

# Cyberbullying and children and young people with SEN and disabilities: guidance for teachers and other professionals

## SEN and disability: developing effective anti-bullying practice

The future is ours: safe, fun and connected

Funded by



Department  
for Education



Achievement for All 



**contact** a family  
for families with disabled children



**mencap**  
The voice of  
learning disability

**SEN and disabilities: developing effective anti-bullying practice:** A programme of work, led by the Anti-Bullying Alliance and funded by the Department for Education, to reduce the incidence and impact of bullying of children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities in schools.

## Contents

SEND: developing effective anti-bullying practice programme of work	3
About this guide	4
What is bullying?	5
What is cyberbullying?	6
Cyberbullying focus groups key findings	7
What is different about cyberbullying?	8
The context of technology in young people's lives	10
Research	11
Cyberbullying and legal duties	12
For school leadership	13
Preventing cyberbullying	15
Responding to cyberbullying	18
Developing a lesson plan for children and young people	19
Summary of recommendations	21
Educational resources	23
Appendix 1 – cyberbullying research	24
References	26
Acknowledgements	29

## SEND: developing effective anti-bullying practice programme of work

Evidence shows that children and young people with special educational needs and / or disabilities (SEND) are significantly more likely to be bullied or victimised than those who don't have any SEND.

From 2013–2015 the Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) will be leading on the most extensive and innovative programme of training and resources ever undertaken to reduce the incidence and impact of bullying of children and young people with SEND in schools. ABA will be working in partnership with Achievement for All 3As, Contact a Family, Mencap and the Council for Disabled Children. We plan to achieve this by:

- improving practice in schools
- early intervention through information, advice and support for parents and carers
- disseminating information to the wider sector
- ensuring our training and resources are influenced and informed by children and young people with SEND themselves

This project is funded by the Department for Education.

During the course of the project we are providing training to 1000s of schools, parents and carers and other professionals to reduce the incidence and impact of bullying of children and young people with SEND.

To support this work and to ensure we are sharing our resources and learning we have created an “information hub” which houses lots of resources and information.

You can find it here: [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/send-programme](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/send-programme)

This module forms part of this programme and was written by Childnet International and Kate Martin, Common Room Consulting Ltd

## About this guide



This guidance gives a unique insight and is intended to help teachers and other professionals understand the issues around cyberbullying for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We want a future where children and young people with SEND are using technology to communicate positively rather than being held back by cyberbullying. We need to ensure that young people are safe, fun and connected.

This guidance is written to apply to schools but could also apply to other settings for children and young people. It draws on evidence from both the research literature and evidence derived from consultation with children and young people with SEND. It outlines the specific issues that schools, teachers and other professionals should be aware of where cyberbullying is concerned for this group of young people and also outlines actions that teachers and other professionals should take to prevent and respond to cyberbullying of children and young people with SEND.

In July and August 2013 Common Room Consulting Limited ran four focus groups with children and young people to explore cyberbullying. The groups consisted of young people with disabilities, learning difficulties, mental health, emotional and / or behavioural difficulties\*. Running at the same time were an additional series of focus groups on bullying and mental health. The young people in each of these sessions also raised cyberbullying as an issue and their views are also incorporated.

For many young people this was a difficult topic to discuss. For some, this was due to experiencing severe forms of cyberbullying and for others this was the first time they had discussed cyberbullying.

The views of children and young people involved in the consultation, and associated quotations, are used throughout and a full report about the results of our consultation can be found on our information hub.

For the purpose of this guide we mean 'young people' to refer to all children and young people.

### Recommendation:

Throughout this guidance recommendations will be made in this style blue box. You can also find a summary of the recommendations on page 21.

There are accompanying resources to this guide, including a powerpoint presentation that schools and other professionals can use in training staff and a full report reflecting young people's views, which you will find on our information hub at [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/send-programme](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/send-programme).

\* For brevity, the terms disabled young people or young people are used throughout the report to encompass all of the young people we spoke to, but should be clear this incorporates the views of disabled young people and young people with learning difficulties, emotional, mental health or behavioural difficulties.

## What is bullying?

It is important that when thinking about cyberbullying we have a full understanding of the definition of bullying.

The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) defines bullying as:

**“the repetitive, intentional hurting of one person or group by another person or group, where the relationship involves an imbalance of power.”**

It can happen face-to-face or through cyberspace.



## What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is bullying via electronic means. This could be via a smart phone, computer, laptop, tablet or online gaming platform. It can take place on a range of online or mobile services, such as text, email, social networking sites, video-hosting sites, messenger, photo sharing services, chat, webcams, visual learning environments and online games.

Cyberbullying can be an extension of bullying behaviour that is already happening in school or the wider community – or it can be between people that rarely meet face to face – or have never met in person. Cyberbullying has some unique characteristics that make it particularly painful to experience and presents particular challenges to which we will discuss in this guidance.

