



# Guidelines for preventing cyber-bullying in the school environment: a review and recommendations

**This booklet is a product of Working Group 3 of COST Action IS0801 addressing Cyber-bullying.**  
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# PREFACE

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Cyber-bullying refers to bullying and harassment of others by means of new electronic technologies, primarily mobile phones and the internet. There has been much research and action on traditional forms of bullying in schools, with some success, but cyber-bullying has arisen and increased in the last decade. Researchers, pupils, parents, teachers, unions, and local, regional and national authorities, in consultation with mobile phone companies and internet service providers, are all trying in various ways to grapple with the issues involved in cyber-bullying.

COST IS0801 is a networking COST Action, that started in late October 2008 and ran for four years. The Action has had 28 participating COST countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and United Kingdom; plus non-COST participation from Australia. Its full title is 'Cyber-bullying: Coping with negative and enhancing positive uses of new technologies, in relationships in educational settings' (<http://sites.google.com/site/costis0801/>).

The main aim of the Action is to share expertise on cyber-bullying in educational settings, coping with negative and enhancing positive uses of new technologies in the relationships area, and moving towards a common set of guidelines applicable in Europe. So, one of the objectives of COST IS0801 has been to examine already nationally published guidelines in different countries, including both dealing with the negative consequences of cyber-bullying, and the positive uses of new technologies in the relationships area. Especially, to disseminate some good practice to assist in the development of new guidelines and revision of older ones was intended. Led by Professor Maritta Välimäki, a Working Group of the Action has done just this. The findings of this analysis will be presented in the following chapters of this publication. We hope that this Booklet will be useful for a range of practitioners concerned with the use of the internet by young people.



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# SUMMARY

Cyber-bullying refers to bullying and harassment of others by means of new electronic technologies, primarily mobile phones and the internet. Cyber-bullying of children and young people is emerging as a significant problem which can threaten the health, well-being and attainment of victims, and adversely affect the climate of the peer group and school. Guidelines have been devised in many countries to assist parents, young people, schools and teachers to understand the problem and take effective action. Although guidelines in themselves are only a start, they can provide a useful framework for all concerned to reduce cyber-bullying and its negative effects.

Guidelines vary greatly in their coverage of important aspects. We aimed to examine a wide range of guidelines and carry out a content analysis, to identify strengths and weaknesses and to point out elements of good practice. We obtained 54 national guidelines from 27 countries; these were scored for the presence/absence of a range of criteria relating to school ethos, policies and programs, skills and collaborative partnerships. We looked at these separately for the four main target groups: parents, young people, schools and teachers. For each target group we review relevant research evidence, and then highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the guidelines, concluding with recommendations.

- **Parents:** many guidelines mentioned the role of parents as role models, talking with their children and helping and monitoring their ICT use; and also mentioned how parents need to develop their own skills. However fewer guidelines mentioned how parents can encourage their children to help others, or pointed out the importance of collaboration with the school.
- **Young People:** many guidelines mentioned the importance of developing general online skills and netiquette, especially for social networking sites, including aspects to prevent cyber-bullying;

and of seeking help from trusted adults. However fewer guidelines mentioned issues around online gaming sites; reporting cyber-bullying to the police as an option; or developing leadership skills in the peer group to discourage cyber-bullying.

- **Schools:** many guidelines mention the importance of developing awareness among students, and helping them recognize and report cyber-abuse. However while some guidelines mention developing a whole-school policy on the issue, many aspects of this are typically under-specified. Few policies mention the importance of the peer group, in terms of peer pressure, or peer support.
- **Teachers:** many guidelines stress how teachers should take cyber-bullying seriously, act as role models, and help students improve their awareness and skills. However there is much less emphasis on the role of teachers in making and evaluating policy, and in developing their own skills.

In summary, many guidelines provide good coverage of aspects such as parents and teachers acting as role models for young people, and the importance of developing young people's awareness and skills as related to dealing with cyber-bullying. Developing skills in parents is often covered, but less so the importance of developing skills for teachers. School policies are often mentioned, but generally deserve much fuller consideration in terms of content. The most prominent omission in most guidelines is the importance of the peer group in maintaining or preventing cyber-bullying, and how young people themselves can take a leadership role in challenging cyber-bullying, as well as how parents, teachers and schools can support them in this. A number of recommendations are made for each target group, regarding proactive policies, plans and practices; understanding and competences; collaborative partners; and social environment.



# INTRODUCTION

Younger and younger users today have direct access to the Internet from personal computers and mobile devices, whether at home, schools or in public places. As a consequence teachers, parents and other carers face new challenges. In recent years, a variety of programmes and policies have been developed and implemented in an effort to prevent and reduce the problem of cyber-bullying in the school environment. In addition to traditional bullying, these policies and programmes have been amended to highlight the use of electronic means of bullying, harassment, and intimidation as an unacceptable behaviour. While these initiatives have been helpful, many policy and practice challenges remain given that cyber-bullying is likely to occur either at school or off school premises, making it difficult to address solely by teachers, schools or families.

