**Cyberbullying in Schools**

**ETB Ireland Draft Guidelines - December 2012**

**What is cyber bullying?**

* **Bullying** is repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical conduct by an individual or group against others. Bullying is always wrong and is unacceptable behaviour which should never be overlooked or ignored.
* A fight or argument between two people of equal power is not usually seen as bullying. Although bullying often begins when friends fall out, we usually only judge it to be bullying when one person or a group deliberately singles out others as a target and sets out to repeatedly humiliate or threaten them.
* **Cyber bullying** refers to bullying which is carried out using the internet, mobile phone or other technological devices.
* **Cyber bullying** generally takes a psychological rather than physical form but is often part of a wider pattern of ‘traditional’ bullying.
* It can take the form of sending nasty, mean or threatening messages, emails, photos or video clips; silent phone calls; putting up nasty posts or pictures on a message board, website or chat room; saying hurtful things in a chat room; pretending to be someone else in a chat room or message board or text message and saying hurtful things; or accessing someone’s accounts to make trouble for them.
* Cyberbullying most commonly occurs through social networking sites (for example Facebook), Twitter, YouTube, Google+, Flickr, text/picture/instant messaging, chat rooms, gaming sites and email. However, the range of web-based tools that can be used **to cyberbully** are constantly changing. Most recently, the focus has been on [Ask.fm](http://www.webwise.ie/AskfmGuide.shtm) in relation to a number of high profile alleged cases of bullying. An explanation of how different communications technologies can be used to cyberbully may be accessed [**here**](http://www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/download/NCC097532).
* Once-off posting of nasty comments on someone’s profile or uploading photographs intended to embarrass someone, while it constitutes unacceptable behaviour and should not be tolerated, is not, by itself, bullying. Bullying is widely agreed to be **behaviour that is sustained** or **repeated** over time and which has a **serious negative effect** on the well-being of the victim and there is a **deliberate** intention to hurt, humiliate or embarrass.
* Making young people or adults panic about every unpleasant message they receive is inadvisable as it can undermine a young person’s resilience. Some young people are resilient and cope well with one or two nasty messages while true victims of cyberbullying need urgent appropriate support.
* In addressing cyberbullying in a school, pressure should not be put on young people to admit to being a victim of bullying. Rather, every effort should be made to ‘empower them to take steps to keep safe and to manage the situation as if it were simply a problem to be solved – a problem that does not involve a loss of face for them’[[1]](#footnote-1).
* It usually involves an imbalance of power so that the victim/s cannot defend themselves.
* There is a clear intention to hurt, humiliate or embarrass.
* New and ever changing electronic tools make it very easy to harass a target anonymously 24/7 – so the target is literally safe nowhere.
* **To protect young people from cyberbullying**, parents/guardians and teachers need to be constantly updated about the ever-changing online world of children and young people and about the resources available to address cyberbullying.
* While research evidence about the extent of cyberbullying is limited, it may be assumed, on the basis of the surveys that have been conducted, that a large number of young people experience abusive or aggressive messages via their mobile phone or the internet. One UK survey found that 49% of respondents had received at least one such message. More worryingly, a sizable proportion of young people are negatively affected by cyberbullying while a significant number of young people have their adolescence blighted by the experience of cyberbullying – sometimes with tragic results.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* **Some instances of cyberbullying can be unintentional**. They 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 student or friend that the sender does not anticipate will be forwarded or viewed outside of the immediate group.

This definition is adapted from ‘[A Guide to Cyberbullying’](http://www.internetsafety.ie/website/ois/oisweb.nsf/page/DPCY-7LYJ4V1343473-en/%24File/Final%20-%20Low%20Res.pdf) published by the [Office for Internet Safety](http://www.internetsafety.ie/).

