

## Cyberbullying: frequently asked questions

This section sets out the cyberbullying – frequently asked questions found in [Bullying prevention and response: A guide for schools](#).

We are continuing to develop advice for schools on a range of issues about cyberbullying. Subject matter expertise is being provided by NetSafe.

### Preventing cyberbullying

#### Parents, whānau and students

##### Q 1. How can parents and whānau help keep their children safe on the internet?

Children and young people will inevitably face challenges on the internet. Another way to think about safety is for parents, families and whānau to consider how they can support their young people to manage challenges, minimise harm to themselves and others, and ensure they are successful and confident internet users. It is vital for young people to know that they can talk to someone they trust if they are being bullied and / or are feeling unsafe. It could be a parent, carer, teacher or another adult.

Parents and whānau can support their children by helping them be responsible digital citizens. For example, being supportive of others and not posting comments that they would not be prepared to say face-to-face. Depending on the age of their child, parents and whānau can reduce the challenges their children face online by teaching them never to share personal information or passwords with anyone, talking to them about their online life, and monitoring their internet usage. Parents can also have discussions with their children about the different strategies they could use in the event they experienced online or texting activities that upset them or made them uncomfortable.

If a child or young person tells an adult they are being bullied and / or feel unsafe, it is important that the adult discusses how the young person could handle the situation, give advice and support the young person to keep themselves safe.

Children and young people often fear their mobile phone or computer will be taken off them if they tell adults about challenges online. This can be a reason why young people are often reluctant to report cyberbullying. See NetSafe's dedicated cyberbullying website.

##### Q 2. How can students protect themselves from cyberbullying?

Students will inevitably face challenges on the internet. Students can take steps to reduce their exposure to risk and minimise harm, while maximising the fun and opportunity that the internet provides. Students should be supported to develop strategies to build resilience and be knowledgeable users of the internet. Knowing when and how to react to challenges on the internet will reduce the number and seriousness of any incidents that do occur. Students often have developed their own coping strategies and will deal with most things without needing additional support or guidance.

Parents, families and whānau can support students by encouraging them to activate the privacy settings on social networking sites and by only letting people they know and trust view their profile. If a student is concerned or upset about online content about them or another student, they should send the person one private message or talk to them face-to-face and let them know that they consider the content is not okay. If this strategy does not work, students should then be encouraged to use other strategies such as telling a trusted adult, using the safety options provided or approaching the provider company.

### Schools

##### Q 3. What is the best way to create a safety culture in a schools including around cyberbullying?

Strategies to reduce all types of bullying are most effective when they are part of a whole-school

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focus on creating a positive climate that is inclusive and supports students' learning. Whole-school interventions establish positive social values that are important to the school community.

Enhancing mutual respect, promoting understanding rights and responsibilities, and fostering a school culture of inclusion that values diversity, are crucial aspects of safe schools. Schools can use a self review process available through Wellbeing@School, to create a safe and caring climate that deters bullying. Support for whole-school approaches can be provided by a New Zealand Police school community officer.

### Q 4. Are policies available for schools to use?

Schools need to develop policies in association with staff, students, parents and whānau, and their community. They need to be specific to the needs of their school and feature cyberbullying policies that can be incorporated into a school's overall bullying policy. For more information refer to the NetSafe Kit for Schools.

### Q 5. How can a school block a website? How do we manage permissions effectively?

No software will be 100% effective in preventing access to material available on the internet. Blocking websites is just one option. There will always be system weaknesses that users try to exploit. Students will always find ways to access websites while at school, eg, through their mobile phone. Blocking websites can drive the use of the website underground. Another approach is to help students understand and be aware of how to deal with unwanted or inappropriate websites.

Programmes are available to block certain websites and these can be loaded onto your school's computers. Filters are also available from the following Ministry of Education site to filter content (eg, access to certain websites), as well as emails and spam:

[www.education.govt.nz/school/running-a-school/technology-in-schools/safe-and-secure-internet/](http://www.education.govt.nz/school/running-a-school/technology-in-schools/safe-and-secure-internet/)

Schools could also consider recommending blocking software to the school parent community

in newsletters and help parents purchase specific software.

