

Information for Parents on Cyber-Bullying A Whole-School Community Issue Donabate Secondary School.

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 their 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. Current research in this area indicates that cyber-bullying is a feature of many young people's lives. One study carried out for the Anti-Bullying Alliance found that 22% of young people reported being the target of cyber-bullying.

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

What is Cyber-bullying?

Cyber-bullying is the use of information Communications Technology (ICT), particularly mobile phones and internet, deliberately to upset someone else.

What's different about cyber-bullying?

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

- 1. 24/7 and the invasion of home/personal space.** Cyber-bullying can take place at anytime 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 cyber-bullying 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 cyber-bullying may attempt to remain anonymous.** This can be extremely distressing for those being bullied. The person cyber-bullying may never be in the same physical space as their target.
- 4. The profile of the bully and target.** Cyber-bullying 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 cyber-bullying 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 pupil, or friend that they don't expect to be forwarded or viewed outside their immediate group.

6. Many cyber-bullying incidents can themselves act as evidence. This is one of the reasons why it's important to know how to respond!

Cyber-bullying and the law.

Education Law: bullying is never acceptable. The school community has a duty to protect all its members and provide a safe, healthy environment. A range of Education Acts and government initiatives highlight these obligations.

Civil and Criminal Law: although bullying is not a specific criminal offence in Irish law, there are laws that can apply in terms of harassing or threatening behaviour, for example, or indeed menacing and threatening communications. In fact, some cyber-bullying activities could be criminal offences under a range of different laws.

'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.'

Preventing Cyber-bullying

The best way to deal with cyber-bullying 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 cyber-bullying 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 contributes to, and are included in, activities.

There is no single solution to the problem of cyber-bullying. 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 cyber-bullying

The whole school community needs a shared, agreed definition of cyber-bullying. Everyone needs to be aware of the impact of cyber-bullying and the ways in which it differs from other forms of bullying. Young people and their parents should be made aware of pupils' 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 cyber-bullying 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 cyber-bullying.

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.

3. Making reporting cyber-bullying easier

No one should feel that they have to deal with cyber-bullying alone; by reporting any incident of bullying can be really hard for the person being bullied and for bystanders. Provide and publicise different ways of reporting cyber-bullying 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 realize and increase the potential or personalized 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 pupils’ experiences of bullying; include cyber-bullying, and a parent satisfaction survey. Publicise progress and activities to the whole school community – keep cyber-bullying a live issue and celebrate your success!

Responding to Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying 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 cyber-bullying.

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 cyber-bullying instances).
Check the person understands simple ways to prevent it from happening again, e.g. by changing contact details, blocking contacts or leaving a chat room.

*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.
Use disciplinary powers to confiscate phones that are being used to cyber-bully. Ask the pupil to tell you who they have sent messages on to.
In cases of illegal content, contact the Gardai, who can determine what needs to be kept for evidential purposes

Investigating Incidents

All bullying incidents should be properly recorded and investigated. Cyber-bullying can be a very serious matter and can constitute a criminal offence. In Irish law, there are criminal laws that can apply in terms of harassment of threatening and menacing communications.

*Advise pupils 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?

Technology-specific sanctions for pupils engaging in cyber-bullying behaviour could include limiting internet access for a period of time or removing the right to bring a mobile into school.

Key Safety Advice

The whole school community has a part play in ensuring cyber safety. 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

Always respect others- be careful what you say online and what images you send.
Think before you send- whatever you send can be made public very quickly and could stay online forever.
Treat your password like your toothbrush - keep it to yourself. Only give you mobile number or personal website address to trusted friends.
Block the bully- learn how to block or report someone who is behaving badly.
Don't retaliate or reply!
Save the evidence- learn how to keep records of offending messages, pictures or online conversations.
Make sure you tell: An adult you trust, or call a helpline like ChildLine on 1800 666 666 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, don't just stand there - if you see cyber-bullying going on, support the victim and report the bullying. How would you feel if no one stood up for you?