Cyberbullying can take a wide range of forms. It can be threats and intimidation, namecalling, harassment, exclusion, gaining access to unauthorised information online or 'hacking', impersonation, posting personal information, sexting/sexualised or manipulation. More detail on all of these is to be found in the Safe to Learn Guidance\* on cyberbullying (see [www.childnet.com/resources/cyberbullying-safe-to-learn-embedding-antibullying-work-in-schools](http://www.childnet.com/resources/cyberbullying-safe-to-learn-embedding-antibullying-work-in-schools)).



\* Safe to Learn Guidance referred to is no longer current Government guidance, but is still useful for information

## Cyberbullying focus groups key findings

Of the young people with disabilities we spoke to many:

- spoke of **using the internet positively** and were doing so with awareness about how to stay safe online.
- felt that the **positive aspects of the internet and social media are often overshadowed** by talk of the internet being unsafe or of cyberbullying. They felt there should be a balanced view, with support to learn how to stay safe online and how to respond to cyberbullying if it happens, rather than being discouraged to use it.
- **had experienced cyberbullying**. This was often an extension of the face-to-face bullying they experienced, often went unchallenged, or they were not supported to respond to this.
- were **not using the internet**, despite being able to do so. For some this was because they were not given the support to do so. For others it was because they had been discouraged from using the internet or were afraid to do so for fear of cyberbullying. This means young people are also missing out on the many positive aspects of the internet.
- said that cyberbullying can **enhance existing social pressures**.
- had **not been supported to learn about cyberbullying or internet safety**. This meant they were not aware of how to stay safe online, what to do about cyberbullying, or made it difficult for them to know if some of the things happening online were cyberbullying or not.
- said they were **often not believed** when they told someone about cyberbullying or were told the best strategy to deal with cyberbullying is to avoid the internet, which they felt wasn't realistic.

*Positives*

*Concerns*

*Education*



- talked of no one knowing they have a disability online and that the internet was a good way of **concealing this aspect of the identity**. This should cause us to question the negative impact of bullying on young people's identity as disabled people.

## What is different about cyberbullying?

There are some features of cyberbullying that are different to other forms of bullying.

### 24/7 bullying

Young people are always connected, which means that the target of the bullying can be reached 24/7, even when they are at home. Young people within the focus groups talked of bullying extending into all areas of their personal lives through cyberbullying and the portability of technology. **This meant that bullying follows them and becomes inescapable.**

**“You used to be able to go in to school, get your head down, and have different friends outside of school... You could separate it... Now you can’t.”**

**“It takes what’s happening in school to a whole other level.”**

**“Bullying is far more wide spread now it is online – it’s not just your time in school. It affects your social life. Your social life is online. How many people like your status or your picture. Social pressures are just made worse.”**

### Online popularity

Young people within the focus groups talked in detail about cyberbullying and social media. For young people who access social media, so much of their social lives are online. This can increase existing social pressures on young people and enhance exclusion and isolation, taking several different forms for example:

- People purposefully not liking a young person’s status update or photo they have posted, so they seem unpopular
- Exclusion from group chats
- Not being invited to group events

### Anonymity

A young person being bullied may not always know who is bullying them, which can be very distressing. The bullying content can be shared with a large audience very quickly, and can reappear again and again, which can make it harder to get ‘closure.’ Anyone can ‘cyberbully’ anyone else – we know teachers have been on the receiving end of cyberbullying.

### Evidence

However, on a positive side, evidence of the cyberbullying can be collected and retained – be it a text or screenshot from a social networking profile. It can be enormously empowering to a

