

# Cyberbullying

Information for staff in schools



Cyberbullying is commonly defined as the use of information and communication technologies to support repeated and deliberate hostile behaviour intended to harm others.

It is sometimes used as an extension to other forms of bullying, and can result in the target of bullying experiencing social, psychological and academic difficulties. (ACMA)

## Forms of cyberbullying

- **Flaming** – heated exchange
- **Harassing and threatening messages** eg 'text wars', 'griefers'
- **Denigration** – sending nasty SMS, pictures or prank phone calls 'Slam books' (websites or negative lists)
- **Impersonation**  
Using person's screen name or password eg message to hate group with personal details
- **Outing or trickery** – sharing private personal information, messages, pictures with others
- Posting 'set up' images/video eg 'happy slapping'
- **Ostracism** – Intentionally excluding others from an online group eg knocked off buddy lists
- **Sexting** – sharing explicit material by mobile phone.

## How common is it?

"We know that 50 per cent of [United States] children report they were cyberbullied. In Australia it's 10 per cent and that's tracking up two to three per cent every year."

*Prof Donna Cross (2009).*

## Effects of bullying behaviour

Research indicates that students who are bullied are more likely than students who are not bullied to experience impaired social and emotional, adjustment, poor academic achievement, anxiety, depression, poorer physical health, higher absenteeism, increased loneliness and low self esteem.

Research also shows that students repeatedly bullying others were likely to have the same symptoms as the students experiencing the abuse. The students bullying were just as likely to have elevated levels of anxiety, to be disconnected from school and to have higher levels of depression as the students who were being bullied.

*(Prof Donna Cross)*

## Bystander behaviour matters

Most bullying takes place when bystanders are present, although most bystanders do not act to discourage it. When a bystander does act there is a good chance (around 50%) that the bullying will stop. Students who are 'defended' are better adjusted and report less peer victimisation one year later. Reconciliation is more likely when bystanders intervene than when teachers intervene. The majority of peer interventions are effective.

## Is it a school responsibility?

The *Student Discipline in Government Schools Policy* makes plain "the school discipline policy may apply outside of school hours and off school premises where there is a clear and close connection between the school and the conduct of students".

*The Suspension and Expulsion of School Students – Procedures* provides that behaviour that may warrant suspension includes "hostile behaviour directed towards students, members of staff or other persons including verbal abuse and abuse transmitted electronically such as by email or SMS text message".

## Anti-bullying Plan

The Anti-bullying Plan is a key part of every school's planning for student wellbeing and effective learning.

The support materials will assist schools to build on their current practice and revise their Anti-bullying Plans to comply with the *Preventing and Responding to Student Bullying Policy*. (2011).

The *Bullying: Preventing and Responding to Student Bullying Guidelines* provide a framework for schools to use in developing and implementing an Anti-bullying Plan which includes protection, prevention, early intervention and response strategies for student bullying.

## Don't blame the technology!

Technology:

- has a positive role in the lives of children and young people. However, technology is also open to misuse and has some risks associated with its use
- is embedded in all aspects of life, including teaching and learning.

Addressing cyberbullying is a whole-of-community responsibility, and requires a whole-of-community response.

## Cyberbullying: What can schools do?

- Maintain a school climate where bullying is less likely to take place and students feel comfortable reporting cyberbullying.
- Implement a sustained curriculum approach to address:
  - appropriate use of technology (Digital Citizenship)
  - bullying (including cyberbullying issues)
- Develop, with their school community, clear, well publicised policies addressing:
  - use of technology
  - preventing, reporting and managing bullying and cyber bullying.
- Develop programs for those students in need of additional support with the development of communication, social and relationship skills, or digital citizenship.
- Where incidents of cyberbullying are impacting on the learning of any student, schools will need to respond to these incidents, even if they occur out of school hours or on private equipment. The appropriate response will depend on the circumstances of the cyberbullying.
- Contact the Police and the School Safety and Response Unit where incidents of cyberbullying include possible criminal behaviour.
- Keep accurate records of incidents and their management.
- Survey students regularly to monitor bullying and cyberbullying rates.
- Ensure all members of the school community including casual staff are familiar with the school's anti-bullying plan.
- Identify students with bullying behaviour or who have experienced bullying both on and after enrolment and develop strategies to support them.

- Promote anti-bullying messages throughout the school community.

Schools will need to provide support to:

- any student who is experiencing bullying
- any student with bullying behaviours
- any bystanders.

School executives, Learning Support Teams or Student Welfare Teams will decide on which intervention, or combination of interventions, is appropriate to each individual circumstance of cyberbullying.