**Who engages in cyberbullying? Who is the target of cyberbullying**

* While males and females cyberbully, Irish and [International](http://www.safetyweb.com/blog/cyberbullying-girls-more-likely-to-become-cyberbullies-than-boys/) research suggests that females are more likely to cyberbully and to be the targets of cyberbullying.
* Girls tend to be more willing than boys to admit to being cyberbullied thus the extent to which boys are bullied may be understated. This may, to some extent, be interpreted as a macho response to avoid admitting to being a victim, weak or disliked.
* Cyberbullying can happen to anyone. Just look at all the YouTube comment pages or gossip sites and forums that are full of people putting other people down.
* A 2011 NUI Maynooth study of 12 to 18 year olds found that **17% of teens have experienced cyber bullying while one in 10% have carried out the bullying**. The NUIM research also reported the following. Indeed, it is believed that these figures understate the extent of Cyberbullying.
* 1 in 5 admitted to having experienced more ‘traditional’ bullying in the six months prior to the study.
* In the case of girls, the bullying was usually done by a single female or small group of females.
* Victims of bullying are usually bullied by students who are in the same year but in a different class, and
* It can be difficult for victims to know who is bullying them due to the anonymity of the internet.
* Teenage victims of cyber-bullying find it worse than traditional bullying because there is no escape from it.
* Due to social media, it’s also easier for others to witness the bullying but still do nothing about it.
* Those who are badly bullied are more likely than those who are mildly bullied to say that ‘the bullying got worse or stayed the same if they did tell someone’ and so they often do not report it.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* The internet and mobile phones have provided ‘new tools for bullies to pursue cyberhomophobia. Perpetrators can conceal their identity to pursue a victim into every corner of their life, 24 hours a day, and amplify the bullying in view of an audience’[[4]](#footnote-4).
* While students are most commonly the victims of cyberbullying, members of staff can also be targeted.

**How can schools respond effectively to cyberbullying?**

**1 Adopt a whole school approach**

The best way to address cyberbullying is to prevent it happening in the first place and, where it does occur, to detect it as early as possible and to provide the target/s with timely and appropriate support and the perpetrators, where identified, with a response that ensures they do not continue to bully.

All available evidence suggests that these goals are most effectively achieved where there is a whole school approach to dealing with bullying and cyberbullying–where there is a real commitment ‘on the part of management, staff, students, parents and indeed the wider society to work together’[[5]](#footnote-5) to agree and implement policies and practices to address bullying and cyberbullying.

It is also important to ensure that all school policies and practices that impinge on bullying and cyberbullying are aligned and coherent and that all members of the school community are fully informed on and supportive of the agreed policies and practices.

The whole school community needs to know that the school has clear policies and practices in place to prevent cyberbullying, and where it occurs, to deal with it effectively.

The following policies and practices are central to ensuring that cyberbullying is addressed effectively in a school.

1. The school’s **Code of Behaviour** should specifically make reference to bullying and cyberbullying and those who engage in it or in any way support it. It should make it very clear that those who further disseminate any material used for the purposes of cyberbullying are also in breach of the Code and that those who come across such material are required to bring it to the attention of the school staff – so that the offending material may be removed and the target appropriately supported.
2. The school’s **Anti-bullying Policy** should specifically define cyberbullying.

**For example:** *cyberbullying refers to a situation where anyone is repeatedly tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another person using text messaging, email, instant messaging or any other type of digital technology.*

**The Anti-bullying Policy** should set out very clearly how the school deals with reports of bullying and cyberbullying and there should be a clear link with the school’s Code of Behaviour – particularly in relation to the way alleged breaches of the Code of Behaviour around bullying and cyberbullying are investigated and the disciplinary options that are available to the school where it concludes that a student has breached of the Code of Behaviour.

While much bulling and cyberbullying commences in the school, students are also bullied while outside of the school environment but the consequences of this bullying manifests itself in the school – with the target being unhappy or underperforming academically.

The Anti-bullying policy should explicitly state that bulling behaviour falls within the remit of the school authorities where the bulling behaviour impinges on the work or happiness of a student in the school - even where the bullying acts are perpetrated outside of the school.

1. The school’s **Internet Acceptable Use Policy** (AUP) should refer to cyberbullying and specify what are and what are not acceptable practices when using the school’s IT network – either locally or remotely. A guide to developing an Internet Acceptable Use Policy for schools may be accessed [here](http://www.webwise.ie/SampleAcceptableUsePolicies.shtm) and a template policy may be downloaded [here](http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Post-Primary-School-Policies/spp_template_internet_safety_policy.pdf).
2. Given the potential for schools to use social Media to facilitate teaching and learning, all schools should have a policy on **The Use of Social Media as a Teaching Tool** and this policy should also address the issue of cyberbullying and reference the school’s Internet Acceptable Use Policy.

It is absolutely vital that there is **consistency across all these policies regarding the way the school deals with cyberbullying.** This means that all members of the school community must clearly understand how the school community (management, teachers, support staff, students and parents) handles such issues. This means that the policies must be provided to all members of the school community and must be accessible to them at all times. This is most easily achieved by prominently displaying the policies on the school website.