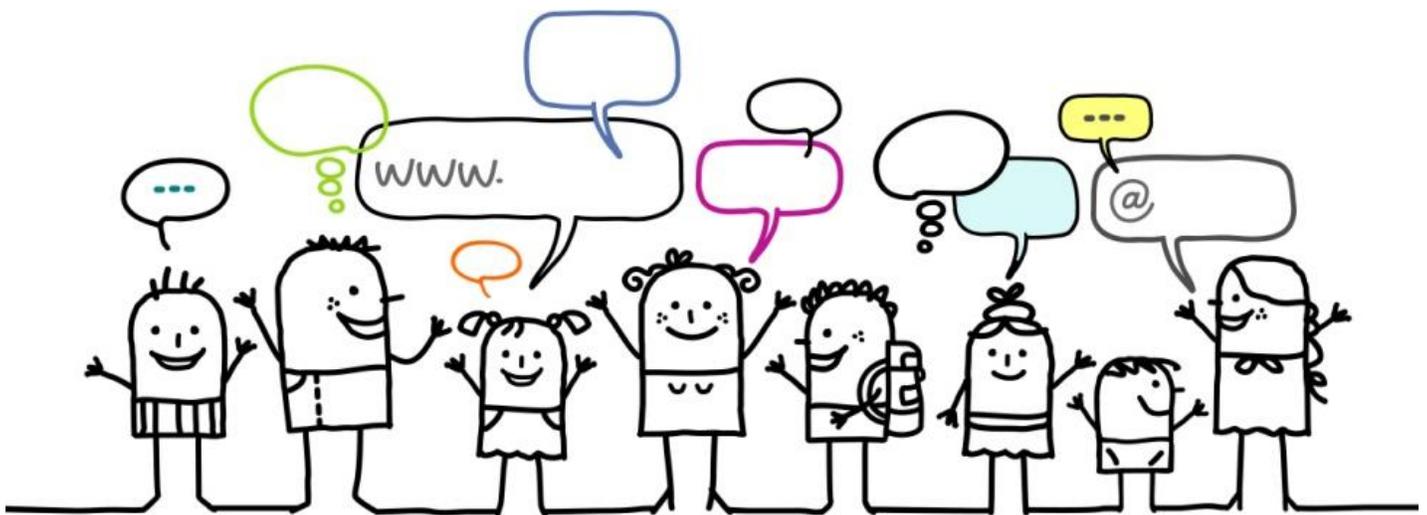


child, when they want to talk about a bullying incident, to have something they can show, and that can be significant in relation to when they tell a friend, a parent or carer, a teacher or school staff member, an internet service provider or even the police.

### Global identity

Bullying and harassment online often involves a large audience with a number of players. It's rarely limited to interaction between two individuals.

**“A lot of people, like I’ve seen them on Facebook, and they’ll take a photo of someone without them knowing it, and there’ll be hundreds of comments on it, just like taking the mick out of them.”**



## The context of technology in young people's lives

### Technology surrounds us

Technology and the internet are incredible tools and are integral to the lives of children and young people, from an educational and a social perspective. Children are adopting, even owning, technology from a younger and younger age. Simply not using it is not likely to be a beneficial strategy in relation to a cyberbullying incident.

### Discouraged from using the internet

Many disabled young people within the focus groups talked of being actively discouraged from using the internet, despite its many positive aspects, because adults were concerned they may be bullied or because of concern about internet safety. Some young people felt this was because adults were scared of the internet or were unsure how to advise them to use it safely.

**“I use it a lot, but my Mum doesn't know”**

#### **Recommendation:**

E-safety education, such as thinking before you post is an important message; encouraging children and young people to put themselves in the shoes of the person receiving messages for example, and the need to respect friends' and peers' thoughts and feelings online.

### Difficulty understanding

Young people within the focus groups talked of the difficulties of understanding whether something was bullying or not. This is an issue for many forms of face to face bullying – but can be exacerbated online as there are fewer cues to understand someone's intention or where words can be interpreted and read in different ways. For example, it can be difficult to know when online communication has turned from joking to bullying. Some young people felt this could be particularly difficult for young people with communication impairments and learning difficulties, who may need support to understand and determine whether something is cyberbullying.

**“I know like there's things that have happened to me online, and when I've spoken to teachers about they said it was cyberbullying, but I didn't realise.”**

#### **Recommendation:**

Becoming good digital citizens, being able to use technology safely and responsibly, looking after yourself and your peers, and participating in life online, has to be a crucial part of modern education for all pupils.

## Research

### What does the research tell us?

#### Summary (see Appendix 1 for more details and references)

- The right not to be bullied was voted in the top 3 online rights by 24,000 children aged 7–19.
- 41% of 7–11 year olds knew someone who had been cyberbullied.
- 8% of 9–16 year olds from the UK have been bullied online, while 21% have been bullied online or offline.
- People with disabilities are amongst the groups least likely to use the internet and are 20% less likely than their peers.
- 28% of 11–16 year olds reported that they have been targeted by some form of cyberbullying.
- Of these, one quarter experienced this as persistent over time. This report found that there are some high risk groups in relation to cyberbullying: ‘those who reported having SEN were 12% more likely to have experienced cyberbullying than those who did not.’ Those ‘who reported having a disability were nearly twice as likely to have experienced cyberbullying than those that did not report having a disability’.



### Disablist language

Our research found that a lot of young people talked about frequently seeing disablist language online or jokes about disability, which they found upsetting or difficult to see, and affected how they felt about themselves as people with disabilities. The young people also talked about disablist language aimed at them directly.

**“Call you names or say stuff, like give you messages and say nasty things.”**

### Recent media attention

Some anonymous social networking services have been linked with cyberbullying, allowing users to post bullying messages and content without revealing their identity. They usually have reporting mechanisms in place and should act on reports received.

There are also services that enable users to share messages and content that are only visible for a short time period, a few seconds usually, and then disappear. These services have started to be used for cyberbullying too. It is possible to take a screenshot of the message and therefore save the content, though the person sending it will then be notified of this.

## Cyberbullying and legal duties

### Education Law:

The school community has a duty of care to protect all its members and provide a safe, healthy environment, and these obligations are highlighted in law and guidance.

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 gives the Head Teacher the power, 'to such an extent that is reasonable', to regulate the conduct of pupils when they are offsite. This power is very relevant to cyberbullying because much cyberbullying does take place out of school, partly because the technology used in cyberbullying, such as social networking services and smartphones, may be restricted in schools. However, the impact of cyberbullying can affect the lives and school lives of young people, so what takes place offsite has a direct impact onsite.