## Possible interventions

**Note: No method of addressing bullying has been reported as 100% effective.**

### Bystander Training

This intervention is a proactive strategy that trains bystander students to behave in a supportive way to students who are being bullied, to intervene where feasible or to report the incident to a teacher.

**Buddy systems** can help to promote friendship and support between older and younger peers through regular collaboration between their classes, which fosters a sense of whole-school community.

### The method of shared concern or the Pikas Method

Empowering the students with bullying behaviour to assist in resolving the problem through the use of individual and group meetings with the participants. The ability to demonstrate empathy is essential for all participants in this method.

*\* The method of shared concern should only be implemented by people who are trained in the intervention and who understand the circumstances in which it may be of benefit.*

### Mediation

Assisting the students involved in incidents of bullying to resolve their differences and helping them find a peaceful win-win solution or compromise. Mediation is a suitable intervention only when the imbalance of power between the students involved is not great and when each party has something to gain and to concede. It should always be voluntary and should never be used in cases of major disputes, serious bullying or assault.

### Restorative practice

Stimulating genuine remorse; helping the student displaying bullying take steps to restore damaged relationships. This intervention is usually effective only in the context of a whole school restorative practices approach.

### Strengthening the victim or assertiveness training

Helping and coaching students to confront a student displaying bullying behaviour assertively; to stand firm and discourage the bullying behaviour through calm and controlled language to redress the balance of perceived power. This intervention should never be the only response to bullying incidents. The behavior of the student displaying bullying must also be addressed and support should be provided to any bystanders.

### Traditional disciplinary approach

Setting out clear behaviour standards and using punishment to prevent and deter the student from repeating their behaviour; punishment could include detention, loss of privileges, chores to be undertaken and even suspension. Research has shown that using punishment as the only intervention is not effective in preventing bullying.

### What can teachers do?

- Know your students.
- Don't ignore or discount their situation by suggesting they ignore it or that it will stop on its own.
- Know your schools anti-bullying policies and reporting structures and
- Establish an understanding of the existing evidence based approaches to dealing with cyber bullying.
- Develop an understanding of the role of bystanders in cyber space.
- Use the curriculum to support an investigation into cyber bullying

- Adopt a critical literacy perspective: to question and challenge attitudes, values and beliefs that lie beneath the surface.

Interventions need to be matched to the particular incident of bullying. More than one intervention may need to be implemented. Not all hurtful behaviours are cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying may involve varying levels of severity, ranging from occasional messages to frequently repeated and highly disturbing threats to a person's life. Threats should be reported to the Police and the School Safety and Response Unit.

### Brochures

**Cyber bullying and the protection of students – Advice for parents and carers**

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/studentsupport/behaviourpgrms/antibullying/cyberbullying.pdf>

**Anti-bullying – how to encourage your child to be an effective bystander – Advice for parents and carers**

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/studentsupport/behaviourpgrms/antibullying/bystanderbhvr.pdf>

### Useful websites

**Anti-bullying**

<https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/lists/directoratesaz/stuwelfare/behaviourpgrms/antibullying/index.htm>

**Digital Citizenship**

<http://www.digitalcitizenship.nsw.edu.au/>

**Bullying. No way! website:**

The Talk Out Spotlight section suggests strategies for students to deal with cyberbullying  
[www.bullyingnoway.com.au](http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au)

**Cybersmart Teachers Gateway and kids portal**

[www.cybersmart.gov.au](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au)

**Teacher Resources – Cybersmart**

<http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Schools/Teacher%20resources.aspx?preview=1>

**Click – a technology guide**

[www.click.edu.au](http://www.click.edu.au)

**Friendly schools friendly families**

[www.friendlyschools.com.au/](http://www.friendlyschools.com.au/)

### Documents

**Bullying: Preventing and Responding to Student Bullying in Schools Policy**  
<http://bit.ly/imAYxN>

**Bullying amongst young children – A guide for parents**

[http://www.ag.gov.au/agd/WWW/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/\(1E76C1D5D1A37992F0B0C1C4DB87942E\)~Bullying+Parents.pdf/\\$file/Bullying+Parents.pdf](http://www.ag.gov.au/agd/WWW/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/(1E76C1D5D1A37992F0B0C1C4DB87942E)~Bullying+Parents.pdf/$file/Bullying+Parents.pdf)

**National Safe Schools Framework – 2011 (includes implementation and resource pack)**

[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school\\_education/publications\\_resources/profiles/national\\_safe\\_schools\\_framework.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/national_safe_schools_framework.htm)

### Memorandum

**Principals: Reporting Incidents Involving Assaults, Threats, Intimidation or Harassment**

<https://detwww.det.nsw.edu.au/inprincipal/sydney/2010-07-30/dn1000225.htm>