A working group in COST Action IS0801 investigated how European, and some other countries, are responding to these challenges by surveying and analysing a sample of existing guidelines related to ICT use and cyber-bullying. Specifically, our aim was to examine already nationally published guidelines in different countries, including those dealing with the negative consequences of cyber-bullying on relationships, and those addressing the positive uses of new technologies and the impact on relationships. Our review and analysis has attempted to bridge the gap between cyber-bullying policy areas that have received extensive attention and those areas that have received less attention. By doing this we hope to guide good practice for school communities among teachers, parents and students to prevent and manage cyber-bullying and maintain school safety.

Our review process comprised four phases. First, a pilot study was conducted to determine the feasibility of this review task. Second, criteria for assessing “best practice” were determined to guide the development of a structured questionnaire. Third, the two most prominent national guidelines were identified

in 27 countries (25 European countries plus Israel and Australia), and the questionnaire was used to score each guideline on the criteria identified; this was done by a representative from the country concerned who was on our Action Management Committee. The scoring was conducted according to specific criteria relating to school ethos, policies and programs, skills and collaborative partnerships as part of anti-bullying preventative actions. The presence of each criterion was scored as not at all, somewhat and mostly. The final validation stage of this review process involved 10 international experts examining and evaluating the importance of each criterion.

Fifty-four national guidelines were reviewed. These targeted various groups: parents (N = 41), young people (N = 35), schools (N = 23), and teachers (N = 32). A separate section has been developed for each of these groups. In presenting the results under key findings from our content analysis of the 54 guidelines, rather than state all the results, we have selected those that are most interesting and contrasting. For each target group, we present:

- 1) **Review of the evidence** based on the research literature in the relevant area
- 2) **Key findings** from our content analysis of the 54 guidelines.
- 3) **Recommendations** for proactive policies, plans and practices; understanding and competences; collaborative partners; and social environment.

At the end, some key references for the literature are provided.



# 1

## PARENTS



### Review of the evidence

Positive parental involvement is associated with less bullying behaviour among adolescents. Poor supervision and lack of attention in the home, parental acceptance of aggressive behaviour, harsh discipline and parent modelling of aggressive behaviour are all associated with bullying behaviour [1]. Conversely, students with higher parental support [2] and who have a good relationship with their parents [3] are less likely to be involved in bullying and may experience fewer symptoms of depression if they are victimised or bully others [4].

As a result of the ‘digital divide’ between young people and adults, parents may feel limited in how they can support their child to effectively prevent and respond to cyber-bullying. Furthermore, many young people indicate they are unlikely to report their experiences of cyber-bullying to adults [5] largely because they fear having their computers or mobile phones taken away, causing them further isolation [6]. Given that cyber-bullying appears to occur more frequently outside of school hours [7], developing parents’ awareness about cyber-bullying is crucial.

Information provision and skill development for families is necessary to reduce bullying behaviour as well as to improve the ways families communicate with each other about this issue. Information for parents (*e.g. information about the bullying prevention initiatives at their school, or with general tips about bullying*) is an important factor related to a decrease in students’ bullying [8]. Parent training information nights or teacher-parent meetings are associated with both a decrease in bullying and being bullied. Although many students

who are frequently bullied report they would prefer to talk to a peer about bullying, rather than an adult [9], parents’ and teachers’ recognition of and regular communication about the signs and symptoms of bullying helps to resolve bullying incidents more quickly and provides more positive support for the students involved.

Students who bully others using the Internet or their mobile phone are more likely to have parents who are less involved with their children’s computer and internet use [10]. These perpetrators are also more likely to report having a poor emotional bond with their caregiver, as well as more frequent discipline and more infrequent monitoring by their caregivers [11]. These findings suggest a need to encourage and enable parents to employ strategies to effectively monitor and communicate with their children about bullying, but cyber-bullying in particular.



## Key findings

Parents' competencies are important in young people's education for media. Knowledge and understanding of technology for interacting in positive ways with others is essential in guiding, assisting and empowering children in social relationships and, especially, in fostering the development of caring ways of relating to one another in differing social settings. Of the 41 guidelines targeting parents, the most represented parental roles are as follows:

Mentors raising children's awareness about their right to seek help to help resolve cyber-bullying incidents	59%
Assistants helping children to use technology for social interaction in positive ways	54%
Role models demonstrating appropriate and positive social behaviour (online and offline) for their children or carers?	46%
Disciplinarian managing their children's online social behaviours	46%

Parents are less likely to be presented as promoters of 'children's use of peer pressure to discourage bullying' in the various guidelines (15%) or as supporters of their 'children helping others who are cyber-bullied' (23%).

The guidelines reviewed mostly acknowledge the role of parents in the prevention of cyber-bullying, suggesting responding skills and limit-setting to ensure a safe and protective environment and the development of trusting relationships. Some 50% or more of the guidelines encourage parental actions such as talking with their children if they need help, and monitoring aspects of their ICT use.

Talking seriously with their children about seeking help	58%
Monitoring their children's use of technology	50%
Monitoring their children's actions specifically to 'discourage and manage cyber-bullying'	49%



Many guidelines were found to promote the importance of raising parents' awareness about positive ways to monitor children's online behaviours, specifically suggesting actions parents can take when their children are cyber-bullying and/or being cyber-bullied. Moreover, 43% of the guidelines encouraged parents to develop their own technical skills and understanding in regard to how to prevent and deal with cyber-bullying.