For Parents and carers







Be aware, your child may as likely cyber-bully as be a target of bullying. 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.
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.
Use the tools on the service and turn on in-built internet safety features.
Remind your child not to retaliate.
Keep the evidence of offending emails, text messages or online conversations.
Report cyber-bullying:
Contact your child's school if it involves another pupil, so that they can take appropriate action.
Contact the service provider.
If the cyber-bullying 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, and 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 friend 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 for forward rude or mean messages via their contacts list.
Chat rooms 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 	<p>Sending electronic, pictures and other files quickly and cheaply anywhere in the world.</p>	<p>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.</p>
Webcams 	<p>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</p>	<p>Making and sending inappropriate content. Persuading or threatening young people to act in inappropriate ways. Using inappropriate recordings to manipulate young people.</p>
Social Network sites 	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
Video Hosting 	<p>Accessing useful educational, entertaining and original creative video content and uploading your own</p>	<p>Posting embarrassing, humiliating film of someone.</p>
Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) 	<p>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.</p>	<p>Posting inappropriate messages or images. Hacking into someone else's account to post inappropriate comments or delete schoolwork.</p>
Gaming sites, consoles and virtual worlds 	<p>Live text or voice chat during online gaming between players across the world, or on handheld consoles with people in the same local area.</p> <p>Virtual worlds let users design their own avatars – a figure that represents them in the virtual world.</p>	<p>Name-calling, making abusive/derogatory remarks. Players may pick on weaker or less experienced users, repeatedly killing their characters.</p> <p>Forwarding unwanted messages to other devices in the immediate vicinity.</p>

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When and How to Contact the Service Provider:

Mobile phone operators have nuisance call centre set up and/or procedures in place to deal with such instances. They may be able to change the number of the person being bullied.

Mobile operators cannot bar a particular number from contacting a phone, but some phone headsets do have this capacity. Action can be taken against the bully's phone account (e.g. blocking their account) only with police involvement.

Contacts:

O2: 1909 or 353 61 203501:

Vodafone: 1907

3: 1800 949 546

Meteor: 1747

Eircom: 1890 260 260

Social Networking sites (e.g. MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, and Piczo):

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 pre-sorting features will be within the profiles themselves, so they are 'handy' for the user. If social networking sites do receive reports about cyber-bullying, 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 (top left-hand corner of the screen) on every Bebo profile page. Bebo users can also report specific media content (i.e. photos, videos, widgets) to the Bebo customer services team by clicking on a 'Report Abuse' link located below the content they wish to report.

MySpace: Reports can be made via the 'Contact MySpace' link, which is accessible at the bottom of the MySpace homepage (<http://Irelandmyspace.com>), and at the bottom of every page within the MySpace site.

Piczo: reports can be made within the service (there is a 'Report Bad Content' button at the top of every member's page). At the bottom of the home page and on the 'Contact US' page there is a link to a 'Report Abuse' page. The Report Abuse' page can be found at:

<http://pic3.piczo.com/public/piczo2/piczoAbuse.jsp>

Video-Hosting sites:

It is possible to get 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 as inappropriate. 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 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 section 5C

Instant 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 achieved 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=gb> 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'.

Chat rooms, individual website owners/forums, message board's host:

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 service 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 cyber-bullying. Adults need to help children and young people prepare for the hazards whilst promoting the many learning and social opportunities available.

'Cyber-bullying is the unacceptable face of new technology, and we need concerted action across society to address it. Schools must play a key role, and this new guidance will help them to identify and tackle instances of cyber-bullying more effectively, as well as providing practical advice and information on how to prevent it.'

'The internet and mobile phones have such positive potential to transform children's lives for the better. However, when they are misused, they can cause real pain. We hope this guidance and resources which Childnet has produced will be of practical use and help us all fight cyber-bullying'.

Stephen Carrick-Davies, CEO, Childnet International