**2. Engagement with parents and guardians**

Schools that have been successful in combating bullying invariably work collaboratively with parents and guardians. There are two implications here. Firstly, parents and guardians are involved (and feel involved) in the development of school policies and practices to combat bullying and cyberbullying. Secondly, these schools hold regular information evenings for parents in order to provide them with expert advice on how they may contribute towards combating bullying. In this regard, it is important that parents realise that anyone can be a bully and anyone can be a target of bullying and that it is not just other people’s sons and daughters that can bully. Bullying of all kinds is, regrettably, ever present in all schools and we have no option but to address it as such in a constructive manner.

Meetings with parents should not be confined to parents receiving information, they should also provide parents with the opportunity to inform the school about their perspective on bullying in the school – though there should be no reference to individual students. Where a parent has specific information about particular bullying episodes, s/he should provide it directly to a staff member in the school, ideally the principal or deputy principal, in private.

School might also put information for parents regarding cyberbullying on their website and they could draw parents’ attention to such material by putting a note in with the end of term reports. There is some excellent information on cyberbullying available on the following websites and parents should be made aware of this. **The information contained on these sites is equally useful to school management, teachers and students**.

* [A Guide to Cyberbullying](http://www.internetsafety.ie/website/ois/oisweb.nsf/page/DPCY-7LYJ4V1343473-en/%24File/Final%20-%20Low%20Res.pdf) Published by the Office for Internet Safety, this guide is clear, comprehensive and easy to understand.
* <http://www.internetsafety.ie/> The Office for Internet Safety has been established by the Irish Government to take a lead responsibility for internet safety in Ireland, particularly as it relates to children.
* <http://www.webwise.ie> An excellent resource that covers much of what schools, teachers and parents need to know in order to deal effectively with cyberbullying. This site is managed by the NCTE.
* <http://www.spunout.ie/health/Healthy-mind/Bullying/Cyber-Bullying>

SpunOut is an independent, youth led national charity working to empower young people between the ages of 16 and 25 to provide an interactive online community for young people to consume health and lifestyle information and find out about health and advice services available to them in their area, online or over the phone.

* <http://www.facebook.com/help/325807937506242/> Provides easy to follow advice on how to protect your privacy on Facebook, thus avoiding cyberbullying on Facebook.
* https:/[/www.f](http://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=247013378662696)a[cebook.com/help/?faq=247013378662696](http://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=247013378662696) Clear advice on how to report abusive/inappropriate content on Facebook.
* [https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-violation/topics/122-reporting-violations/articles/15789-how-to-report-violations%23#](https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-violation/topics/122-reporting-violations/articles/15789-how-to-report-violations%23) Advice on what constitutes a violation on Twitter and how to report such violations.
* <http://ie.reachout.com/inform-yourself/bullying-and-personal-safety/cyber-bullying/>

**ReachOut.com is an Irish service dedicated to taking the mystery out of mental health by providing quality assured mental health information and inspiring real life stories by young people to help other young people get through tough times.**ReachOut.com is run by the [Inspire Ireland Foundation](http://www.inspireireland.ie) which is a not for profit, non-government registered charity.

* <http://www.socialbrite.org/sharing-center/glossary/>

**This provides a glossary of the terms and phrases used in the world of social media. The glossary is constantly being updated to keep pace with developments in the field.**

* <http://old.digizen.org/downloads/cyberbullyingOverview.pdf>

**The information available via this link is a summary of the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Guidance for schools on preventing and responding to cyberbullying. This document seeks to give practical advice to young people, their parents and school staff about the issue of cyberbullying. While the information is a little dated, it, it nevertheless, is easy to understand and provides a good overview of the topic.**

* <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2012/1102/1224326036363.html>

**This link is to an Irish Times Article ‘**Education the Solution to Cyberbullying Scourge’ by **Dr Sharon McLaughlin,** a lecturer in law at Letterkenny Institute of Technology. Her PhD studies examined child protection in the online environment and she is a member of EU Kids Online network.

* <http://www.hotline.ie/> **Irish hotline for reporting child pornography and other illegal content on the Internet.**
* [www.watchyourspace.ie](http://www.watchyourspace.ie) **Advice on managing children’s profiles on social networking sites.**
* [EU Kids Online](https://www.google.ie/#hl=en&sugexp=les%3B&gs_nf=3&gs_rn=0&gs_ri=hp&tok=iusCMpv7UCbzFtOyt8px5g&cp=15&gs_id=1q&xhr=t&q=eu+kids+online&pf=p&tbo=d&sclient=psy-ab&oq=Eu+kids+on+linr&gs_l=&pbx=1&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.r_cp.r_qf.&bvm=bv.1354675689,d.ZG4&fp=85a788acf04f3e86&bpcl=396503) **Hugely informative on the way young people use modern communications technology and contains a specific report on how Irish young people use these technologies and the risks and safety for young people in Ireland using the Internet.**
* [How ‘Harmless Slagging’ leads to cyberbullying.](http://www.independent.ie/national-news/how-harmless-slagging-leads-to-cyber-bullying-3290119.html) **An interesting Irish Independent Article that includes a short video clip.**