Many guidelines mentioned the need to raise parents' knowledge about ways to act safely online via improved understandings of technology and young people's favourite online activities and ways to interact online.

Parents improving their technical skills about privacy settings	48%
Reporting cyber-bullying to service providers	45%
Understanding the modes of technology used to communicate	43%

A weakness identified in these guidelines was raising parents' awareness of the importance of their contribution in collaborative actions with schools and the community. Issues related to parents and schools working together for prevention, developing strategies and seeking help in collaborative ways with schools were emphasized in less than one third of the guidelines.



## Recommendations

### 1 Proactive policies, plans and practices

Every parent needs to talk with their children about cyber-bullying and not wait until it happens. They need to model respect and tolerance of others and be explicit in their disapproval of cyber-bullying. In this way children will be better prepared to deal with cyber-bullying and be more likely to avoid initiating acts by cyber-bullying or assisting or reinforcing those who may cyber-bully others.

### 2 Understandings and competences

To reduce any digital divide that might exist between parents and their children, parents need to inform themselves about safer mobile phone and Internet use and the different modes of electronic communication and how each of these can be used in a negative way to cyber-bully others. They need to be aware of how to contact mobile and Internet service providers and help their children to determine how they can report a problem, secure their privacy settings or indeed block the sender of the abusive messages or images.

Parents often do not realise that even though their children are skilled technically they may not know how to use the technology in safe ways. This is especially true of younger children. Parents need to inform themselves of the signs of cyber-bullying, particularly becoming withdrawn, moody or depressed, or visibly upset or angry when online or reading a text, so they can provide support for their children during this time.

### 3 Collaborative partnerships

Parents need to be encouraged to take action when they suspect their child is being targeted or indeed is targeting someone else in a hurtful manner. They need also to be aware that children can be both cyber-bullied and bully others, and if they are, that there is a high probability that they may be also bullied or bully others in a traditional way. Parents need to be encouraged to familiarize themselves with their children's school's policy and procedures for reporting and investigating allegations of cyber-bullying.

Parents need to stress to their children there is no shame in being bullied. The problem lies with the aggressor. Therefore children need to be encouraged to not hesitate to seek help from parents, teachers, youth leaders or others who care for them when they feel they are unable to help themselves. Parents need to have conversations with their children that they will not over-react or deny their children phone or online access if they are targeted online, but instead talk about possible ways of dealing with such cyber-attacks.

### 4 Social environment

Parents need to encourage their children to intervene when they are witness to cyber-bullying. This may include supporting the victim and reporting the behaviour to a person in authority. Should parents learn of their children's involvement in cyber-bullying they need to a) stress their disapproval and b) talk about how hurtful and damaging it can be for the victim.

Parents need to understand the importance of leading by example and of having a positive and supportive relationship with their children. For children to confide in their parents they need to feel that they are valued and listened to and that their parents will respond in a non-judgemental and positive manner. Parents need to be encouraged to promote good social skills, in particular empathy, good moral reasoning, a sturdy self-esteem and resilience to reduce the risk of becoming involved in cyber-bullying.



## 2

# YOUNG PEOPLE



### Review of the evidence

Efforts to address all forms of bullying including cyber-bullying need to engage students and peer groups to build their ownership of efforts to prevent bullying. This approach ensures that strategies are relevant, responsive and engaging, and acknowledges that students play a crucial role in building a school climate that does not tolerate any form of bullying.

While most students do not like seeing someone being bullied, most do not intervene to stop the bullying and may instead directly or inadvertently encourage or support the bullying behaviours of others [12,13]. Hence, it is important to enhance students' skills and self-efficacy to discourage bullying and to support those who are bullied. Students who are bullied perceive that supportive actions from their peers are often more helpful than supportive actions from adults and even their own actions to address bullying [14].

Engaging peer bystanders is particularly important given that adults' responses to bullying and particularly cyber-bullying are often felt by young people to be inappropriate or ineffective. An Australian study found that some 50% of senior secondary school students (aged 16-17) reported no change in their bullying situation after talking with teachers about the bullying behaviour [15].

To encourage more students to seek support or help, they need to feel confident their disclosure of bullying will be addressed appropriately and discreetly by school staff; will not exacerbate the bullying situation; and that staff will listen to how students would like the situation to be resolved.

Improving students' key understandings, skills and competencies to prevent and respond to bullying, especially as a bystander, needs to be an essential element of school action to support students who do not seek help from school staff. Accordingly, formal classroom learning needs to raise students' awareness about bullying and its harmful effects, student rights and responsibilities and importantly provide students with opportunities to develop their social skills and strategies online and offline to enhance their self-efficacy and ability to respond more effectively. These strategies need to be embedded into the curriculum, rather than being 'standalone' messages, so as to enable students to refine their skills over time and to foster lasting behaviour change.

Educating students about technical, social decision making online, good 'digital citizenship' skills and other cyber-safety strategies to prevent, respond to and report cyber-bullying is essential, as much cyber-bullying behaviour occurs out of sight of adults. While students may have good online technical skills they may be less aware about strategies to reduce their harm online such as how to remove harmful websites and supporting their friends who may be experiencing online difficulties [16].