The Education Act 2011 gives additional powers to schools – screening, searching and confiscation, including of electronic devices. There is DfE advice on this in "Screening, searching and confiscation – Advice for Head Teachers, staff and governing bodies" This even includes the power to delete certain content. There are conditions to the use of all of these powers, so the DfE Guidance should be referred to.

### Criminal law:

There is more detail on cyberbullying and criminal law in the Safe to Learn Cyberbullying guidance.\* Although bullying or cyberbullying is not a specific criminal offence in UK law, there are laws that can apply – for e.g. in terms of menacing and threatening communications, or harassment. Some cyberbullying activities could be criminal offences under a range of different laws, including the Malicious Communications Act 1988 and the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. There have been some instances of such prosecutions in the UK.

---

\* Safe to Learn Guidance referred to is no longer current Government Guidance, but is still useful for information

## For school leadership

Issues relating to technology and its misuse are an everyday experience of most secondary schools and some primary schools. Many a school leader will talk of the time spent dealing with fall-out from popular social media sites for example, and all schools have probably experienced cyberbullying in some form and probably cyberbullying of children and young people with SEN and disabilities.



School leadership is the most important factor in dealing with cyberbullying in a school community. Cyberbullying is explicitly included in the new Ofsted Inspection Framework, under the Behaviour and Safety of children at school, as well as in the Leadership and Management section, and is something the inspectors consider in their evaluations.

For school leadership, it is important to be able to prepare for and be in a position to evidence the steps that a school is taking to prevent and to respond to this issue. Updated in January 2013, 'Inspecting e-safety,' a briefing document for Ofsted inspectors outlines the key features of good and outstanding practice (as well as indicators of inadequate practice) and this provides an invaluable resource for schools.

The approach which is recognised as appropriate is the '**whole-school community approach**', where everyone in the school community is aware of what cyberbullying is, the impact it can have, and what they can do to prevent and respond to it when it happens – more on this approach is outlined in the Safe to Learn Guidance on cyberbullying which, although is no longer official government guidance, remains valuable detailed advice on this subject for schools, see <http://www.childnet.com/resources/cyberbullying-safe-to-learn-embedding-anti-bullying-work-in-schools>.

The young people in the focus groups supported the whole school approach and highlighted the need for education and awareness for their parents and carers, for school staff, as well as themselves.

**“[Teachers] tend to be a bit scared of dealing with it”**

**“In colleges when you have 1–1 about your work and stuff, have some of the time for general stuff so people can talk about if they're getting bullied... Or if I went to my tutor about my work they should ask how are things in general in school. Give you time to say 'I'm ok but I'm being bullied.'”**

**Recommendation:**

- The young people we spoke to felt that internet safety should be linked to wider learning and teaching about staying safe and wanted support to understand how to communicate appropriately online. They made several recommendations for integrating internet safety education into the school curriculum and felt that it should be taught regularly to *all* children and young people.
- Ensure cyberbullying is actively talked about in schools and that this information is in accessible formats, so it can be accessed and understood by all children and young people.
- Provide real life examples when teaching, so that children are more likely to spot bullying of themselves or others , or to understand when their own actions could be construed as bullying.
- Bullying and cyberbullying should be built into ‘everyday’ school conversations, for example, in personal tutor sessions, staff should talk to young people about bullying and cyberbullying so that young people have the opportunity to talk about any issues they have.

## Preventing cyberbullying

### Understanding and talking about cyberbullying

The young people questioned said it can be difficult to know whether something was bullying or not, as they had not been given the support to learn about what cyberbullying is, how to spot it, or what to do about it. For those that had had lessons or teaching about cyberbullying, it was often very brief, focused more on 'strange men pretending to be young people,' or gave few strategies for young people to deal with cyberbullying, other than avoidance of the internet.

#### Recommendation:

The whole-school community needs a shared understanding of what is meant by 'cyberbullying', its potential impact, how it differs from other forms of bullying and why it is unacceptable. Young people and their parents should also be made aware of pupils' responsibilities in their use of ICT and schools are clear how they will respond to issues of cyberbullying of young people with SEND.

**"I don't think sometimes they realise what they're doing is bullying. I don't even think sometimes the victim knows it's bullying. I know like there's things that have happened to me online, and when I've spoken to teachers about it they said it was cyberbullying, but I didn't realise."**



**Recommendation:**

- Update existing policies and practices to reflect cyberbullying issues, and ensure that policies are 'owned' and understood throughout the school community.
- Make reporting cyberbullying easier, publicise existing reporting routes so pupils, parents and staff are clear on how and who to report to.

**Promoting the positive use of the internet**

The young people spoken to felt that their schools often had no clear approach to dealing with cyberbullying; had no clear guidelines on what is and isn't acceptable for students outside of school; or that schools said it 'wasn't their responsibility' if the bullying was happening outside of school. Young people also felt that teachers and other school staff often did not know how to respond to cyberbullying.

**Recommendation:**

Promote the positive use of technology: The positive use of technology, which models safe and effective practice, is key to preventing the misuse of technology. Schools should ensure that learning strategies and targets, as well as staff development programmes, support the innovative and engaging use of technologies.