**A further resource that would be of assistance to school and parents seeking to respond effectively cyberbullying is the following publication.**

***Cyberbullying and E-Safety: What Educators and Other Professional Need to Know*. Adrienne Katz (2012) Published by Jessica Kingsley**

**2. Engagement with students**

Effectively combating bullying in schools inevitably means that the students must be involved in finding and implementing solutions. This engagement has a number of dimensions.

1. **Survey the student body regularly to identify the extent of cyberbullying and, in so far as is possible, the students that are most affected.**  A suitable survey questionnaire that you may, if you feel it necessary, adapt to suit the needs of your particular school may be accessed [**here**](http://www.hazelden.org/OA_HTML/ibeCCtpItmDspRte.jsp?AID=10273664&PID=3444383&item=10892&sitex=10020:22372:US). While there is a charge for this material, the work of Dr Dan Olweus around the whole matter of bullying is internationally recognised and the questionnaire includes items relating to cyberbullying.
2. **The school’s SPHE and RSE programmes must specifically address the issue of bullying and cyberbullying with each year group each year.** School assemblies, pastoral care programmes or counselling programmes and Safer Internet Awareness days or weeks may supplement the work done in SPHE and RSE.

In terms of a curriculum to support the prevention of bullying, the curriculum materials developed by Dr Dan Olweus are particularly interesting and may be accessed [here](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CP.omahony%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CTemporary%20Internet%20Files%5CContent.Outlook%5CCSO5RLN4%5CCyber%20Bullying%3A%20A%20Prevention%20Curriculum). In any case, all students would need to be well informed on the following matters.

* **What is cyberbullying** and why it is a totally unacceptable behaviour for anyone.
* **How to stay safe using the web**? For example, if the privacy settings on Facebook are correctly set, the chances of being bullied through your Facebook site are virtually reduced to zero. Unfortunately, many young and older users of Facebook do not know how to set them correctly. There is potential here for identifying a group of older students with the necessary expertise to help young people to set their privacy settings correctly. These ‘cyber mentors’ might also be able to advise and support younger students more generally about concerns they may have in relation to cyberbullying.
* **The need to report any concerns about cyberbullying to a member of staff** or, maybe, where they are available, to student ‘cyber mentors’. The point to be reinforced here is that it is the responsibility of every student to report any evidence that s/he may come across of cyberbullying – even when s/he is not the target. Indeed, since many targets may fear reporting the fact that they are being bullied, oftentimes targets will not be able to escape its clutches unless someone else reports it for them. If cyberbullies know that their ‘handiwork’ is likely to be reported they might reconsider their actions.
* **How to go about reporting inappropriate material** on web to the relevant service providers – see below.

All young people, indeed young and old alike, need to know how to protect themselves online and how to respond if they, or their friends, feel threatened online. In this context, the following tips[[6]](#footnote-6) may be helpful.

**How to avoid trouble?**

* Never give out your passwords – even to your best friend. Always keep your passwords and PIN numbers to yourself, and make a habit of logging out of your email/Facebook page if you’re using computer.
* Pick your friends carefully – remember whatever you post online can be seen by everyone who’s got access to your page or the discussion board. If it’s Facebook, only make friends with people you’re ok sharing information with.
* Use Netiquette – be polite to other people online. Think about what you’re saying and whether it might be hurtful or embarrass them in public, even if it’s funny.
* Don’t send a message to someone else when you’re angry – wait until you’ve calmed down and had time to think. Once you’ve sent it, you can’t take it back.

**How to deal with comments or other material that you find upsetting**

* Don’t reply – even though you might really want to, don’t rise to the bait and reply to messages from someone who’s bullying you. They want to know that they’ve got you worried and upset. Chances are if you never reply they’ll get bored and leave you alone.
* Go offline – if you feel like it’s invading every bit of your life, remember you can turn off your computer and your phone anytime. Ditch virtual reality for some actual reality for a while.
* Inform your Phone Company or Internet Service Provider (ISP) – they can block texts, calls or online messages from specific people.
* Change your contact details – get a new user name, a new email address, a new mobile number and only give them to your closest friends. This doesn’t mean you’re giving in; you’re just getting on with your own life.
* Tell someone – if it’s bothering you, don’t keep it to yourself. Talk to someone about it. If you’re worried your parents will freak out, you could talk to a friend, or a teacher you trust. Check [face-to-face help](http://ie.reachout.com/getting-help/face-to-face-help/) for more.
* Inform [the Gardaí](http://www.garda.ie/) – if the messages are ever threatening or it’s getting really serious, tell the Gardaí. It’s against the law to threaten people, and the Gardaí can put a stop to it. They’re there to keep you safe, and they generally want to know about stuff like this.
* Keep a record – you don’t have to read the messages, but keep them and keep a record of the time and date. This can act as evidence if you ever need it, and can help the Gardaí or your service provider finds out where the messages are coming from.

