2. Preventing cyberbullying

Effectively addressing cyberbullying means making sure everyone in the school knows that bullying, including cyberbullying, is not acceptable and knows how to identify and take action against cyberbullying.

- Schools and other educational settings should take proactive measures to help prevent cyberbullying from occurring, and to reduce the impact of any incidents that do happen.
- All state schools are **required to have a clear policy** on tackling all forms of bullying, which is owned, understood and implemented by the whole school community.
- All schools are required to follow anti-discrimination laws, and staff must act to prevent discrimination, harassment and victimisation within the school.

Cyberbullying prevention should build on these requirements, promoting and maintaining a safe and welcoming environment.

Effectively addressing cyberbullying is an ongoing commitment, as a whole school community, to:

- understand and talk about cyberbullying
- keep policies and practices up to date
- make reporting easier
- promote the positive uses of technology
- evaluate the impact of your activities

2.1 A whole school community approach

For schools, 'whole school community' means learners, teachers, support staff, parents and carers, school leaders, governors, and all the people who provide support – including teaching assistants, break and lunchtime supervisors, and extended school provision staff. The school will need to provide a range of opportunities and routes for engagement with the different members of the whole school community.

The whole school community should be involved in agreeing an accessible and meaningful definition of bullying, which includes cyberbullying, and take an active role in preventing and responding to cyberbullying. As with other issues that potentially impact on the whole school community, wherever possible and appropriate, policies and processes should be discussed, agreed and developed collectively.

A positive whole school community ethos which promotes mutual respect and trust can help reduce incidents and the impact of incidents. All members of the school community should be confident that bullying behaviours and actions will be challenged, wherever they take place.

> "We have a weekly parent bulletin where we pass on information about internet issues to parents. By having this as a regular activity we can flag problem behaviours and guidance without creating moral panics about individual issues."
> Assistant principal, secondary school

2.2 Coordinate responsibility

A member of the senior leadership team will need to take overall responsibility for the coordination and implementation of cyberbullying prevention and responding strategies.

The schools anti-cyberbullying work will need to involve:

- the Senior Management Team
- staff with responsibility for pastoral care and behaviour issues
- the designated safeguarding lead (DSL)
- the IT network manager
- students
- teacher unions / professional associations representing staff
- school governors
- parents and carers

Schools should support and encourage parents and carers to talk to children and young people about cyberbullying. This will help reduce the number of bullying and cyberbullying incidents and limit the impact of harm caused.

The school will need to identify and work with key safeguarding partners from outside agencies, for example:

- the police

- the Local Authority

- the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

- your local Broadband Consortia (if they are providing you with IT services)

Key external organisations can provide information, guidance, and training on issues relating to specific kinds of bullying – for example gender, LGB&T and disability. They can support schools and staff in understanding different discriminatory behaviours, and equip the school to recognise and challenge them.

Share cyberbullying resources, practices and ideas with safeguarding leads from other schools and local authorities to ensure joined up and effective prevention.

2.3 Understanding and talking about cyberbullying

Developing and agreeing on a shared understanding of what cyberbullying is, and supporting school-wide discussion around the issue of cyberbullying provides a firm foundation for prevention activities. Everyone should be aware of the forms that cyberbullying can take, and the characteristics of cyberbullying.

The school should consider what it could do to actively promote the welfare of groups that are disproportionately affected by cyberbullying. Include discussion of prejudice-related bullying and hate incidents. Sexist, racist, homophobic, biphobic and transphobic cyberbullying, as well as cyberbullying related to disability, should be addressed.

> Many schools have found taking a creative approach to understanding and talking about cyberbullying can be particularly effective – with pupils producing plays, films, songs, websites, games and posters.

Children and young people need to be encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions, and be equipped to know how to respond if they are cyberbullied, or if they see someone else being cyberbullied. They also need to be given assurance that they are not on their own when it comes to addressing cyberbullying – that the school will help them if they or anyone they know is being cyberbullied.

> "Understanding and talking about the positives of the internet can help young people who have had a tough time with cyberbullying. Social media doesn't cause cyberbullying, but services like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube can be misused. Helping children and young people support and educate each other about the impact and consequences of bullying online can be a really effective way of combatting cyberbullying."
>
> Local Authority e-safety peer ambassador

Curriculum opportunities

In England, the Computing Programmes of Study for primary and secondary schools includes internet safety requirements at all key stages, to ensure children and young people can use technology safely and respectfully, and that they are able to identify risks and report concerns.

Schools are under a statutory duty to promote the Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development (SMSC) of their pupils. This includes issues relevant to cyberbullying, including:

- developing self-knowledge and self-esteem

- understanding the difference between right and wrong

- taking responsibility for your own behaviour and making a positive contribution locally and socially

- respecting cultural differences and others

Cyberbullying can also be addressed through the citizenship curriculum, through Personal Social Health and Economic education (PSHE), as well as Religious Education (RE).

Publicising Sanctions

Pupils need to be aware of the importance of safe physical and digital environments and how to behave responsibly when using technology. Pupils, parents and carers, staff and governors should all be aware of the consequences of cyberbullying. Young people and their parents and carers should be made aware of pupils' rights and responsibilities in their use of technologies, and what the sanctions are for cyberbullying and instances of online abuse. Information should be accessible to all pupils.