Engaging students in partnerships with knowledgeable and supportive staff and external support and education services, as well as enhancing student-parent communication about social conflict and bullying issues, will also enable and promote students' ability to prevent and respond to cyber-bullying situations.





## Key findings

Most of the 35 national guidelines aimed at young people endorse skills development as the best method of dealing with and preventing cyber-bullying. In fact, in each of the following four criteria – school ethos, policies and programs, skills, and collaborative partnerships – youth skills building was a top concern. Skills such as digital citizenship, netiquette amongst others were deemed key in over 40% of the guidelines.

Practice principles of 'netiquette' when socializing online	60%
Develop relational and technical skills to prevent cyber-bullying (e.g., understanding the difference between real and virtual friends, not forwarding unkind messages)	49%
Use technology for positive social interaction	43%

Coping with cyber-bullying through seeking support from parents, teachers and peers were rated as following:

Seek support from parents to prevent and/or deal with cyber-bullying	57%
Seek support from teachers to prevent and/or deal with cyber-bullying	37%
Seek support from peers to prevent and/or deal with cyber-bullying	23%

Collaborative actions with school, family and the community led by young people are salient in guidelines aimed at young people. Encouraging young people to seek help from trusted adults is emphasized in about two thirds of the guidelines, whereas a third stress the importance of seeking help online or through professional helplines.

Report cyber-bullying to school staff or other trusted adults	60%
Seek further online information or resources	43%
Seek further information or resources from professional services such as a phone helpline	38%

Many guidelines differentiate between online activities (e.g. *social networking and chat rooms*) and call for specific skills expertise to deal with these varying areas. Within these areas 'gaming' is the online activity that is least referred to in the guidelines.

Understand the nature of cyber-bullying in the use of social networking technology	49%
... chat rooms	40%
... instant messaging	37%
... SMS and mobile phones	34%
... websites	29%
... blogs	29%
... online gaming	20%

Developing digital skills that allow young people to regulate negative interactions are featured prominently in the guidelines. While the importance of maintaining privacy and the need for reporting procedures were mentioned in around 50% of the guidelines, only about one third included references to reporting negative incidents to the Police.

Develop the technical skills to help prevent cyber-bullying (e.g. privacy settings on social networking profiles, not sharing passwords)	54%
Report to service providers, block a person bullying, save evidence of cyber-bullying	43%
Report cyber-bullying to the police	37%

Limited attention was given to encouraging young people to show leadership and to be engaged and responsible in proactive and pro-social ways in managing cyber-bullying situations. The use of positive peer influence, peer leadership and support of those who are cyber-bullied was only slightly more encouraged. In fact in over two thirds of the 35 guidelines aimed at young people the encouragement of these competencies was notable for its complete absence and, as shown in the table below, they are indicated in one form or another in less than a quarter of the guidelines.

Encourage young people to show leadership in addressing cyber-bullying	17%
Encourage young people to show leadership in positive uses of technology	17%
Use positive peer pressure to discourage cyber-bullying	21%



## Recommendations

### 1 Proactive policies, plans and practices

To give young people a sense of ownership of their school's anti-bullying policy, they need to be consulted so that their views regarding the definition, procedures for reporting and investigating and intervention strategies for dealing with cyber-bullying are taken into consideration.

As young people's online activities cannot be supervised at all times young people must be encouraged to be responsible for their own safety rather than relying on restrictive adult supervision. To enhance young people's digital citizenship efforts must be made to have them engage in peer support programmes, cyber-mentoring and counselling.

### 2 Understanding and competencies

Young people need awareness raising programmes to help them understand:

- What is cyber-bullying and the forms it can take
- The damaging effects of cyber-bullying for the victims
- The damaging effects of cyber-bullying for the aggressor's digital reputation, i.e. it can affect their friendships and relationships as well as their future employment prospects.
- The legal consequences and risks of prosecution.

Young people must be given the opportunity to explore their attitude and to develop the technical/digital skills needed to stay safe when either online or using smart phones. Specific skills are needed for the different online activities, e.g., social networking, chat rooms and online gaming. Young people need to learn the principles of netiquette when communicating and socialising online, notably that the same standards of behaviour apply online as they do in real life.

Every young person must be given the knowledge and the confidence to respond effectively to a cyber-attack, notably by:

- Not retaliating or replying
- Saving the evidence
- Making sure they tell someone who can help or calling a helpline
- Blocking the sender
- Reporting the incident to the provider of the service (e.g. mobile phone operator or social networking operator) and if posing a serious threat reporting it to the police.

All young people should be informed of the risks and benefits of responding to cyber-attacks in a manner which is:

- Aggressive
- Problem solving /assertive
- Passive or emotional
- Social/seeking help from friends, peers, family, carers and teachers

Young people need to be given opportunities to improve their social skills, level of empathy, moral reasoning, conflict resolution skills and anger management.