For more information on what to do about bullying, see [what to do if you’re being bullied.](http://ie.reachout.com/inform-yourself/bullying-and-personal-safety/what-to-do-if-youre-being-bullied/)

**3. Hold safe Internet awareness days/weeks**

Schools might consider holding safe Internet Awareness days or weeks to highlight the whole issue of staying safe using modern communications technology.

These awareness days/weeks might be arranged to coincide with the **Annual Safer Internet Day (SID)** organised by Insafe in February each year to promote safe and responsible use of online technology and mobile phones. Insafe, a world-wide network of Awareness Centres promoting safe, responsible use of the Internet and mobile devices to young people will hold its **10thannual Safer Internet Day on 5 February** this year and the theme for the day is 'Online rights and responsibilities', when participants will be encouraged to 'Connect with respect'. Further details on Insafe and safer Internet day may be accessed [here](http://www.saferinternetday.org).

**4. Building staff capacity**

Given that cyberbullying is a relatively new phenomenon in Irish schools and the technology that facilities it is constantly evolving, it is essential to build the capacity of all staff in a school (management, teachers and support staff) to deal effectively with both bullying and cyberbullying.

The time that a school devotes to building such capacity annually will vary from one school to another. However, it is suggested that a school consider devoting at least one hour each year to the building of this capacity and, in the first instance, it might be necessary to devote more time.

The matter of where to acquire the services of a suitable person/s to deliver the training to the school’s staff also merits serious consideration, as cyberbullying is not well understood. It is essential that those who deliver this training have a thorough knowledge of both cyberbullying and the school context.

The [PDST Technology in Education](http://www.pdst.ie/node/1089) has launched a short online internet course for teachers to help students to be safe and responsible internet users. Details of this course may be accessed on the online courses page on the PDST Technology in Education's website and follow the link to [Internet Safety in School and Classroom.](http://www.ncte.ie/courses/PrimaryPostPrimary/NCTEInternetsafetyinschoolclassroomonline/Name%2C22192%2Cen.html)

While it will be necessary, in the first instance, to use external trainers, in the medium term, schools should seek to identify a staff member who could become the school’s expert on all aspects of cyberbullying. Needless to say, this person would need to have a good knowledge of ICT and would also need to be well disposed towards combating cyberbullying in a calm and reasonable manner. No matter how much cyberbullying may be abhorred, it is a permanent feature of school life and the pain that those targeted by cyberbullies experience can only be relieved and avoided if school staff have the capacity to deal with the matter calmly in a multi-facetted manner. The issuing of edicts and the punishment of perpetrators, where identified, will not, on their own eliminate the problem.

It is acknowledged that all schools may not be able to identify someone suited to leading its campaign to address cyberbullying. Consequently, two or more schools might identify someone who could lead the campaign across a number of schools. While such experts would have a fairly wide-ranging remit, they would be particularly helpful in ensuring that offending material is removed from websites as quickly as possible, while ensuring that all relevant evidence is retained.

**5. Investigating cyberbullying incidents**

All bullying incidents should be properly recorded and investigated – see Incident Checklist and pointers at [**Annexures A& B**.](#ANNEX_A)

Cyberbullying can be a very serious matter and can, in some instances, constitute a criminal offence.

For example, cyberbullying may constitute a criminal offence under section 10 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997. Section 10 deals with harassment and provides that a person may be guilty of this crime if s/he:

 *‘…… without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, by any means including by use of the telephone, harasses another by persistently following, watching, pestering, besetting or communicating with him or her.*

*‘For the purpose of this section, a person harasses another where-*

1. *he or she, by his or her acts* intentionally or recklessly, seriously interferes with the other's peace and privacy or causes alarm, distress or harm to the other, and

(b) his or her acts are such that a reasonable person would realise that the acts would seriously interfere with the other's peace and privacy or cause alarm, distress or harm to the other’.

