



Cyber-bullying Policy

Introduction

1. Social Media provide a dynamic and rapidly evolving means of communication. Mobile phones, chat rooms, websites and social networks, such as Facebook, play a significant role in many young people's lives as they interact with their peers and search for a social identity.
2. Inappropriate use of social media may lead to what is commonly known as cyber bullying.
3. Cyber bullying, like any other form of bullying, is the abuse of one person or group of people. It is an affront to human dignity and will be treated in accordance with the principles and procedures of this Cyber Bullying Policy, the school's Code of Behaviour, the Anti Bullying Policy, the Child Protection Policy, the Internet Acceptable use Policy, the Health and Safety Statement and Safety Statement and the Policies on Dignity in the Workplace, Harassment, Sexual Harassment and other relevant policies.
4. Due to the instant, public, open and potentially permanent nature of access to material posted on social media and its capacity to multiply exponentially, a single inappropriate and offensive posting may constitute Cyber Bullying.
5. The school has a duty of care toward its pupils and its staff. A safe and respectful environment in school is necessary so that teaching and learning can take place.
6. The school, together with other relevant parties (parents and/or guardians, social media providers, Gardai etc) has a responsibility (though not the sole one) for the promotion of the responsible use of social media and the prevention of their misuse, with special reference to Cyber Bullying.
7. This Cyber Bullying Policy applies even when a student engages in inappropriate use of social media, when not under the direct supervision of the school; when there is a clear connection with the school and/or a demonstrable impact on its aims, work reputation and/or personnel.

Definitions

Social Media Technologies are defined as information and communication technologies (ICT), such as the internet, digital media or the mobile phone (e.g. text messages, group messaging services, instant messaging, personal websites, online polling websites, social media networks etc.)

Cyber Bullying means any usage of Social Media Technologies that seeks to undermine or humiliate a member, or members, of the school community. This includes circulating or publishing through ICT, material recorder without consent for the purpose of undermining, or causing damage to, the professional or personal reputation of another person, whether considered a “joke” or not.

Policy

Cyber Bullying will be deemed a serious breach of the school’s Code of Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policies, as well as other relevant policies, and will attract serious sanctions, up to and including suspension and expulsion. Allegations of Cyber Bullying may also be reported to the Gardai or other outside agencies as appropriate.

Any misbehaviour, including inappropriate use of social media, impacting on the health and safety of any member of the school community, will be treated with the utmost seriousness by the Principal and the Board of Management.

Reporting procedure and investigation.

1. Any student or staff member who believes s/he has, or is being, subjected to Cyber Bullying, as well as any person who has reason to believe a student or staff member is being subjected to (or has been subjected to Cyber-Bullying) shall immediately report the matter to the Principal, Deputy Principal or Year Head.
2. The Principal/Deputy Principal or Year Head shall investigate all reports of such conduct in line with agreed school procedures. Cyber Bullying will be subject to appropriate discipline and sanctions, to be decided by the Board of Management. The seriousness of the violation will determine the sanction to be applied. This may include suspension or expulsion.
3. All parties will be informed of the results of the investigations into Cyber Bullying.

Consequences of false accusation

1. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a student found to have falsely accused another member of the school community of an act of Cyber-Bullying range from positive behavioural interventions up to and including suspension and expulsion.
2. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a school employee found to have maliciously accused another member of the school community of an act of Cyber-Bullying is that s/he may be disciplined. Such discipline will be in accordance with relevant legislation and the school’s Dignity at Work Policy.

3. In circumstances where an investigation of Cyber-Bullying is not proven, but the Board is satisfied that a genuine and reasonable complaint is made, no action will be taken against the complainant.

The Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (June 2012) states that "staff should ensure that any communication with students, colleagues, parents, school management and others is appropriate, including communication via electronic media, such as e-mail, texting and social networking sites".

Discipline and Consequences

1. Some acts of Cyber-Bullying may be isolated incidents requiring the School Authorities to respond appropriately to the individual committing the acts. Other acts may be so serious, or part of a larger pattern of Cyber-Bullying, that they will require a response from outside agencies such as the Gardai.
2. Sanctions will be decided by the Board of Management and the seriousness of the violation will determine the sanction to be applied. This may range from positive behavioural interventions, up to and including suspension or expulsion. It is further noted that Cyber-Bullying using school technologies is in violation of the school's Acceptable Internet Use Policy. Where an incident of cyberbullying takes place outside of school time but is deemed to impact the welfare of students in school, the Board of Management will intervene as necessary, as mentioned above.
3. Intervention techniques to prevent Cyber-Bullying and to support and protect victims may include appropriate strategies and activities, as determined from time to time by the Board of Management and Principal.