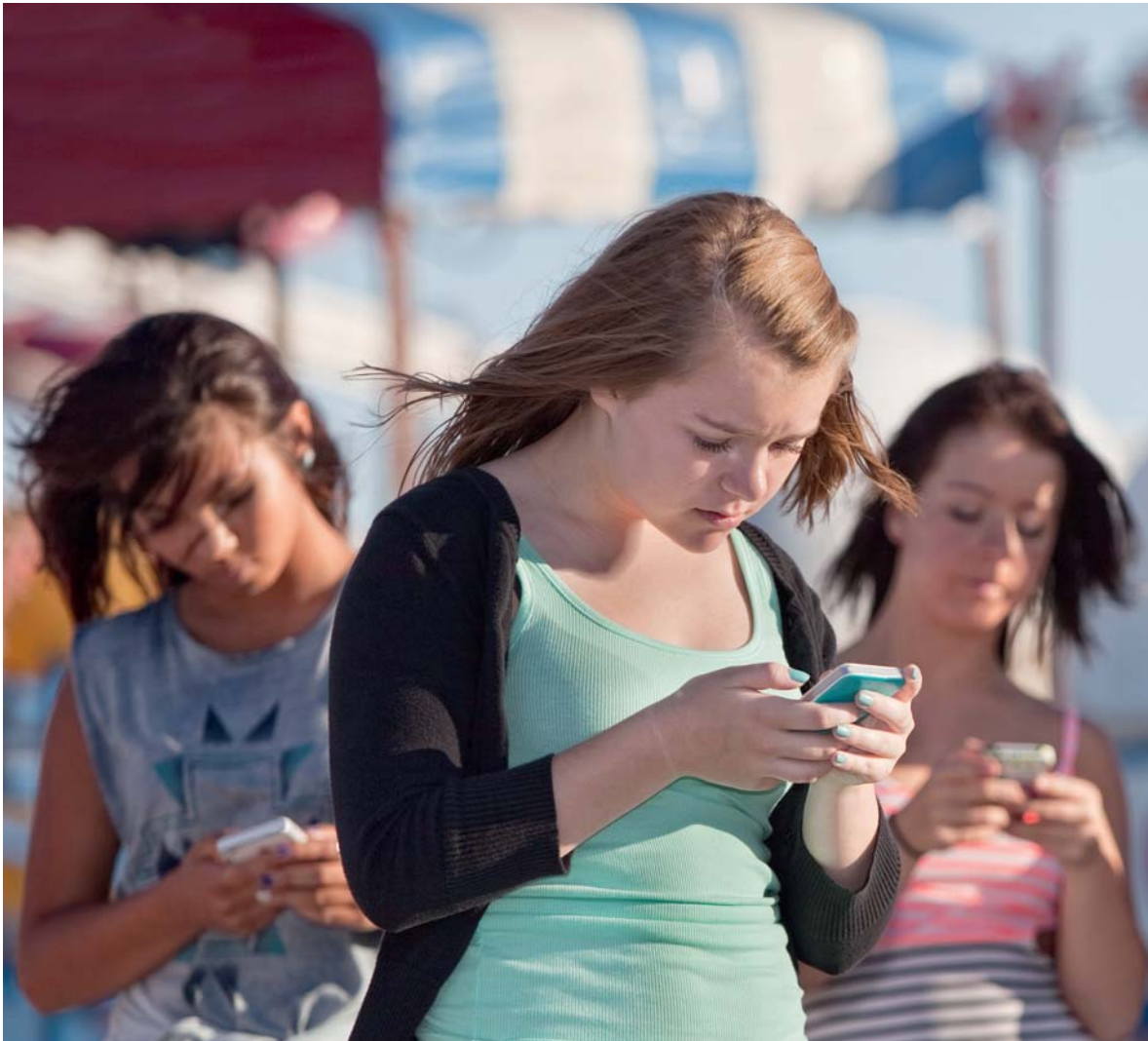


**3 Collaborative school-family community relations**

Young people need to be empowered to report to school staff and to parents when they are subjected to cyber-bullying. They need to recognise that the problem lies with the aggressor and the sooner the hostile behaviour is addressed the sooner the cyber-bullying will stop. Young people need to be made aware of external agencies and organisations where they can seek information, advice and guidance on internet safety and cyber-bullying. They must also be encouraged to seek counselling if affected by cyber-bullying.

**4 Social environment**

All young people need to recognise the importance of supporting victims of cyber-bullying in and out of school and of reporting the incidents to school staff for action to be taken. However they need to be taught effective strategies which they can use should they be witness to their peers being cyber-bullied. Young people need to feel supported when defending or seeking help for victims of cyber-bullying.





### Review of the evidence

Given the complexity of bullying behaviours and the social contexts in which they arise, school-based efforts to reduce bullying and cyber-bullying are enhanced by a whole-school approach. This approach targets members of the school community by building a supportive school culture; consistently implementing policy and practice to effectively reduce bullying; enhancing school staff and student understandings and skills in relation to these behaviours; and forming partnerships between staff, students, families and the wider community.

A supportive school culture provides safety, encourages open communication and positive relationships, and supports a sense of connectedness to school that reduces the risk of bullying. Schools that implement strategies which foster a sense of student safety have lower levels of bullying behaviours [17]. In addition, students who report having trustworthy, caring and helpful friends are less likely to perpetrate bullying and cyber-bullying [18]. Interestingly, students who are cyber-bullied, and/or who cyber-bully others, often report feeling uncared for by their teachers [19].

