

Cyberbullying

A whole-school community issue

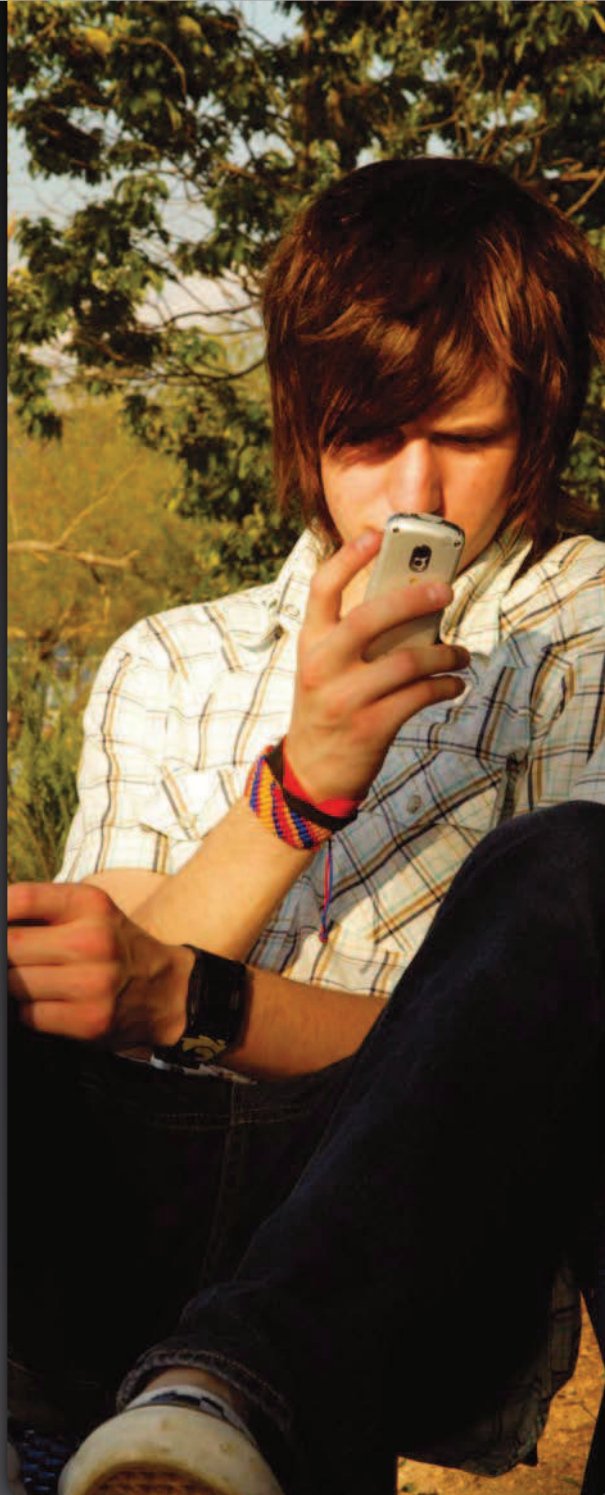
Introduction

Today's children and young people have grown up in a world that is very different from that of most adults. Many young people experience the internet and mobile phones as a positive, productive and creative part of their activities and development of their identities; always on and always there. Above all, information communication technologies support social activity that allows young people to feel connected to their peers.

Unfortunately, technologies are also being used negatively. When children are the target of bullying via mobile phones or the internet, they can feel alone and very misunderstood. They may not be able to identify that what is happening to them is a form of bullying, or be confident that the adults around them will understand it that way either. Previously safe and enjoyable environments and activities can become threatening and a source of anxiety.

As mobile phone and internet use become increasingly common, so has the misuse of this technology to bully. Current research in this area indicates that cyberbullying is a feature of many young people's lives. One study carried out for the Anti-Bullying Alliance found that 22% of young people reported being the target of cyberbullying.

This document explains how cyberbullying is different from other forms of bullying, how to respond and combat misuse through a shared responsibility, and how to promote and develop a culture of confident technology users to support innovation, e-safety and digital literacy skills.



'**Cyberbullying, A whole-school community issue**' is a summary of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Guidance for schools on preventing and responding to cyberbullying, which was written in conjunction with Childnet International and published in September 2007. This document seeks to give practical advice to young people, their carers and school staff about the issue of cyberbullying.

What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the use of Information Communications Technology (ICT), particularly mobile phones and the internet, deliberately to upset someone else.

What's different about cyberbullying?

Bullying is not new, but some features of cyberbullying are different from other forms of bullying:

- 1. 24/7 and the invasion of home/ personal space.** Cyberbullying can take place at any time and can intrude into spaces that have previously been regarded as safe or personal.
- 2. The audience can be very large and reached rapidly.** The difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages means the scale and scope of cyberbullying can be greater than for other forms of bullying. Electronically forwarded content is hard to control, and the worry of content resurfacing can make it difficult for targets to move on.
- 3. People who cyberbully may attempt to remain anonymous.** This can be extremely distressing for those being bullied. The person cyberbullying may never be in the same physical space as their target.
- 4. The profile of the bully and target.** Cyberbullying can take place both between peers and across generations; teachers have also been targets. Age or size are not important. Bystanders can also become accessories to the bullying; for example, by passing on a humiliating image.
- 5. Some instances of cyberbullying are known to be unintentional.** It can be the result of not thinking (something sent as a joke may be deeply upsetting or offensive to the recipient) or a lack of awareness of the consequences – for example saying something negative online about another pupil, or friend that they don't expect to be forwarded or viewed outside their immediate group.
- 6. Many cyberbullying incidents can themselves act as evidence.** This is one of the reasons why it's important to know how to respond!

Cyberbullying and the law.

Education law: Bullying is never acceptable. The school community has a duty to protect all its members and provide a safe, healthy environment. A range of Education Acts and government initiatives highlight these obligations.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006) outlines some legal powers which relate more directly to cyberbullying. Head teachers have the power 'to such an extent as is reasonable' to regulate the conduct of pupils when they are off site. The EIA also provides a defence for school staff in confiscating items such as mobile phones from pupils.

Civil and criminal law: Although bullying is not a specific criminal offence in UK law, there are laws that can apply in terms of harassing or threatening behaviour, for example, or indeed menacing and threatening communications. In fact, some cyberbullying activities could be criminal offences under a range of different laws, including the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, which has both criminal and civil provision, the Malicious Communications Act 1988, section 127 of the Communications Act 2003, and the Public Order Act 1986.

'I felt that no one understood what I was going through. I didn't know who was sending me these messages, and I felt powerless to know what to do.'

A pupil