Many young people spoke of the many positive aspects of using the internet, which they often felt were overlooked. Some felt this was freeing and empowering and a way of escaping some of the difficult experiences they had in their day to day lives.

Some young people said they used the internet:

- To connect with other people with similar experiences.
- To get support with issues such as bullying or other issues, from message boards, forums and videos.
- To build social connections, particularly where they were experiencing social difficulties or isolation in their daily lives. For example, some young people enjoyed the social aspects of online gaming or hearing other people's experiences on YouTube, blogs or forums.



However, some young people with disabilities talked of positive aspects if the internet being no one knowing that they had a disability and being able to conceal this aspect of their identity, leading us to question the negative impact of bullying on their identity as young people with disabilities.

**“Even if you don't communicate directly with that person, you can feel a connection.”  
(Said regarding watching online videos of people with similar experiences).**

**Recommendation:**

Children and young people, especially those with SEND, should be taught how to use the internet and new technologies safely and responsibly is a key step to preventing cyberbullying – helping young people develop into responsible digital citizens who can look after themselves, and their peers and get the most out of technology is the best counter to cyberbullying.

**Support and teaching**

Most young people spoken to had had little or no teaching and support to understand cyberbullying or internet safety and many young people spoken to said the cyberbullying they encountered at home was an extension of the bullying they experienced in school. Many of the young people spoken to talked of not using the internet at all. For some young people, this was because they would need support to access the internet and they were not given this support. For other young people, this was because:



- they thought the internet was a dangerous place,
- were fearful of doing so, or
- had been actively discouraged from using it by parents and/or teachers, for 'safety' reasons.

On the other hand, many disabled young people talked about using the internet, even though their parents or teachers assumed that they weren't; and without having been supported to understand how to use the internet safely. They wanted further guidance and education about what to do if they are being cyberbullied, and how to stay safe online.

**Recommendation:**

Evaluating the impact of prevention activities: Regular reviews are vital to make sure that anti bullying policies are working and are up-to-date. Consider conducting an annual survey of pupils' experiences of bullying, including cyberbullying, and a parent satisfaction survey. Publicise progress and activities to the whole-school community – keep cyberbullying a live issue and celebrate your successes!

## Responding to cyberbullying

### Recommendation:

- Support the person being bullied. Give reassurance that the pupil that has come to you has done the right thing by telling someone about the incident, refer to any existing pastoral support/procedures and inform parents. Young people we spoke with wanted staff members to work with them closely to agree a course of action and support, so the young person felt in control of this process.
- Advise on next steps – e.g. save the evidence and don't retaliate. Young people requested further support to review how they currently use the internet and explore ways of improving their online safety. For example, being shown how to block people or increase their privacy settings.
- Take action to contain the incident when content has been circulated. Steps may include:
  - asking the person responsible to take the content down;
  - reporting the content online yourself;
  - consider disciplinary powers to confiscate devices that are being used to cyberbully; and,
  - contacting the police if the law has been broken.
- Investigating incidents – keep a record. If necessary, take steps to identify the person displaying the bullying behaviour.
- Working with the young person displaying the bullying behaviour. The young people who took part in this research felt that it was also important to support the young person who had bullied them and look at the possible causes for their behaviour, for example, they may have been bullied themselves, or may not understand how their behaviour and actions have affected others.

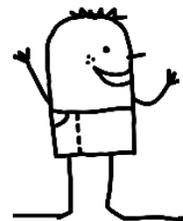


## Developing a lesson plan for children and young people

These are some of the key messages to get across to children and young people with SEND to help them keep safe online.

### Prevent:

- Always respect others. Be careful what you say online and what images you send. It is good to ask permission before you upload a photo or video of someone else.
- Keep it private! Remember, friends made online may not be who they say they are, and people online may not always tell the truth. Only give your mobile number, email addresses and other personal information to trusted 'real-world' friends.
- Think before you post or send – If you are active on social networking services, think about what you are sharing and who you are sharing it with. Whatever you share can be made public very quickly and could be online forever.



Some young people from the focus groups talked about getting 'into trouble' for things they had done or said online, as they had not realised how the things they said might affect other people, or had not been supported to understand how to communicate appropriately online.

- Protect your personal information and your online reputation. The content you post online can affect not only yourself but other people too. You can set your privacy settings to control who can see your content and make sure that you use strong passwords for all accounts.
- Don't give in to pressure. It can be easy to get caught up in online behaviours that you wouldn't normally be a part of. If you lose your inhibitions online, you've lost control. Once you've pressed send, it is very hard to take something back. It's not a digital footprint – it's a digital tattoo which, in some cases, can never be removed.

Young people said cyberbullying often took the form of peer pressure including pressure to get involved in bullying others or pressure to send images of themselves. This was often done on the promise of friendship or fear or threat of isolation and exclusion from within a peer group.