Positive relationships also enhance school-connectedness, which both contributes to and is fostered by a positive school climate [20]. School-connectedness describes the sense of belonging among students, families, school staff and the wider school community [21]. Higher levels of self-reported student school-connectedness are associated with academic success, positive attitudes towards self and others, lower levels of bullying, decreased school dropout and decreased health risk be-

haviours [22]. It is therefore important to build school-connectedness by enhancing positive interactions among students, as well as engaging students in school life through positive school and extracurricular activities [23].

School policy and practices are important in reducing bullying [8], as they send a strong message to the whole-school community about the school's commitment to providing a safe and supportive school environment, and as a basis for action and behaviour change. Policy and practice needs to discourage bullying behaviour and encourage positive social skills and reporting of bullying behaviour to enable staff to respond consistently and effectively to these behaviours. This will help to build student confidence that school staff will consistently follow through on reports of bullying.

To enhance understanding of and engagement with school policy and practices, policies need to be developed in collaboration with all members of the school community. They also need to be promoted in both online and offline environments to the whole-school community and implemented consistently and monitored to be effective.

Positive student behaviour needs to be acknowledged and encouraged at the whole-school level, as rewarding positive behaviour is related to decreased student discipline problems (*including bullying*) [24]. In contrast, the long-term effectiveness of punitive responses to bullying is unknown, and such approaches may be harmful to school climate and increase student reluctance to report these behaviours. School responses need to teach students how



to constructively resolve social problems to prevent the occurrence of similar incidents [25].

Raising awareness and teaching common understandings about bullying, and alternative ways to deal with social problems, is needed to equip the whole-school community with the knowledge and skills to prevent, identify and respond effectively to bullying behaviour.

## Key findings

The 23 guidelines aimed at schools generally stressed the importance of maintaining a positive and safe environment, and awareness raising among students is the most widely cited method, together with rewarding positive uses of ICT.

Raise students awareness that they have the right to seek help to resolve cyber-bullying incidents	52%
Raise students awareness that they have the responsibility to seek help to resolve cyber-bullying incidents	44%
Reward and encourage the positive use of technology for social interaction	39%

Less emphasis however is given to the peer group, peer influences and school dynamics which support its positive impact.

Use positive peer pressure to discourage peer pressure	9%
Use the peer group to provide support for students who are cyber-bullied	17%
Use cooperative learning methods to promote pro-social behaviour	22%
Develop programs and implement strategies to empower students to participate in a positive school culture, e.g. peer support systems	17%

Given the importance of whole-school policies that include cyber-bullying and virtual relationships for prevention and management of bullying situations, the role School Policy can play was not emphasized as widely in the guidelines as perhaps would be expected. And in general, it was found that school guidelines undervalue the role that the organisation plays in ensuring the success of these policies and processes.

Treat reports of cyber-bullying seriously and with a clear consistent action	36%
Develop and implement a whole-school bullying prevention policy which includes the reduction and management of cyber-bullying	27%
Document procedures and outcomes for managing cyber-bullying incidents	24%
Develop and then regularly review cyber-bullying policies, programs and procedures in collaboration with staff, students and parents	18%
An agreed definition of cyber-bullying, and an agreed statement of expected and unacceptable behaviour in relation to the use of interpersonal communications technology and cyber-bullying	14%
Coordinate a whole-school plan outlining how behaviours are to be addressed	14%
Allocate adequate resources including staff, time, finance, facilities and materials to implement strategies to reduce and manage cyber-bullying	14%
Provide professional development opportunities for staff responsible for the implementation of strategies	14%
A statement about the rights and responsibilities of all members of the school community, including visitors to address cyber-bullying prevention	5%

A key message across many guidelines aimed at schools was the importance placed on building up students skills to deal with the problem. But while the school's role in enabling, engaging, providing protection, support, and empowering students, was recognised this was under emphasised in many national guidelines. In addition very few guidelines explicitly valued the importance of working with students who cyber-bully others.

Enable students to recognize and report abuse	52%
Actively engage students in ways to prevent and manage cyber-bullying behaviour	32%
Develop protective strategies, including help-seeking behaviours	30%
Provide curricula that enable and empower students to increase their online safety and provide means to solve their own problems and learn important lifelong relationships and digital citizenship skills	22%
Provide appropriate monitoring and supervision of students' use of technology	18%
Help students who cyber-bully others to use their leadership or peer skills in more positive ways	5%



As for collaborative school-family-community partnerships being a key element in preventing and responding to cyber-bullying, some guidelines suggest that the most important element is the use of consultation and implementation of specialized knowledge to lead to a better-informed school community, especially amongst teachers.

Seek further information and resources to develop a whole school policy and procedures to address cyber-bullying	36%
Seek further information about cyber-bullying professional development opportunities for teachers	36%

## Recommendations

### 1 Proactive policies, plans and practices

Teachers and all other members of the school community need clear and consistent information, support, and procedures for preventing, detecting, reporting, and responding to cyber-bullying from the school management. They also need to talk to the students about cyber-bullying. In addition teachers themselves need to act as role models and engage students to support those who are victimised and by extension build a school climate that does not tolerate cyber-bullying.

