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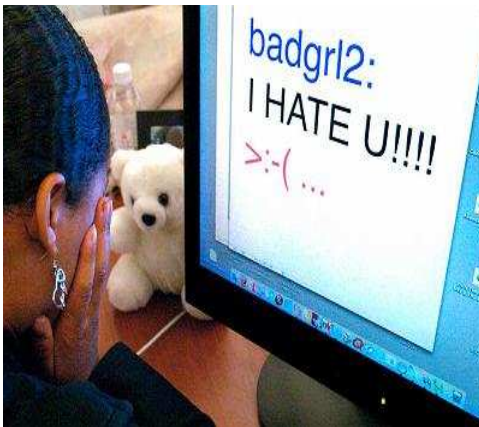
Safer Schools – Safer Communities

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Cyberbullying (UK)

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Cyberbullying is a type of aggression defined by Childnet International as the ‘sending or posting of harmful or cruel text or images using the internet or other digital communication devices’. The Anti-Bullying Association has identified seven types of cyberbullying, ranging from abusive text messages, emails and phone calls, to bullying in internet chatrooms, social networking sites and instant messaging:



Text messages – unwelcome texts that are threatening or cause discomfort.

Picture/video-clips via mobile phone cameras – images sent to others to make the victim feel threatened or embarrassed.

Mobile phone calls – silent calls or abusive messages; or stealing the victim’s phone and using it to harass others, to make them believe the victim is responsible.

Emails – threatening or bullying emails, often sent using a pseudonym or somebody else’s name.

Chatroom bullying – menacing or upsetting responses to children or young people when they are in a web-based chatroom.

Instant messaging – unpleasant messages sent as children conduct real-time conversations online.

Bullying via websites – use of defamatory blogs (web logs), personal websites and online personal polling sites.



Teachers too can be victims. The advent of cyberbullying also adds a new and worrying gender dimension to the wider problem of bullying. Ten years ago, psychologists thought of aggression in verbal and physical terms, traditionally seen as a male domain. But cyberbullying is more akin to relational or indirect bullying, such as rumour-spreading, where female pupils are more likely to be involved.

Cyberbullying is insidious; it can be conducted 24 hours a day, seven days a week, following children into their private space and outside school hours.

It can be anonymous. The audience is large and can be reached rapidly.

Unlike other forms of bullying, a single incident can be experienced as a multiple attack – a video posted to a website can be copied to many different sites. Bystanders can become accessories by passing on a humiliating message.

Messages on social networking sites remain there to damage social life and friendships and, in the case of teaching staff, reputation and credibility.



Tackling cyberbullying

There is both a moral and legal duty placed on schools to protect their members and provide a safe and healthy environment. This should ensure that steps must be taken in respect of bullying to deal with the problem at source. Nevertheless, the question of how to tackle bullying generally has been debated for many years and with mixed success.

Research conducted by Childline in 2003 highlighted that despite years of schools attempting to take a tougher line on bullying, two out of three secondary-school pupils would feel uncomfortable telling a teacher they were being bullied. More than half of primary and secondary school pupils surveyed said that bullying remained a problem in their schools. Schools that did not involve their pupils in developing anti-bullying initiatives had higher levels of bullying.



The Ofsted research indicates that these issues have not gone away. Effective anti-bullying strategies need to start with adults listening and learning from pupils about their experiences, how they cope, and what their support needs are.

The duty on schools to protect their members is as applicable to cyberbullying as it is to other forms of bullying. It would be naive to suggest that cyberbullying can be eradicated from the school community, but it would appear that more could and should be done. Recent research by British Telecom, in conjunction with CEOP, the Internet Watch Foundation, Internet Content Rating Association, Get Safe Online, Stop it Now and Yahoo found that 70% of teachers themselves did not know where to get advice if they suspected a child was being bullied on the internet.

In order to deal effectively with cyberbullying, the school (including school governors, headteachers and senior managers) needs to decide who will take responsibility for coordinating and implementing cyberbullying prevention and response strategies. Ideally this should be a member of the school's senior management team and/or the existing member of staff responsible for the school's overall anti-bullying activity.

