

Cyberbullying information and advice for teachers and principals



The information in this guide appears online at <http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/teachers/>

What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is bullying. It's using the internet, a mobile phone or other technology like a digital camera to hurt somebody or embarrass them.

What does cyberbullying involve?

Bullying in 'cyberspace' covers the use of the internet or other devices like mobile phones, cameras or game consoles to do any of the following:

- Send anonymous texts or picture messages to a mobile phone
- Post nasty or threatening comments on the victim's social networking profile on popular websites like Bebo and Facebook
- Hack existing website accounts or create fake profiles for people they want to intimidate or embarrass.
- Circulate photos or videos of people they are targeting – these can be real images or digitally altered to cause offence or embarrass the victim.
- Scare or embarrass their victims and victims may feel upset or ashamed.
- Spread rumours or try to isolate others using this new technology.

How is cyberbullying different to other forms of bullying?

Cyberbullying is bullying. But where face-to-face bullying ended when the target got home from school or work, cyberbullies can use the internet or their mobile to continue attacks on victims at any time of the day or night.

Young people are growing up with access to more and more technology, often using the internet and mobiles as the main way to reach friends. If threats continue outside of school it may make the target feel like there's no escape.

If messages are sent anonymously this can make the bullying feel more intimidating. And if the bullying occurs online the harassment can be intensified, especially if public hate pages or embarrassing videos are passed around the school community.

Is cyberbullying a big deal?

Yes, very much so. In 2007, around 20% of secondary school students in the Youth 2007 study reported they had been cyberbullied in the past year.

The effects of cyberbullying

Students who were bullied were around 3 times more likely to be anxious and depressed than students who did not report being targeted by bullying (Youth 2000 study).

UK research (Smith, 2008) found that the effects of cyberbullying were similar to face-to-face bullying, and that some cases (i.e., those involving videos of the target) may be worse than face-to-face bullying experiences. The all-day/all-night potential of cyberbullying can be associated with particularly high distress and negative student outcomes.

Cyberbullying and the law

Cyberbullying can be a criminal offence under a range of different laws, including sections 249-252 of the Crimes Act. The age of criminal responsibility in New Zealand is 10 years. If young people commit an offence they may face warnings, police diversions, or a Family Group Conference. Young people over 16 who commit an offence are treated as adults by the courts.

Education Law in New Zealand (Education Act 1998) includes the National Administrative Guideline 5, which says that schools are to provide a “safe physical and emotional environment for students”. This includes addressing behaviours (such as cyberbullying) that occur outside school but which have implications for student’s well-being while at school.

What can I do to prevent cyberbullying amongst my students?

Cyberbullying is bullying. Apply school policy on bullying to cyberbullying.

Use the Lets Fight it All Together and At a Distance resources to address cyberbullying with your students.

Register for your free DVD at <http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/order.php>

Classroom interventions

- Continue to promote safe and responsible use of technology in your learning environment
- Develop a “class contract” with your students that includes appropriate behaviour online/on mobile both inside and outside of school time.
- Ensure all students understand your school’s ICT Use Agreements (templates are available from NetSafe).

- Make sure parents and caregivers are informed about what cyberbullying means and that it is not tolerated among your students.
- Create a pledge in your classroom to be positive bystanders

For more advice on staying safe online see our NetBasics website and links to popular New Zealand websites and services at <http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/links.php>

Are 'bystanders' important?

Bystanders are people who do not start a bullying situation but see it happening.

Bystanders can help or hinder bullying situations.

75% of peer (bystander) actions in a UK study (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999) were successful in stopping bullying.

The 4 types of bystander

There are four types of bystanders (Salmivalli, 1999):

- * Assistants: join in on bullying and help the bully
- * Reinforcers: laugh and encourage the bully but don't personally attack the target
- * Outsiders: don't get "involved", but see it happen
- * Defenders: Try to stop the bullying on behalf of the target

How bystanders can help

Defenders can be very effective in addressing cyberbullying situations. Cyberbullying defenders can avoid the physical dangers of intervening in face-to-face bullying situations.

Bystanders can intervene anonymously – by telling someone/reporting abuse – and secretly – by talking directly to the target without an audience.

Bystanders to a cyberbullying situation help the person being bullied by letting them know that they support them.

Bystanders can save the evidence of the bullying and report the bullying to someone who can help (e.g., a principal at school, a parent or caregiver, etc.).

What do principals and teachers say?

"Finally, a resource that reflects New Zealand schools and the reality that our kids face in the 21st Century. 'At a Distance' is an excellent classroom resource from which to initiate discussions with children. It clearly shows children acceptable strategies to deal with

cyberbullying and bullying in general. 'At a Distance' sits well with the 'Keeping Ourselves Safe' resource."

Don Biltcliff. Year 5/6 Teacher, Mangere Bridge School, Auckland

"Bullying is a serious issue in all schools. Cyberbullying is an insidious method of destroying a young person's confidence and sense of well-being. This DVD offers a practical, compelling resource for teachers to use to engage classes in understanding, discussing and addressing the issues of cyberbullying. I highly recommend it."

David Lett, Deputy Principal - Mount Roskill Grammar School, NetSafe Board Member

'At a Distance' – standing up to cyberbullying

Watch the New Zealand made short film about cyberbullying at <http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/at-a-distance-film/>.

All New Zealand state and state integrated schools can register to receive free copies of the 'Let's Fight it Together' and 'At a Distance' films on DVD, along with the companion resource packs.

Please register your details at <http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/order.php>. You can also watch the UK short film 'Let's Fight it Together', created by Childnet International, at <http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/fullFilm.aspx>.