### 2 Understanding and competences

There is a need for schools to implement strategies for action and behavioural change when intervening in bullying, especially in accordance with age. For example, older students typically have a better understanding and knowledge in regards to the Internet. Hence younger students may require more technical support responses to stop cyber-bullying, compared to older students.

Positive discipline, cooperative learning methods, and conflict resolution approaches can also provide ways for policies, plans and programs to endorse positive uses of technology and anti-cyber-bullying interventions. Schools provide an ideal context to develop online communication and other social skills, such as digital citizenship.

### 3 Collaborative partners

All members of the school community, teachers, parents and students need to collaborate in order to combat cyber-bullying. In case of a cyber-bullying situation, all parties involved need to contact each other and work together. It should not be a question of when does parental responsibility end and the school's responsibility start but rather how do we make cyber-bullying a more shared responsibility.

### 4 Social environment

Schools need to develop and maintain a positive and supportive school culture through the positive relationships they build between and among staff and students. School personnel and peers need to develop the knowledge and skills to effectively respond and give support to those who are cyber-bullied. These help seeking responses are more likely in a school with an open, supportive and trustworthy atmosphere, that has clear guidelines about how the community is expected to behave and respond to cyber-bullying. Caring, supportive and authoritative school personnel also contribute to better relations and a positive class and school climate.

Students also need to be provided with opportunities to practise safe bystander skills in the school as they often fail to report incidents of cyber-bullying behaviour to school personnel for fear that the technology will be taken away. It is of importance to promote the use of positive discipline models instead of punitive approaches.





## Review of the evidence

Teachers and other school staff play a key role in discouraging bullying and cyber-bullying, particularly with regard to the effectiveness and consistency of their response to bullying behaviour among students [26]. School staff report having less confidence responding to covert bullying (including cyber-bullying) than more overt verbal and physical bullying, often stating they are unsure about what action they should take [27]. Problematically, when bullying behaviours are not acknowledged nor effectively responded to, it is likely these behaviours will persist and even increase over time [26].

Clear policy and practice is needed to support teachers' consistent implementation of effective responses to bullying situations. The Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Study (ACBPS) showed that a lack of clear and consistent procedures for preventing, reporting and responding to bullying means that staff do not have guidance and support to encourage effective teacher actions. [28]. The behavioural expectations and consequences of poor behaviour and the procedures a school uses to respond to bullying need to be described and communicated clearly to both staff and all other members of the school community to build awareness and ensure consistent implementation.

School staff need comprehensive professional learning to enhance their confidence and self efficacy to assist students with bullying and related matters. This training needs to be part of a whole-school response to bullying where the training is linked to the school's bullying-related policy and response plan. While the vast majority of school staff usually disapprove of bullying [28], and perceive themselves as

having a responsibility to reduce and prevent school bullying, many report they need more training to improve their skills related to reduce and respond to bullying.

Aspects of teachers' relationships with students, such as their level of supportiveness and warmth, are also related to students' perceptions of the social climate and have an important influence on the bullying behaviour of students [29]. Poor teacher management of the class (as viewed by students) is associated with a higher likelihood of students bullying others, whereas more effectively managed classrooms have lower rates of bullying [30]. Positive classroom management techniques to respond to bullying, and the use of classroom rules against bullying are important methods to reduce bullying behaviour.

A study in Australia found that a large proportion of school staff (71%) justify the use of punitive approaches to address bullying, but with considerable disagreement over which strategies should be used to work with the student who is engaging in the bullying and the student who is being bullied [31]. The use of punishment to address bullying in schools has limitations, as it may only suppress behaviour temporarily, rather than in the longer-term, and may lead the perpetrators to resort to more covert forms of bullying, less easily detected by adults. Restorative approaches are often a useful first step; a study in England found that two-thirds of schools used some kind of restorative approach in dealing with bullying [32].

The 'digital' generation gap between young people and their teachers may be a potential



barrier in attempts to help students who are cyber-bullied [33]. In a study of pre-service teachers' perceptions about cyber-bullying, the vast majority of teachers surveyed reported they generally lacked the confidence to identify or manage cyber-bullying [34]. Further, students may not perceive adults at school as being able to help if students were to report cyber-bullying to them [16].

In addition to teachers' own efforts to reduce bullying, on-going effective teacher communication with parents contributes to the development of a positive school climate [35]. These regular communications need to encourage and help parents to effectively monitor and communicate with their child about all forms of bullying, particularly cyber-bullying given this behaviour occurs commonly outside of school hours.

## Key findings

There were 32 guidelines which addressed teachers as a main target group. Teachers were often presented as role models for aspects of promoting positive ways of using technology, modelling positive uses of ICT, and raising students' awareness.

Promote positive ways of using technology for social interaction	50%
Model the positive use of information communication technology for students	47%
Raise students' awareness that they have the right and responsibilities to seek help to resolve cyber-bullying incidents	47%

However, one area little mentioned in the guidelines is the role of teachers in policy-making and evaluation. Few guidelines encouraged teachers to document procedures and outcomes for managing cyber-bullying incidents, use positive approval, praise and encouragement to modify behaviour, or evaluate their actions in discouraging and managing student cyber-bullying.