Appeals

Section 20 of the Education Act 1998 gives parents and students (aged 18 years and over) the right to appeal certain decisions made by the Board of Management or by a person acting on behalf of the Board (expulsion; cumulative suspension of 20 days; refusal to enrol). In general, appeals must be made within 42 calendar days from the date that the parents/guardians were notified of the decision.

Reprisal or retaliation prohibited

The Board of Management will not tolerate reprisal or retaliation against any person who reports an act of Cyber-Bullying. The consequences and appropriate remedial action for a person who engages in reprisal or retaliation shall be determined by the Board or the Principal after consideration of the nature and circumstances of the act, in accordance with the principles of natural justice and Department of Education & Skills regulations and procedures.

The Board of Management and the Principal wish to encourage active reporting of all cases of Cyber-Bullying and will support aggrieved persons throughout the process

What is Cyber-bullying?

Online bullying is something you should talk about with your child before it happens. Ideally when your child starts using social media for the first time, when they are moving from primary to secondary school, and regularly thereafter.

This type of bullying is increasingly common and is continuously evolving. It is bullying carried out through the use of internet and mobile phone technologies. Being the target of inappropriate or hurtful messages is the most common form of online bullying. Cyberbullying does not require face to face contact, it can occur at any time (day or night). Many forms of bullying can be facilitated through cyberbullying. For example, a child may be sent homophobic text messages or pictures may be posted with negative comments about a person's sexuality, appearance etc.

Be clear on what constitutes online bullying. The procedures published by the Department of Education and Skills say:

“placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site or another public forum where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people will be regarded as bullying behaviour.” (Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools, DES 2013)

Cyberbullying can happen to anyone

It's always wrong and it should never be overlooked or ignored. You know your child better than anyone else. It means you are best placed to identify and deal with any cyberbullying they may encounter.

What Can I Do if my Child is Being Bullied Online?

Praise your child for coming to speak to you about the problem. Sometimes that first step of asking for help is a difficult one. Try to stay calm and not overreact. **Reassure your child by reminding them that many people have had similar experiences.**

The first thing to do is to listen. **Listen supportively, don't interrogate your child.** If they come to you looking for help, they have demonstrated trust in you. Be careful not to damage that by losing your cool or taking action that they are uncomfortable with. At the same time, you should make it clear that in order to help them you may have to talk to their teachers and the parents of other children involved.

Once you have established that bullying is taking place, you should get in touch with your child's school or youth organisation. Internet service providers should also be contacted and, if the cyberbullying is very serious, or potentially criminal, you could contact your local Gardaí.

Schools have a particular responsibility to address bullying. **Talk with your child's teacher if the bullying is school related.** A pupil or parent may bring a bullying concern to any teacher in the school. Individual teachers must take appropriate measures regarding reports of bullying behaviour in accordance with the school's **anti-bullying policy**. All schools must have an "Anti – Bullying" policy. You should familiarise yourself with your school's policy, so you know the steps to be taken if required.

Encouraging your child to talk to you about cyberbullying is key to maintaining an open and positive environment which can help you deal with the situation.

Responding negatively by barring internet use or taking away their mobile phone can damage trust and may also put you out of the loop if cyberbullying happens again.

Help your child to build his/her confidence and self-esteem in other areas. This can be supported by your child engaging in out of school activities, such as sports, music or art activities. If your child is very distressed it's important that they have someone with whom they can speak. A professional counsellor might be able to help. Childline offers a listening support service for children.

What Advice Should I Give my Child?

1. Don't Reply: Young people should never reply to messages that harass or annoy them. The bully wants to know they have upset their target. If they get a response it feeds into the problem and makes things worse.

2. Keep the Messages: By keeping nasty messages your child will be able to produce a record of the bullying, the dates and the times. This will be useful for any subsequent school or garda investigation.

3. Block the Sender: No one needs to put up with someone harassing them. Whether it's mobile phones, social networking or chat rooms, children can block contacts through service providers.

4. Report Problems: Ensure your child reports any instances of cyberbullying to websites or service providers. Sites like Facebook have reporting tools. By using these, your child will be passing important information to people who can help eradicate cyberbullying.

Children need to understand the emotional damage of cyberbullying, and all other forms of bullying can cause. **All forms of bullying hurt, all cause pain and all should be stopped.** By stressing this to your child – and by enforcing the importance of not standing by while someone else is being bullied – it will encourage their responsible internet use.

Examples of Cyber-bullying

- Sending mean emails, texts or instant messages.
- Sending neutral messages to someone to the point of harassment.
- Posting hurtful things about someone on social media.
- Spreading rumors or gossip about someone online.
- Making fun of someone in an online chat that includes multiple people.
- Pretending to be another person by creating a fake online profile.

- Threatening or intimidating someone online or in a text message.
- Taking an embarrassing photo or video and sharing it without permission.
- Sending/sharing sexually explicit material with someone online via social media, e-mail etc.