### Q 6. Where can we find anti-cyberbullying and internet safety programmes?

See NetSafe's website for a variety of programmes for different ages, available at: [www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz)

### Q 7. What is a reasonable amount of time for schools to spend on cyberbullying education?

The amount of time spent will depend on the needs of the school and students and the capabilities of staff and students. Digital citizenship and technology capability can be built into all areas of the curriculum and a range of whole-school activities. Everyone in the school should be responsible for digital citizenship. NetSafe has a Learn, Guide, Protect website that schools can use to create a culture of responsible, safe use of digital technologies. Go to: [www.mylgp.org.nz](http://www.mylgp.org.nz). Also refer to a NetSafe document on digital citizenship in schools.

### Q 8. How can we stop students from wasting time on social networking sites?

Social networking plays an important role in the lives of young people. Students should be encouraged to use social networking sites responsibly and schools should have policies about the use of mobile devices during class time or at school.

### Q 9. How can schools cooperate to deal with inter-school bullying?

Principals can use their existing networks to work with other schools and agree on appropriate responses to bullying, including cyberbullying.

### Q 10. Can a principal inform parents of websites that students should avoid?

It is up to individual schools to determine if this is appropriate. Principals may wish to inform parents, using the school newsletter, if the school is having issues arising from a particular website. However, this may encourage students to visit these websites more often.

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## Responding to cyberbullying

### Parents, whānau and students

#### Q 11. What should a parent do if they discover their child is being cyberbullied?

Online and off line bullying or harassing behaviours are closely linked, with international research showing that those who are bullied offline are 15 times more likely to experience online bullying. Parents should inform their child's school if they become aware their child is being cyberbullied, as their child could be being bullied at school as well.

If parents discover their child is being bullied, they should take their child's concerns seriously and reassure them that it's not their fault. Children and young people often fear that their mobile phone or computer will be taken off them, which can be a reason why they do not report cyberbullying. It is important that parents work with their child to develop appropriate strategies that support the young person. One strategy is to report internet cyberbullying to the website where the bullying took place. Usually there is a 'report abuse' button or 'safety' link, as well as a 'block sender / user' link. If bullying occurs through text messages, contact the phone company and ask them to take action. Parents should talk to their child's school if it appears that the bullying comes from another student at their child's school or if it is affecting their child at school.

#### Q 12. What blocking strategies can be made available to the bullied student?

Children and young people will inevitably face challenges on the internet and will resolve the majority of them by themselves. Teaching students coping strategies and digital citizenship is the best way to minimise exposure to challenges online.

Students can usually report abuse directly to the website concerned or to their mobile phone company. Many social networking sites such as Facebook have a 'block' or 'report' function where a student can enter the user names of people bothering them or people who they want to avoid. Mobile phone companies can also block the number of a person who is sending abusive or

threatening messages or phone calls. Alternatively, students can shut down their own social media page. Young people can find advice and guidance on NetSafe's webpage:

[www.cyberbullying.org.nz/youngpeople/](http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/youngpeople/)

#### Q 13. Where can immediate help / advice be sought about cyberbullying?

NetSafe is an organisation that promotes cybersafety and champions digital citizenship by educating advising and supporting individuals, organisations and industry on a range of issues. NetSafe has a toll-free number for queries and advice. Call 0508 NETSAFE (638 723). This number is not manned around the clock, but someone from NetSafe will call back as soon as possible if a call is made after hours. NetSafe also has an email address for queries. Email NetSafe at: [queries@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:queries@netsafe.org.nz)

#### Q 14. What support exists to help students who are being bullied through their mobile phone?

Inappropriate or abusive text messages should be reported to the student's phone company. Phone companies have an agreement to liaise with each other and take action where appropriate. They can block calls or disable an account (that the texts or calls are originating from). Young people can find advice and guidance on NetSafe's website, [www.cyberbullying.org.nz/youngpeople/](http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/youngpeople/)

#### Q 15. How do I recover / take down inappropriate pictures of my children?

Sharing inappropriate pictures online is the least common form of cyberbullying. Parents and whānau can minimise harm from sharing inappropriate pictures by advising their children against posting or sharing any images they do not want distributed further, including email, pxt and txt.

The Orb website has been developed to offer a simple and secure way to report concerns about online incidents. Visit the website: [www.theorb.org.nz](http://www.theorb.org.nz). Reports made to this website will be directed to the organisation best able to investigate or advise on various types of online incidents, including objectionable material and privacy breaches.

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## Schools

**Q 16. What resources are available to support teachers' learning and development relating to changes in technology and the online environment?**

Due to the ever changing nature of the online environment and advances in technology PPTA's Digital Communication guidance strongly advises ongoing professional learning for teachers. Teachers can find further information here.