Use positive approval, praise and encouragement to modify cyber-bullying behaviour	13%
Clearly document procedures and outcomes for managing cyber-bullying incidents to monitor their effectiveness and inform possible modification	16%
Evaluate their actions to discourage and manage student cyber-bullying	18%

Teachers were often encouraged to treat reports of cyber-bullying seriously; but only about one-third of guidelines mentioned providing appropriate monitoring and supervision for students. Similarly, in only about one-third were teachers encouraged to pursue the development of their own skills to effectively intervene in cyber-bullying situations.

Treat reports of cyber-bullying seriously and with clear consistent action	45%
Provide appropriate monitoring and supervision of students' use of technology	31%
Develop the skills required of them to manage students' cyber-bullying behaviour	31%

An item on encouraging and helping students to positively use technology for social interaction was often scored in the guidelines. Conversely, few guidelines addressed teacher's participation in professional development opportunities to deal with bullying. In practice, this would result in the often-theorized digital gap between young people and their teachers widening.

Encourage and help students to positively use technology for social interaction	53%
Participate in cyber-bullying professional development opportunities	20%

The majority of guidelines for teachers emphasize the importance of collaborative partnerships with parents and community groups. However, the mechanisms and actions to foster better linkages with parents and community were seldom addressed. Importantly, ways to develop strategies to deal with cyber-bullying in collaboration with parents, and increase parent and community awareness and ways to prevent or deal with cyber-bullying were poorly covered or less explicit.

Increase parent awareness of cyber-bullying and ways to prevent or deal with this behaviour	20%
Build close cooperation with parents and the school administration	19%
Increase community awareness of cyber-bullying and ways to prevent or deal with this behaviour	16%
Develop positive strategies to deal with cyber-bullying in collaboration with parents	9%





## Recommendations

### 1 Proactive policies, plans and practices

Teachers need to be educated and supported by the school management to know how to act when cyber-bullying occurs. This information needs to be clear, consistent and accurate so the school community knows how to effectively respond. It is also essential that school management encourages and enables teachers to consistently implement and evaluate effective responses to cyber-bullying situations.

### 2 Understanding and competences

Teachers need to be equipped with professional training to intervene effectively in cyber-bullying situations. They would benefit, in particular, from a deeper understanding of group dynamics and conflict management skills. It is essential that the school management team assess the capacity of their school staff to determine their professional learning needs to effectively and consistently respond to cyber-bullying behaviour. For example, teachers need to improve students' knowledge about cyber-safety and online etiquette rules.

### 3 Collaborative partners

Teachers need to actively collaborate and develop links with parents to establish close cooperation, develop collaborative strategies to deal with cyber-bullying, contact parents when appropriate, and increase parent and community awareness about cyber-bullying.

### 4 Social environment

Teachers need to be actively involved in creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom and positive relationships with their students. Teachers also need to enable and assist students in supporting students who are cyber-bullied and stop those who assist and reinforce students who cyber-bully others. In addition, they need to encourage students to report cyber-bullying behaviour. Close teacher-student relationships help to ensure a more positive class and school climate and to notice and to address conflicts and problematic situations between students.

Students are in a unique position to have a vital role in addressing the problems of cyber-bullying in schools, and need to be actively engaged as co-teachers/researchers by schools. Teachers need to take the opportunity to learn about the ways students use the Internet, while the students need to learn ways to solve social problems and develop social skills from teachers.



# CONCLUSIONS

The review of the literature and analysis of available guidelines on cyber-bullying in Europe, Israel and Australia points to a number of challenges that must be addressed so that schools, teachers, young people and parents can better prevent and respond effectively to all the risks associated with electronic communications.

To prevent and counter cyber-bullying of children and young people, which is emerging as a significant health problem, we are of the opinion that it is critical that there is first and foremost a concerted effort on the part of society, schools, teachers, parents and young people to work together to set policy and practice. Young people, in particular need to feel that their voice is heard when policies and procedures, which are to affect them, are being developed.

For schools it is essential that they include cyber-bullying as part of their whole school community approach to bullying, and that they have their teachers provide lessons which give students the confidence and self-efficacy to report and to seek help when they or their peers are victimised.

All young people need to learn the necessary self-help skills to both stay safe when navigating in the cyber world and to cope effectively when they are exposed to cyber aggression. It is also important that parents and teachers do not abdicate their responsibility in dealing with incidents which arise but rather ensure that

the victims of cyber aggression and bullying receive the necessary support and knowledge to help them cope with future attacks. We would strongly advise that teachers also guide the students who cyber-bully towards developing better social skills when online and to use their leadership or peer skills in more positive ways.

To help teachers better prevent and respond to cyber-bullying, provision must be made for them to gain a good understanding of group dynamics and conflict management skills as part of their pre-service and professional development training.

In recognising the importance of parents in preventing, identifying and responding to cyber-bullying we would strongly recommend that the more knowledge parents can gain about the internet and the risk factors associated with its use, the better equipped they will be in securing the safety of their children when online. However, it is also important that they establish regular communication with their children stressing the need for online netiquette and behaviour and for reporting all electronic communications which they or their peers find distressing and in poor taste.

In recognising the benefits of media technology for social and educational purposes we hope that the review of guidelines will go some way to countering the risk of cyber-bullying of children and young people.

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