

Cyber-bullying and the protection of students

Advice for parents and carers



Research shows that school is one of the safest places for children and young people to access the internet.

What is cyber-bullying?

Cyber-bullying is an intentional, repeated behaviour by an individual or group to cause distress or undue pressure to others using technology.

Today's technology allows children to communicate instantly with others in both positive and negative ways. Cyber-bullying includes all communications that seek to threaten, humiliate, intimidate, control or put another person or persons down.

How does cyber-bullying work?

Cyber-bullying can be carried out through an internet service such as:

- email
- chat room
- discussion group or forum
- instant messaging

- social networking websites such as Bebo, Facebook, MySpace or YouTube.

Cyber-bullying can also include bullying through mobile phones by:

- text and picture messaging
- video clips
- phone calls.

Cyber-bullies can flame (repeatedly leave negative messages), harass, exclude or cyberstalk victims using these technologies.

What are schools doing to protect students?

The Department strives to make schools a safe place for young people. As such, any instance of bullying is unacceptable. Schools and families need to work together to make sure that students use technology appropriately and are equipped to form positive relationships.

Policies

All New South Wales government schools are required to have a plan to counter bullying and this is outlined in the *Anti-bullying Plan for Schools (2005)*. This plan outlines strategies for parents, students and teachers to identify, report and deal with bullying behaviour. This plan can be accessed under the 'Our Policies' section of the internet site: www.det.nsw.edu.au

Filters

The Department maintains a strict filtering system to ensure that all websites and emails viewed on school computers are appropriate for children. Anything not appropriate is automatically blocked.

Programs

There is a range of programs available in schools that promote positive relationships and support students. These include buddy and peer support programs,

mentoring and transition programs and conflict resolution programs.

Bullying behaviour is specifically addressed through curriculum areas such as Personal Development, Health and Physical Education. Child protection education and values education also promote strategies to counter bullying.

What can you do to protect your child?

1. Talk to your child

- Discuss online safety and reassure your child that you are there to help if they need it.

2. Provide safe and supervised access

- Keep your family computer in a high traffic area so you can keep an eye on your child's technology use.
- Install safety software on your computer. For example, anti-virus, spy ware, a firewall and filters. Free internet content filters are available at www.netalert.gov.au

3. Monitor technology use

- Take an interest in what your child is doing online.
- Remind your child of 'stranger danger', they might think they are talking to another child but it could be an adult.

4. Get involved and be aware

- Has your child's behaviour changed recently? Are they spending more or less time online? Are your mobile phone bills suddenly through the roof?
- Encourage your child to come to you if anybody says or does anything to make them feel uncomfortable.

5. Keep your knowledge up to date

– visit:

- www.schools.nsw.edu.au/news/technology
- www.netalert.gov.au
- www.thinkuknow.com.au

Help is available

Your child's school

If you are aware of school-related bullying issues, encourage your child to notify a trusted adult at school or notify the school yourself. New South Wales government schools are equipped to provide advice and support to help resolve this issue.

Offensive websites

If you are concerned about offensive websites, contact the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) www.acma.gov.au and they will investigate the matter.

Report harassment and threats

Report incidents of online harassment to your local police and your Internet Service Provider (ISP). If your child is bullied through a mobile phone, report the problem to your phone service provider. They can help you block messages or calls from certain senders. If the problem is persistent, you may want to consider changing your number.

Helpline for parents and carers

For confidential support, call the Net Alert helpline on telephone 1800 880 176.

Helpline for children and young people

Confidential counselling is available for children and young people from the Kids Help Line on telephone 1800 551 800.

Student Welfare Consultant

If you have contacted the school, but feel that you need more support or advice, contact the student welfare consultant at your local Department of Education and Training regional office. Find your regional office telephone number at the website www.det.nsw.edu.au/contactus/index.htm

Other useful websites

NSW Public Schools

www.schools.nsw.edu.au/news/technology

Bullying. No way!

www.bullyingnoway.com.au

Kids Help Line

www.kidshelpline.com.au

Reach Out!

www.reachout.com.au