- Respect the law. Although bullying is not a specific criminal offence in UK law, there are laws that can apply in terms of harassing or threatening behaviour. **It is important to consider the offline consequences of your online actions.**

## Respond:

- Don't retaliate or reply. Most of the time the person who is bullying is looking for a reaction. If you do reply, you could be giving them exactly what they want.
- Save the evidence of any texts, emails, images, website pages or other communications that you receive. This can be helpful for when you want to tell someone about it or report the cyberbullying.
- **Don't keep it to yourself!** Tell a trusted adult if you are being cyberbullied, or call a helpline like Childline 0800 11 11 in confidence. An adult at school, such as your class teacher or sports coach, can also help you.



Young people said they felt it was often unclear within schools about who to go to for cyberbullying incidents and this meant other young people could get away with cyberbullying. Their strongest recommendation stated that each school should have a specific member of staff to deal with bullying and cyberbullying. This was to ensure that children and young people knew who to talk to if they were being bullied, so they would feel confident that this person would listen to them and give them time to talk about their experiences, believe them, and help to do something about it.

- Know where to find help. Understand how to report to service providers, or ask an adult to assist you, and take steps to prevent it from happening again by changing privacy settings and using blocking and deleting tools.

Young people explained how asking for help could be problematic. They had experienced a combination of both the lack of understanding from adults about how to respond to disablist bullying, as well as a lack of understanding to effectively deal with cyberbullying. Their experiences included being told to avoid the internet as the best means of stopping the bullying or that they should 'put up with it'. They were seeking adult guidance but it was not always an effective solution.

- Do something! If you see cyberbullying going on, support the person being bullied and do whatever you can to help them. Think how you would feel if no one stood up for you.

## Summary of recommendations:

### Prevention

- E-safety education, such as thinking before you post is an important message that schools should be giving; encouraging children and young people to put themselves in the shoes of the person receiving messages for example, and the need to respect friends' and peers' thoughts and feelings online.
- Becoming good digital citizens, being able to use technology safely and responsibly, looking after yourself and your peers, and participating in life online, has to be a crucial part of modern education for all pupils.
- The whole-school community needs a shared understanding of what is meant by 'cyberbullying', its potential impact, how it differs from other forms of bullying and why it is unacceptable. Young people and their parents should also be made aware of pupils' responsibilities in their use of ICT and schools are clear how they will respond to issues of cyberbullying of young people with SEND.
- Make cyberbullying more visible in schools and ensure that this information is in accessible formats, so it can be accessed and understood by all children and young people.
- Update existing policies and practices to reflect cyberbullying issues, and ensure that policies are 'owned' and understood throughout the school community.
- Promote the positive use of technology: The positive use of technology, which models safe and effective practice, is key to preventing the misuse of technology. Schools should ensure that learning strategies and targets, as well as staff development programmes, support the innovative and engaging use of technologies.
- Children and young people, especially those with SEND, should be taught how to use the internet and new technologies safely and responsibly is a key step to preventing cyberbullying – helping young people develop into responsible digital citizens who can look after themselves, and their peers and get the most out of technology is the best counter to cyberbullying.
- Evaluating the impact of prevention activities: Regular reviews are vital to make sure that anti-bullying policies are working and are up-to-date. Consider conducting an annual survey of pupils' experiences of bullying, including cyberbullying, and a parent satisfaction survey. Publicise progress and activities to the whole-school community – keep cyberbullying a live issue and celebrate your successes!

### Reporting

- Make reporting cyberbullying easier, publicise existing reporting routes so pupils, parents and staff are clear on how and who to report to.
- Provide real life examples when teaching, so that children can use these to spot when they or others are being bullied, or to understand when their own actions could be construed as bullying.
- Bullying and cyberbullying should be built into 'everyday' school conversations, so that during, for example, personal tutor sessions, staff should talk to young people about bullying and cyberbullying so that young people have the opportunity to talk about any issues they are.

### Responding

- Support the person being bullied. Give reassurance that the pupil that has come to you has done the right thing by telling someone about the incident, refer to any existing pastoral support/procedures and inform parents. Young people we spoke with wanted staff members to work with them closely to agree a course of action and support, so the young person felt in control of this process.
- Advise on next steps – e.g. save the evidence and don't retaliate. Young people requested further support to review how they currently use the internet and explore ways of improving their online safety. For example, being shown how to block people or increase their privacy settings.
- Take action to contain the incident when content has been circulated. Steps may include:
  - asking the person responsible to take the content down;
  - reporting the content online yourself;
  - consider disciplinary powers to confiscate devices that are being used to cyberbully; and,
  - contacting the police if the law has been broken.
- Investigating incidents – keep a record. If necessary, take steps to identify the person displaying the bullying behaviour.
- Working with the young person displaying the bullying behaviour. The young people who took part in this research felt that it was also important to support the young person who had bullied them, as they may have been bullied themselves, or may not understand how their behaviour and actions have affected others.