Information and resources about teachers' use of social media for staff meetings and workshops.

**Q 17. What can schools do in response to students being bullied on Facebook? What jurisdiction do they have?**

Schools can support the affected student to help them build coping strategies and resilience to prevent the bullying reoccurring. This applies to bullying occurring through any social media. Schools may also choose to approach the owner of the bullying material (for example, the owner of the Facebook page) and ask them to remove it. Schools can seek advice from NetSafe on 0508 NETSAFE.

**Q 18. What can a school do if a student sends an inappropriate photo of themselves to another student who then circulates it amongst his / her friends?**

Schools should ensure the student is supported and deal with an issue such as this through their behaviour / bullying policy. Schools can also call NetSafe for advice on 0508 NETSAFE. Students should be discouraged from sharing inappropriate images of themselves, and should be warned of the dangers if they choose to do so. It can be easy to post a photo of someone and not realise that the other person may feel uncomfortable about it. This behaviour does happen and often is not intended to cause harm. This highlights the need to teach students about being responsible digital citizens.

**Q 19. What is the process for closing down sites that contain offensive material? How can the offensive material be removed?**

The best and most effective response to the discovery of offensive material on a website is to ask the person who put it there to remove it. Many websites are based overseas, so it is not generally possible or reasonable to get them shut down.

Cyberbullying and abuse can be reported to the website where the bullying took place – usually there is a 'report abuse' button or 'safety' link. If a social networking page, for example a Facebook page, is offensive or abusive and the page owner refuses to remove it after being approached, this can be reported to the website and the page may be taken down by the website owner if it breaches the terms and conditions of the site.

**Q 20. Can a school apply disciplinary consequences for comments / images about other students or staff, posted online?**

Schools' bullying and behaviour policies should determine the steps schools take to discipline a student who is cyberbullying. School policies should declare an intention to deal with cyberbullying by making it clear that the school will take steps to respond to cyberbullying behaviour.

**Q 21. Where do schools' responsibilities for cyberbullying and bullying that occurs out of school hours / off school premises begin and end?**

Schools that take a whole-school approach to bullying which encompasses the school community will respond to all reports of bullying behaviour, whether it takes place in or out of school.

**Q 22. What is the legal risk of a school taking action or not taking action to respond to bullying they know about?**

Schools are required to provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students. Schools should respond to reports of bullying, including cyberbullying by following their bullying policies and procedures. Schools should keep parents

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informed if their child is bullying or has been bullied.

## **23. What role does New Zealand Police have and when should schools refer cyberbullying to New Zealand Police?**

New Zealand Police provides both a prevention service (through a school community officer) and a response service for schools. Cyberbullying may be related to a range of criminal and / or civil offences.

If a school or parent believes an offence may have been committed, they should contact their local police station and provide the police with as much evidence as possible. They should save offending text messages and take screen shots of any abuse online or call 111 depending on the seriousness of the incident.

## **Q24. What role are telecommunication companies playing in helping to create a solution to cyberbullying?**

Many of the telecommunications companies, including Spark, Vodafone and 2 Degrees, have created cyberbullying resources. These can all be found online.

## **Links**

Online Safety Advisory Group – Digital technology: Safe and responsible use in schools.

<http://elearning.tki.org.nz/Teaching/Digital-citizenship>

Ministry of Education – Surrender and retention of property and searches guidelines.

[www.minedu.govt.nz/Boards/SupportForBoards/SurrenderAndRetentionOfPropertyAndSearches.aspx](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/Boards/SupportForBoards/SurrenderAndRetentionOfPropertyAndSearches.aspx)

NetSafe – queries and advice. Phone: 0508

NetSafe (638 723) and email:

[queries@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:queries@netsafe.org.nz)

NetSafe resources for schools – At a Distance video and guide for teachers and principals.

[www.cyberbullying.org.nz/teachers/](http://www.cyberbullying.org.nz/teachers/)

NetSafe Kit for Schools – Digital Citizenship Policy; Staff Responsible Use Agreement; Student Responsible Use Agreement

[www.netsafe.org.nz/the-kit/policy-and-use-agreements](http://www.netsafe.org.nz/the-kit/policy-and-use-agreements)

PPTA digital communication guidance through ongoing professional learning and development for teachers.

<http://ppta.org.nz/resources/publicationlist/624online-safety-for-teachers>

Teachers' Council social media website.

[www.teachersandsocialmedia.co.nz](http://www.teachersandsocialmedia.co.nz)