Staff can be disciplined, and in some cases will be prohibited from teaching, if they participate in unacceptable professional conduct. This includes sustained or serious bullying, which includes cyberbullying.

Provide information about bullying that takes place out of school

Schools have some powers in relation to out-of-school bullying, under the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Students and parents will need to know that the school can provide them with support if cyberbullying takes place out of school.

The school should publicise arrangements for dealing with issues in school holidays, including signposting parents and learners to relevant reporting routes and external support when appropriate.

2.4 Updating existing policies and practices

Cyberbullying issues will impact on a range of other policies – staff development, ICT support and infrastructure, and e-learning strategies, for example.

Schools should ensure that their anti-bullying policy and/or school behaviour policy makes reference to specific types of bullying, including cyberbullying.

> "County schools take a wide range of approaches to ensuring their anti-cyberbullying work is effective. This includes the involvement of student councils in updating policies to ensure student voice is heard – some schools have student versions of key policies to ensure they are accessible and understood."
>
> Local Authority e-Safety officer

Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) are the rules that students and staff agree to follow in order to use technology in school. AUPs represent how everyone in the school makes use of technology – what behaviour is expected and looks like within the community, to keep pupils and staff safe, and ensure the school is not brought into disrepute. Engage young people and staff in the development and drafting of AUP policies. It is important to ensure the language used is appropriate and accessible to the age or group of students it is intended for.

> "Our e-safety group has also just created a child-friendly AUP which we are about to launch. The policy has been written with input from children, staff and governors."
>
> Deputy Headteacher, primary school

It is for schools to decide if they wish to ban or restrict the use of mobile phones or devices or certain internet sites during school hours. It is open for schools to include in their behaviour / anti-bullying policies measures to restrict the use of mobile devices and websites as well as sanctions for their misuse. It is important that rules are well-publicised and that parents are made aware of them. All staff members should apply rules consistently.

2.5 Making reporting cyberbullying easier

Reporting any incident of bullying can be difficult for the person being bullied and for bystanders. It may be particularly difficult for young people to report cyberbullying if reporting will reveal something about their online activities that they do not want to share.

Engagement with technology involves feelings as well as actions – above all it is a social activity that allows young people to feel connected to their peers. Telling a young person who has been cyberbullied to keep their mobile phone switched off, delete an account, or to stay off the internet as a response to cyberbullying may be interpreted as a disruption of their social life and perceived as a punishment. In some cases, the knowledge that this is likely to be a response may prevent reporting.

All members of the community should recognise that asking for help is not a failing or a weakness, but a strength which shows courage and good judgement. All members of school staff should treat all disclosures of harm with respect and seriousness.

Publicise reporting routes

Make reporting incidents as easy as possible, providing a range of ways to report, including confidential and anonymous reporting routes.

All members of the community should know who they can talk to if they become aware of or suspect cyberbullying is taking place, or if they themselves experience cyberbullying. All staff should be clearly informed of reporting procedures by school leaders, and be aware how important it is to report cases as early as possible.

A bystander is someone who sees or knows about bullying or other forms of violence that is happening to someone else. Schools should ensure the community is aware of the importance of reporting all incidents they are aware of.

Setting up a pupil cyberbullying taskforce or peer support programme, or focusing on cyberbullying within existing groups – such as the school student council or student digital leaders group – can be an effective way to raise awareness and engage learners. Some organisations offer online safety peer education programmes to schools, for example, Childnet International's **Digital Leaders Programme**.

2.6 Promoting the positive use of technology

New technologies are being developed all the time. Keeping up-to-date and informed about young people's use of technologies, and their potential abuse and risks, is important. While children and young people are experts on their own use and can be a valuable source of information about technology, they may not necessarily understand all of the risks involved and the strategies for keeping their experience of technology safe and enjoyable.

Schools are required to ensure appropriate filters and appropriate monitoring systems are in place. Filtering and monitoring systems should protect learners from harmful materials, but not prevent schools from effectively teaching about and addressing online safety and cyberbullying. The UK Safer Internet Centre provide **advice on appropriate systems**.

Inflexible blocking and filtering policies can make it difficult for school staff to address incidents (for example, contacting service providers), and may restrict access to sites and information that is useful and relevant to students. Education and discussion around digital literacy, responsible use and online safety is essential to help children and young people deal confidently with problems that may arise, whether in or out of school.

It is important that learners and staff members are aware of what monitoring procedures are in place. Schools should ensure data protection procedures are adhered to in relation to monitoring data access and handling. Monitoring should be compliant with legal requirements and help protect the community against harassment, while respecting the rights of those who are being monitored.

Many schools make use of text, email, blogs and social networking services to inform and engage parents and carers. Schools should ensure staff making official use of social networking services and social media sites understand how to manage accounts responsibly.