## Educational resources

There are some e-safety/cyberbullying teaching resources. Further information and support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND):

- **Let's Fight it Together** (subtitled)  
<http://digizen.org/resources/cyberbullying/films/uk/lfit-film.aspx>
- **Character interviews** (subtitled)  
<http://digizen.org/resources/cyberbullying/films/uk/character-interviews.aspx>
- **SMART adventures** (signed stories)  
<http://www.signedstories.com/authors/clifford-boobyer>
- **SMART rules** (BSL)  
<http://www.childnet.com/resources/know-it-all-for-teachers-sen/bsl-smart-rules>
- **Symbols based SMART rules**  
<http://www.childnet.com/resources/know-it-all-for-teachers-sen/symbols-based-smartrules>
- **Clicker 5 SMART adventure**  
<http://www.childnet.com/resources/know-it-all-for-teachers-sen/clicker-5-smartadventure>
- **The UK Safer Internet Centre** run the Professionals Online Safety Helpline (POSH) which provides support to teachers, Head Teachers, youth workers and social workers, see [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk).



## Appendix 1 – cyberbullying research

### Summary

- The right not to be bullied was voted in the top 3 online rights by 24,000 children aged 7–19 in the Safer Internet Day survey. However, 41% of 7–11 year olds knew someone who had been cyberbullied.
- EU Kids Online (2011) research has found that 8% of 9–16 year olds from the UK have been bullied online, while 21% have been bullied at all, online or offline.
- In contrast, Beatbullying found in their Virtual Violence II report (2012) that 28% of 11–16 year olds reported that they have been targeted by some form of cyberbullying. Of these, one quarter experienced this as persistent over time.
- NFER (2012) found that 3% of teachers said they had been cyberbullied by pupils. In addition, nearly four in ten (38%) teachers have dealt with an incident of cyberbullying among pupils during the past 12 months.
- The ONS ‘Internet Access Quarterly Update’ has found that people with disabilities are amongst the groups least likely to use the internet and are 20% less likely than their peers.

### Further detail

In the ‘**Have your Say**’ survey launched by the UK Safer Internet Centre for Safer Internet Day 2013, both primary and secondary school age children voted for the ‘right not to be bullied on the internet’ in their top 3.

40% of 7–11 year old respondents knew someone who had been cyberbullied, and 20% said that bullying stopped them having fun online. 31% of 7–11s said that people being unkind stops them enjoying their time online. In addition, primary age children are supporting their friends who experience cyberbullying – of those who knew someone who had been cyberbullied, 48% had helped their friend.

- “People saying my house and movies are rubbish” (8 year old girl)
- “Friends spreading rumours about me and telling other people my account settings or putting some pictures of me on the website that they have changed a little to make it look more silly” (10 year old girl)
- “Well I do have fun on the internet, but sometimes some people try to racially bully me on PSN [PlayStation Network]” (10 year old boy)

15% of 11–19s said that bullying stops them from enjoying their time online, 23% said that mean comment stops them enjoying their time online. Many young people are standing up for their friends: 32% of secondary age respondents said they had spoken out or challenged people when mean things were said online, and this increases over age.

- “Video calls from people that you know who used to or still bully you” (12 year old girl)

- “Sick, evil Facebook pages that make me feel sad for the person that’s being targeted” (13 year old girl)

**EU Kids Online (2011)** have found that 8% of 9–16 year olds from the UK have been bullied online, while 21% have been bullied at all, online or offline. Across Europe, the 6 per cent of children who have been bullied online divide fairly evenly into those who were very upset (31 per cent), fairly upset (24 per cent), a bit upset (30 per cent) and, the smallest category, not at all upset (15 per cent). Girls are more upset than boys (37 per cent vs. 23 per cent “very upset”).

In contrast, **Beatbullying** found in their Virtual Violence II report (2012) that 28% of 11–16 year olds reported that they have been targeted by some form of cyberbullying. Of these, one quarter experienced this as persistent over time. The effects and consequences for those who are cyberbullied are severe. 20% said that fear of bullies made them reluctant to go to school, 19% experienced a decline in confidence and self-esteem, and 14% did not feel safe. At the more extreme end of the spectrum, 11% felt depressed, 5% self-harmed and 3% attempted suicide.

The report found that there are some high-risk groups in relation to cyberbullying: ‘those who reported having SEN were 12% more likely to have experienced cyberbullying than those who did not.’ Those ‘who reported having a disability were nearly twice as likely to have experienced cyberbullying than those that did not report having a disability’ (pp22–23).

**NFER (2012)** found that 3% of teachers said they had been cyberbullied by pupils, and 19% of teachers said that one or more of their colleagues has experienced cyberbullying by pupils. Analysis by phase showed that the reported incidence of cyberbullying was around five times higher proportionally in secondary schools compared to primary schools.

Almost seven in ten teachers (69%) said that some of the pupils at their school have experienced cyberbullying, while nearly four in ten (38%) teachers have dealt with an incident of cyberbullying during the past 12 months. Cyberbullying of pupils, as was the case for cyberbullying of teachers, appears to be more of a problem in secondary schools than in primary schools. More than nine in ten secondary teachers (91%) said that some of their pupils have experienced cyberbullying, compared with just over half 17 (52%) of primary teachers.