Section 10 harassment is an arrestable offence and, if convicted on indictment, carries a jail term not exceeding 7 years.

Even where cyberbullying does not amount to a criminal offence, the perpetrator may be held liable for damages in civil court proceedings.

Where it is felt that cyberbullying may amount to a criminal act, a school/VEC (as appropriate) should seek legal advice and the matter should be reported to the Gardaí.

Staff and students should be advised to try and keep a record of the bullying as evidence. It can be useful to show parents, teachers, pastoral care staff and the Gardaí, if necessary, what has happened.

Every reasonable effort should be made to identify the perpetrator/s, including looking at the school IT systems, identifying and interviewing possible witnesses, and contacting the service provider and the Gardaí, if necessary. Remember, the Gardaí will have to be involved where it is necessary to get the service provider to look into the data of another user. In terms of identifying perpetrators, it needs to be appreciated that online forums (such as [ask.fm](http://ask.fm)) permit users to operate under a cloak of anonymity, thus making cyberbullying a very insidious form of bullying.

In seeking to identify perpetrators, the focus should be on protecting and supporting the target/s and getting the perpetrators to see that what they are doing is wrong and to desist from such behaviour in the future.

**6. Working with the bully and sanctions**

Once the person doing the bullying is identified, steps should be taken to change their attitude and behaviour as well as to ensure that they have access to any counselling or other support that s/he may require. The following factors need to be considered when determining what disciplinary action should be taken.

* **The impact on the victim:** was the bully acting anonymously, was the material widely circulated and humiliating, how difficult was it to control the spread of the material?
* **The motivation of the bully:** was the incident unintentional or retaliation for being bullied by others.
* Disciplinary action should be **proportionate to the seriousness** of the offence. Remember, disproportionately severe sanctions can be counterproductive. Technology-specific sanctions for cyberbullying might include limiting internet access for a period of time or removing the student’s right to bring a mobile phone into school.

**7. Reporting violations on social media sites**

Where material that constitutes cyberbullying is posted on a social media site and or sent via a mobile phone, it may be necessary to report the matter to the service provider – Facebook, Twitter, Vodafone, etc. However, before reporting a violation, it is important to distinguish between material that is distasteful and material that is obviously abusive.

Before reporting a violation, it would be advisable to take ‘screen shots’ of the offending material and to date and save these in case they may be required as evidence in legal or other proceedings. Where phone messages are involved, these should be saved. It is not possible to rely on material remaining on the web, thus the need to save a copy of offending material.

Mobile phone providers are proactive regarding bullying and harassment and most have services similar to 02ʼs *Block It* service where a customer can block unwanted text, picture and video messages from other mobile phone providers.

On the other hand, social networking sites tend to adopt a more liberal stance and rely, to a significant extent, on publishing rules for users to follow. For example, according to Facebook’s terms and conditions for users, in the safety section its states “We do our best to keep Facebook safe, but we cannot guarantee it.

That said, social networking sites usually have procedures for reporting violations (the posting of inappropriate material) and these procedures are invariably posted on their websites. The big difference between the mobile phone providers and the social media sites is that, in the case of the latter, it is only the site management that can remove offending material and material that a user feels should be removed may not, in the eyes of the site management, warrant being removed. In any case the first step towards getting material removed from a site is to report it.

In the case of an unwanted e-mail, it is simply a matter of designating/marking a mail item from an unwanted source as junk/spam and all mail from that source will go directly into a junk/spam folder – from where it can be deleted with a single mouse click.

**8 . Ensuring teachers using social media do so safely**

Many teachers use social media in their private lives and a significant and growing number use the Internet and social media to connect with students as part of their teaching work. In doing so, however, they can put themselves at risk of being cyberbullied and they can put their privacy at risk. While social media can provide teachers with an effective two-way means of communicating with their students, it also has the potential to give students access to personal information about teachers and therefore to provide students with the opportunity to target them with unwelcome communications. This is something that needs to be guarded against in a proactive way.

Another issue that needs to be considered here is the nature of the student teacher relationship. While teachers should foster warm and constructive relationships with their students, it is equally important that these relationships be appropriate in the sense of being professional rather than personal. Indeed, it would be inappropriate for teachers to cultivate anything other than a professional student teacher relationship with their students – either inside or outside the classroom. In this regard, it is also important to note that the Teaching Council’s Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers states, at 3.7 of the Code, that teachers should:

*‘ensure that any communication with pupils/students, colleagues, parents, school management and others is appropriate, including communication via electronic media, such as e-mail, texting and social networking sites’.*

Having regard to the need for teachers to both protect their privacy and to ensure that their relationships with their students are manifestly professional, rather than personal, it would be prudent for teachers to have regard for the following in their use of social media in the context of their work.