> "We regularly post anti-cyberbullying tips and information for parents from one of our school Twitter accounts, and through an online newsletter and by letter."
> e-Safety Coordinator, secondary school

Promote online safety and digital literacy

Technology is being used in schools to support engaging, positive and effective learning, and for differentiation. Embedding appropriate technologies within practice can be used to enhance educational opportunities for all – making learning more flexible, creative, accessible and effective. Staff development around digital literacy and e-learning provides a great opportunity for staff to both develop their own practice and skills creatively, and to support children and young people in their safe and responsible use of technology.

Some young people will have restricted internet access, or restricted access to online spaces and communities, and may depend on school networks to find information, build positive connections, and participate in everyday life online in the same way their peers do. It is important that school staff do not make assumptions about young people's confidence and competence in relation to the use of technology, but support all learners in becoming digitally literate.

Some steps to take include:

- staff and students should never reply to upsetting messages or images. Instead, they should keep any evidence and report the incident.

- encourage staff and pupils to become familiar and confident with the account management tools of the services they use, particularly privacy and blocking features.

- ensure that staff and students are aware of the importance of keeping passwords confidential.

- everyone should know how to properly log out of accounts and lock devices. Students and staff should never leave unlocked devices unattended.

- staff and students should protect personal devices by using a PIN number or similar, and activate timed 'lock out'.

There is a range of resources available to schools which can be used in the classroom or to support individual learners, staff members and parents. Many are highlighted on the website of the **UK Safer Internet Centre**, where you can also find information about the annual Safer Internet Day, an opportunity to raise awareness and educate on the safe and positive use of the internet.

2.7 Evaluating the impact of prevention activities

Regular reviews of the impact of cyberbullying activities are vital to reduce incidents in the long term. The school should consider how it might measure the impact of prevention activities most effectively, as well as measuring the impact of prevention activities, and how it will communicate findings to the whole school community.

When an issue is made visible and people feel safe to discuss and identify incidents – for example, sexist or homophobic cyberbullying, it is likely that the school will see the number of reports relating to those issues increase in the short term.

Many schools conduct annual student and staff cyberbullying surveys. These address how safe members of the school community feel, how comfortable they feel in reporting cyberbullying incidents, and how happy they are with the ways incidents are dealt with. It is useful also to conduct a parent and carer satisfaction survey. Asking questions about cyberbullying will provide you with an indication about awareness and the success of your prevention work.

Publicise progress, activities and impact findings to the whole school community.

Preventing cyberbullying: checklist

✓ Are the senior leadership team confident and up-to-date in their knowledge of understanding, preventing and responding to cyberbullying?

✓ How does the school ensure the whole school community is involved in anti-cyberbullying activities, including the creation of related policies?

✓ Do staff have an understanding of how the children and young people in the school community use technology? Is the school familiar with the devices, sites and apps the community use?

✓ Do all members of staff understand how to report any incident of online abuse they become aware of? How are students encouraged to report cyberbullying?

✓ Does the school support anonymous and confidential reporting?

✓ How does the school support learners who are cyberbullied out of school hours, and in school holidays?

✓ How is the school providing digital literacy support and opportunities for staff and students?

✓ How is the school monitoring and measuring the impact of its prevention work?

Resources

The Your Own Technology Survey (YOTS) is a free tool to help schools and researchers better understand the digital technology their students use out of school.

The UK Safer Internet Centre have produced a guide for education settings and filtering providers about establishing 'appropriate levels' of filtering and monitoring: **www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/teachers-and-professionals/appropriate-filtering-and-monitoring**

The South West Grid for Learning's **360 degree safe self-review tool** is free for schools to use, and can help schools take a strategic approach to their online safety work.

The **Childnet Digital Leaders Programme** helps to empower young people in both primary and secondary schools to champion digital citizenship and digital creativity within their schools and to educate their peers, parents and teachers about staying safe online.

The Diana Award Anti-Bullying Campaign empowers young people, professionals and parents to tackle all forms of bullying as Ambassadors who help to keep their peers safe online and offline.

The South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) **e-Safety Policy Template** addresses a range of e-safety and cyberbullying issues, and includes a section on a school 'Search and Deletion Policy', as well as an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP).

London Grid for Learning School **Online Safety Policies page** provides schools with a wide range of policy resources, information and guidance, including AUP templates and model letters for parents and carers.

Kent Online Safety (e-Safety) Guidance pages host a range of documents, policies and templates, including a school e-safety policy generator and AUP policies.

True Vision is a site providing information about identifying and reporting hate crimes and incidents, including racist and homophobic material.

Discrimination: your rights from Gov.UK.

Cyberbullying and children and young people with SEN and disabilities: guidance for teachers and other professionals (2014) Anti-Bullying Alliance.

The **Childnet STAR SEN Toolkit** provides practical advice and teaching activities to help educators explore e-safety with young people with autism spectrum disorders in Key Stage 3 and 4.

Stop Online Abuse provides information for women and LGB&T people.

Stonewall provides a range of research and resources for schools, including Staying Safe Online (2014), Working with Faith Communities, and Tackling Homophobic Language in schools.

Youth Chances is an action research project working to improve the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people across England.

Government Equalities Office and Department for Education (2014) Evidence review: what works in tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying among school-age children and young people?