contain the spread of these by contacting the service provider, confiscating phones, and contacting the police (in relation to illegal content).

- Take steps to identify the person responsible for the bullying. Steps can include: looking at the school system and computer logs
- Identifying and interviewing possible witnesses obtaining user information from the service provider (with police involvement). Once the person responsible for the cyberbullying has been identified, it is important that, as in other cases of bullying, sanctions are applied. Steps should be taken to change the attitude and behaviour of the bully, as well as ensuring access to any help that they may need. In dealing with cyberbullying, staff should following the school's procedure (above) when having a discussion with a bullying child.
- Sanctions in place for pupils engaged in cyberbullying behaviour could include limiting internet access for a period of time or removing the right to have a mobile phone on the school site.

Support for the person being cyber-bullied

As with other forms of bullying, the target of cyberbullying may be in need of emotional support.

Key principles here include:

- Reassuring them that they have done the right thing by telling someone
- Recognising that it must have been difficult for them to deal with
- Reiterating that no-one has a right to do that to them
- Referring any existing pastoral support/procedures for supporting those who have been bullied in the school, and refer them to helpful information and resources
- Advising those experiencing cyberbullying on steps they can take to avoid recurrence – for example: advise those targeted not to retaliate or reply, provide advice on 'blocking' or on removing people from 'buddy lists' and ask them to think carefully about what private information they may have in the public domain
- ensuring that the school adopts a culture that does not tolerate cyberbullying, as this assurance can help to make the target of cyberbullying feel safe.