* Do not use personal Twitter or Facebook accounts for any school-related projects. Instead, teachers should establish a separate Twitter or Facebook account to use for school-related use.
* Where teachers are considering using social media to facilitate their school work, they should obtain permission from school management to do so. Furthermore, teachers should obtain parental permission for students to participate in school work that involves the use of social media.

* Where teachers use social media in the school work, they should ideally use invitation-only discussion groups. This means that the teacher has control over who joins the ‘conversation’ and is in a position to moderate the content posted on the site.
* Teachers, when using social media, should avoid connecting directly with students and, instead, use Facebook ‘pages’. In this way, a student can access the page without having to be ‘friends’ with the teacher.
* Teachers or other staff working in schools should maximize their privacy settings on Facebook in order to protect their personal profile. This will minimize the chances of students discovering a staff-member’s personal profile. Of course this should also be done for accounts used for school purposes. For advice on how to maximize privacy settings see [here](%E2%80%A2%09http%3A/www.facebook.com/help/325807937506242/).
* Remember, even the best privacy settings do not guarantee absolute privacy as a ‘friend’ may pass on information.
* Teachers can ‘protect’ their tweets on Twitter. This means tweets are only viewable to approved users. This is good practice for both personal and school-related Twitter accounts.
* Do not connect with people who cannot be identified or who post questionable content – even from a private account.
* Do not allow students to take pictures of school staff/students unless specifically required for a school project. Admittedly, given the ubiquity of the camera phone, doing this is going to present a challenge and school would need to consider this option carefully before acting.
* School staff should avoid using personal photos in their profile information, or information about their job or school in their bios. Instead an icon or graphic and a non-school related bio might be used in their personal accounts.
* School staff should not make any comments about students or post pictures of students on social media sites.
* Ideally, schools should look towards establishing a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), using Moodle, SharePoint or some other technology. This would then eliminate the need for teachers to use public social media sites.

**8. Concluding Comments**

Firstly, the information provided in these guidelines is not in any sense intended to be prescriptive. Rather, it is intended to provide general information to schools, with the hyperlinks providing direct access to more detailed information. Ultimately, however, each school has to work out how best to address a form of bullying that is likely to be with us for the foreseeable future.

Secondly, cyberbullying is not something that can fully responded to using technological solutions. While the appropriate use of social media and privacy settings, in particular, can help, cyberbullying can only be addressed effectively in the wider context of the school’s policies and practices around dealing with bullying in a generic sense.

**Annexure A**

 **School Crest/logo here**

**Bullying/Cyberbullying Critical Incident Form/Checklist**

1. **Reporting Details**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name of Person reporting the incident |  |
| Name of Staff member recording incident |  |
| Anonymous Report? |  |
| Date of report |  |

1. **Type of bullying incident (please tick all that apply)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Via mobile or hand held device | Involves Internet |
| Face to Face | Involves IM |
| Involves chatrooms | Involves SNS |
| Blackberry Messenger | Friendship feud |
| Ridicule/humiliation | Demanding money/valuables |
| Persistent teasing/sarcastic remarks | Involves photographs |
| Name calling | Coercion |
| Threats | Encouraging others to join in |
| Spreading rumours | Provocative/sexist taunts |
| Unpleasant/hurtful email/texts/web posts combined | Linked to bullying in school |
| Plans to isolate someone |  |
| Other |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Racist\* | Cyberbullying |
| Homophobic | Due to disability |
| Sexual |  |
| \**If racist report to local authority/The Gardaí /BOM or VEC – as appropriate*  |

1. **Persons involved in incident**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name of victim/target |  |
| Class | Year |
| Age |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name of Perpetrator (s) |  |
| 1. |  |
| 2. |  |
| 3. |  |
| Class | Year |
| Age (s) |  |

1. **Incident Details**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Date(s) of incident |  |
| Day |  |
| Month |  |
| Year |  |
| Approximate times |  |
| Before School |  |
| Morning |  |
| Afternoon |  |
| After School |  |
| Weekend |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| How long has this been going on? |  |
| Has any intervention been tried? |  |
| If Cyberbullying, has this abuse been reported to the service provider or website/ |  |
| Do the Gardaí need to be informed? |  |
| Does a device need to be confiscated or a computer isolated as evidence? |  |
| Does material need to be taken down from social media website? |  |
| Have parents been alerted? |  |
| Who has taken responsibility for the above steps? |  |

If you are not sure what steps to take, talk to your e-safety lead persons in school or within the Department of Education and Skills. Does the school have the power to search and confiscate a phone?

