

Social media: Cyberbullying

Background Note

Overview

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to bully a person or group. Bullying is repeated behaviour by an individual or group with the intent to harm another person or group. Cyberbullying can involve social, psychological and even, in extreme cases, physical harm. Young people can cyberbully other young people through abusive texts and emails, hurtful messages, images or videos, imitating others online, excluding others online or through nasty online gossip and chat. It can cause shame, guilt, fear, withdrawal, loneliness and depression.

Because children and young people are often online it can be hard for them to escape cyberbullying. Nasty messages, videos and gossip can spread fast online and are hard to delete. Sometimes the attackers can be anonymous and hard to stop. This can make it harder for adults to see and manage.

Facts about cyberbullying

- Every 7 seconds someone in the world is cyberbullied.
- Approximately 50% of victims know their perpetrator (usually another student at same school).
- Approximately 50% of victims met their perpetrator online and did not know them.
- Both girls and boys cyberbully.
- Girls are most likely to be perpetrators and victims.
- Girls are most likely to spread rumours.
- Boys are most likely to post hurtful pictures and videos.
- Most cyberbullying occurs amongst mid-teens (ages 14-17).
- Perpetrators of cyberbullying are generally the same age as the victim.



Signs of a young person being cyberbullied

Research indicates that 1 in 5 young people (8-17 years old) have experienced cyberbullying¹, however, research shows students often don't tell an adult. They fear we will disconnect them from supportive friends and family and may overreact and make the situation worse. There are some signs you might be able to pick up at school that indicate a child may be the target of cyberbullying. Look for:

- reluctance to go to school
- falling behind in school work and homework
- unexpectedly disinterested or stops using the computer
- becomes withdrawn, distressed, anxious or lacking confidence
- becomes aggressive and begins to bully other young people
- disturbed or deprived sleep
- appears to be depressed, angry or frustrated after computer use
- mood swings
- becomes anti-social and isolated from peers and family
- higher levels of absenteeism
- increased negative self-perception
- a decline in physical health
- suicidal thoughts—this should be reported to the administration and the parents/carers immediately for appropriate action.

Cyberbullying can happen to anyone, however often the young people involved in cyberbullying are also involved in other kinds of bullying.

Responding to cyberbullying

If you notice a child in your class or the school yard showing any of the above signs, or other worrying and out of character behaviours, tell them you are worried and want to help. If they won't open up to you, recruit others to talk to them (another teacher, guidance officer or school counsellor).

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Keep a close eye on their interactions and ask other relevant staff to do the same, particularly at recess and lunchtime. If they seem disconnected from others encourage them to join lunchtime groups and recruit kind and supportive students to look out for them. If other students appear to be targeting them or excluding them, enact appropriate consequences as per the school's bullying policy.

Any significant concerns should be discussed with the student and their parents or carers. Students should be provided with options for psychological support including school counselling or anonymous counselling through the Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800.

Katz, I., M. Keeley, B. Spears, C. Taddeo, T. Swirski and S. Bates *Research on youth exposure to, and management of, cyberbullying incidents in Australia: Synthesis report (SPRC Report 16/2014)* Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Australia, 2014.

<https://www.communications.gov.au/publications/publications/research-youth-exposure-and-management-cyber-bullying-incident-australia-synthesis-report-june-2014>.

Relevant resources

Professional development

[Outreach programs](#), Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner

Outreach programs have been developed to train students, parents and teachers about online safety through the provision of web-based and face-to-face events.

Websites

[Staying safe online](#), Kids Helpline

[Cyberbullying information for teachers](#), Office of the Children's esafety Commissioner

Provides activities, resources and practical advice to help kids, teens, teachers and parents safely enjoy the online world.

[Cyber Strong Schools](#)

An online resource to assist teachers to build their capacity to talk to, and help, young people with their technology use, particularly use of social networking.

[Bullying. No Way!](#)

Aims to create learning environments where every student and school community member is safe, supported, respected, valued and free from bullying, violence, harassment and discrimination.

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[ThinkUKnow](#) for young people 11-17 years old

Informative site for teens on cybersafety. Also has a 'report abuse' tab which is monitored by the Federal Police.

[Fact sheets/booklets/videos](#)

[Tagged](#)

A video which encourages young people to reflect on the real life consequences of cyberbullying, sexting and a negative digital reputation.

[Cyberbullying](#), Legal Aid WA

Postscript

This Background Note relates to the following Learning Activities:

- [Safety first](#)
- [Online vs face-to-face communication](#)

Date printed

8 April 2020