While there is no single solution to the problem, guidance issued by the DCSF produced in association with Childnet International has identified five key areas schools need to address.

Key areas that schools must address

The starting point must be a clear and agreed definition of what constitutes cyberbullying. Once agreed, everyone in the school needs to be aware of its impact and the ways it differs from other forms of bullying. Pupils and parents need to know what pupils' responsibilities are in the use of information communications technology (ICT), and what sanctions will be imposed for misuse. Pupils and parents must also be aware that the school now has a statutory obligation under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to provide them with support if the cyberbullying takes place outside school.

It is vitally important for the school to review and update its anti-bullying policy as well as all other policies relating to behaviour, pastoral care, e-learning and existing acceptable use policies (rules that students have to follow in order to use ICT in school). Schools must decide if they wish to ban or restrict the use of mobile phones or certain internet sites during school hours, and what sanctions will be imposed for their misuse. All such policies should be published and widely publicised.

Incidents of cyberbullying should be recorded in ways that are simple, easy and varied – some schools have introduced council task forces, peer reporting or anonymous reporting, for example. All incidents should be investigated thoroughly. The school should be able to conduct searches of internet use records. Again, the clear message is to ensure that the whole school is aware of the policies in place. This publicity itself may act as a disincentive for potential bullies.

Cyberbullying issues will impact on a range of other policies, including staff development, ICT support and infrastructure and e-learning. General technology safety should form part of the school's positive promotion of such technology and needs to include discussion of 'netiquette', e-safety and digital literacy.

Regular reviews are vital to ensure that the policies are working and remain up to date. This could be achieved via annual surveys of pupils' experiences of bullying in all its forms, as well as parent satisfaction surveys. Again publicising progress and activity within the school keeps the issues alive and relevant.

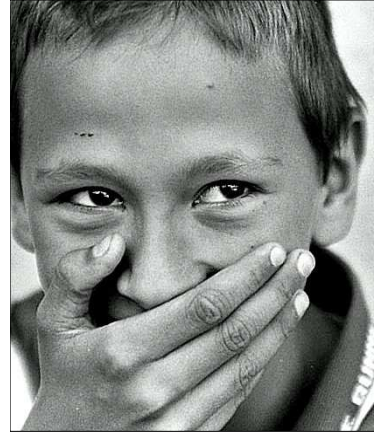


School cyberbullying policies alone cannot deal with the problem. Service providers are also under an obligation to deal with cyberbullying and schools should be aware of the obligations placed on service providers and the sanctions that can be taken. Mobile phone operators have nuisance call centres and procedures to deal with cyberbullying. Operators can change the number of the person being bullied, although they cannot bar a number from contacting a phone (some handsets, however, do have this capacity). Phone accounts can be blocked, but only with police involvement.

Social and video hosting networking sites, Instant Messenger (IM) and chatrooms or individual websites should have clear and prominent reporting mechanisms. Site providers can remove content that is illegal or breaks the terms and conditions of their licence, and can delete the accounts of those who break the rules.

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The "IAMS SAFE" electronically published newsletter focusing on news and resource information relating to bullying, safer schools and safer communities is produced in Ottawa by Kids-Can, a not for profit organization offering a variety of training and awareness programs for educators and students. Our newsletter efforts are voluntary and carried out primarily by youth!



About us

In 2002 we coordinated Canada's first national conference on bullying and went on to present yet another in 2005 and again in 2007. All three conferences were "sold out" and the rated as huge successes.

We also write and promote productions such as 'You're Not the Boss of Me', a play about bullying which has been featured in various parts of Canada; and we were the driving force in the development of the Ottawa Anti Bullying Coalition (OABC).

Our work includes:

- Distributing this free monthly e-mail newsletter to over 3,000 subscribers around the world
- Organizing seminars, training courses and conferences
- Providing professionals with comprehensive tool kits
- Our youth built and maintained website www.iamSAFE.ca

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