1. **Follow up**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Has the bullying stopped? |  |
| Does the target/victim feel safe? |  |
| Is further action required? |  |
| Have those involved changed their behaviours/acknowledged the harm caused? |  |
| Has the case contributed to the learning of the class/year/group in some way? |  |
| Have passwords been changed, privacy settings checked and friends list cleaned? |  |

|  |
| --- |
| Any further note such as the impact of this incident or recommendations: |

Signed: ................................................... Date:...................................

Position:...........................................

This document has been prepared by the Bullying Intervention Group ([www.bigaward.org.uk](http://www.bigaward.org.uk)) and can be used as part of an overall School Policy.

**Annexure B**

* Ask the questions and listen effectively
* Keep the evidence
* Explore with bystanders and witnesses
* Assess harm and impact
* Is prejudice involved?



**As a result of our intervention:**

* **Is the victim safe?**
* **Does the bullying child’s behaviour change?**
* **How do we know?**
* **Have we learned from this as a group/class/year group?**

**5. Usefullinks**

[A Guide to Cyberbullying](http://www.internetsafety.ie/website/ois/oisweb.nsf/page/DPCY-7LYJ4V1343473-en/%24File/Final%20-%20Low%20Res.pdf) Published by the Office for Internet Safety, this guide is clear, comprehensive and easy to understand.

<http://www.webwise.ie> An excellent resource that covers much of what schools, teachers and parents need to know in order to deal effectively with cyberbullying. This site is managed by the NCTE.

Creating an Acceptable Use Policy (Department of Education website)

<http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Post-Primary-School-Policies/Policies/Internet-Safety.html>

[SPHE Bullying Prevention- First Steps for Teachers](http://www.thinkb4uclick.ie/)

<http://www.sphe.ie/downloads/bull/bull_respond.pdf>

TheStaySafeprogramme<http://www.staysafe.ie/>

Secondary Assemblies for Online Safety [http://optimums-education.com](http://optimums-education.com/)

[Social mediaglossary](file://sbsserver/users/bernadettek/My%20Documents/Social%20media%20):<http://www.socialbrite.org/sharing-center/glossary/>

Webwise (NCTE program) <http://webwise.ie/>

[ThinkB4Uclick](file:///C%3A/Users/rachel/Documents/ThinkB4Uclick) <http://www.thinkb4uclick.ie/>

Optimise your Facebook privacy settings

<http://www.jmb.ie/component/content/article/428>

[Facebook page on Cyber-bullying](https://www.facebook.com/stopcyberbullying)

Twitters guidelines on [behavior and privacy](https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-violation) and the [Twitter rules'](https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-violation/topics/121-guidelines-best-practices/articles/18311-the-twitter-rules)

Bully4uAnti bullying services: <http://www.bully4u.ie/>

Cyber bully Infographic/poster: Tell, Unfriend, Block,

Report: <http://www.fuzion.ie/index.cfm/page/cyberbullying>

[How to report abuse on Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=247013378662696):

https:/[/www.f](http://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=247013378662696)a[cebook.com/help/?faq=247013378662696](http://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=247013378662696)

[Howto report abuseonTwitter](https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-violation/topics/122-reporting-violations/articles/15789-how-to-report-violations) [https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-](https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-violation/topics/122-reporting-violations/articles/15789-how-to-report-violations%23)

[violation/topics/122-reporting-violations/articles/15789-how-to-report-violations#](https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-violation/topics/122-reporting-violations/articles/15789-how-to-report-violations%23)

Olweus Prevention Program: [http://www.violencepreventionworks.org](http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/)

[Cyber Bullying: A Prevention Curriculum](http://www.violencepreventionworks.org/public/cyber_bullying_curriculum.page?menuheader=9)

[Bullying Intervention Group(BIG)](http://www.bullyinginterventiongroup.co.uk/)

http://old.digizen.org/downloads/cyberbullyingOverview.pdf

<http://facecrooks.com/Safety-Center/Facebook-Privacy-and-Security-Made-Simple-345.html>

1. Katz, A. (2012), p 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Katz, A. (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Katz, A. (2012) p 76 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Katz, A. (2012) p 82 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Conclusions Chapter in: [Guidelines for Preventing Cyber-bullying in the School Environment: a Review and Recommendations](https://sites.google.com/site/costis0801/guideline). (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. These tips are slight adaptations of what is provided at <http://ie.reachout.com/inform-yourself/bullying-and-personal-safety/cyber-bullying/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)