Text taken from the following reports:

- [http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/downloads/Safer\\_Internet\\_Day/2013/Have\\_your\\_Say\\_survey\\_-\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/downloads/Safer_Internet_Day/2013/Have_your_Say_survey_-_Full_Report.pdf)
- [http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/downloads/Research\\_Highlights/UKCCIS\\_RH\\_31\\_Virtual\\_violence\\_II\\_pupils.pdf](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/downloads/Research_Highlights/UKCCIS_RH_31_Virtual_violence_II_pupils.pdf)
- [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/39351/1/EU\\_kids\\_online\\_final\\_report\\_%5BLSERO%5D.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/39351/1/EU_kids_online_final_report_%5BLSERO%5D.pdf)
- <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/95001/95001.pdf>

## References

### DITCH THE LABEL (2013)

Annual Bullying Survey 2013. London: Ditch the Label. 22pp. Based on the data of 1,843 British students – aged 16 to 26 – and hundreds of case studies, this report identifies key bullying statistics and also provides a risk analysis for 52 demographic groups. Data shows how variables such as sexuality, disabilities, race, religion and household income can impact upon susceptibility to bullying; it can also be used to predict the behavioural and psychological impacts of bullying and how different demographics are likely to respond. Among the key findings in the report: 7 in 10 young people were found to experience bullying before their 18th birthday; 24% of victims self-harm, 25% have suicidal thoughts and 17% truant from school or college; 60% of bullied students are targeted for their appearance, 36% for their interests, 11% for their sexuality and 8% because of their social class; 21% of victims are bullied or harassed online through social networking websites; 22% of victims are bullied daily; and the majority (57%) of students are not happy with the bullying support available.

Document link: <http://www.ditchthelabel.org/annual-bullying-survey/>

### WELLS, M. and MITCHELL, K.J. (2013)

Patterns of internet use and risk of online victimization for youth with and without disabilities. *Journal of Special Education*, Online first, 8 March 2013. Findings from a nationally representative telephone survey of 1,560 young internet users revealed youth receiving special education services in schools were more likely to report receiving an online interpersonal victimization in the past year, even after adjusting for other explanatory factors. These findings suggest that special education staff and other professionals should assess students for risk of online victimization.

### ABILITY PATH ONLINE HUB (2011)

Walk a mile in their shoes: Bullying and the child with special needs. Published by AbilityPath.org, an online initiative of Community Gatepath of Northern California.

According to this report and guide from AbilityPath.org, an online hub and special needs community for parents and professionals of children with disabilities, children with special needs are victims of a nationwide silent epidemic of bullying. The report was developed to include children with special needs in the national dialogue and to raise the level of awareness about bullying, cyberbullying and the negative developmental effects it can have upon children with special needs. Over the course of several months, staff from AbilityPath.org interviewed experts, educators and parents regarding the bullying of children with special needs or disabilities. Findings of the report include: 60% of students with disabilities reported being bullied compared to 25% of the general student population; the bullying experienced by these children was more chronic and usually directly related to their disability; 50% of parents reported their children were scared by their peers. Includes a section on cyberbullying.

Document link: <http://www.campussafetymagazine.com/files/resources/abilitypath-WalkAMileintheirshoes-report-final-2011-02.pdf>

**GREEN, R., COLLINGWOOD, A. and ROSS, A. (2010)**

Characteristics of bullying victims in schools. National Centre for Social Research. London: Department for Education. 117pp. (DfE research report; RR001). This study represents the first in-depth investigation of pupil and school characteristics in relation to bullying of secondary school pupils aged 14 to 16. The study used information from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England which contains data on the young person's individual and family characteristics. The data has also been linked to the National Pupil Database for data about pupils' attainment and information on school-level factors. Using this dataset, the study explored the relationship between various factors and the likelihood of a young person reporting that they had experienced bullying in the last 12 months. It looked at the five different types of bullying identified in the LSYPE survey: being called names (including text and email bullying), being socially excluded, being forced to hand over money or possessions, being threatened with violence and being a victim of actual violence. Characteristics of the young people looked at included their gender, ethnic group, importance of their religion, whether they had special educational needs or a disability, their social position and family structure, a range of school characteristics and whether the young person's main parent also reported that they were being bullied. Links between bullying and educational outcomes at the age of 16 were also examined.

Document link: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/AllPublications/Page1/DFE-RR001>

**PIGGIN, R. (2010)**

Striking back against bullying. SEN: The Journal for Special Needs, no.47 (Jul/Aug). Pp 60–61. An examination of the bullying and cyberbullying of school children with special educational needs and of how teachers and parents can help to combat the issue.

**CROSS, E J and others (2009)**

Virtual bullying: Protecting children from cyberbullying. London: Beatbullying. 61pp. Findings from a survey of secondary school pupils showed that 1-in-13 had been persistently bullied. Girls were more likely than boys to experience persistent cyberbullying as were traditionally 'vulnerable' groups of children, including those with special educational needs and white non-British children, including Gypsy-Roma and European children. Hoax calls to mobile phones were the most common form of cyberbullying, followed by hurtful text messages or emails and hurtful comments left on social networking profiles. The findings lend weight to the migration theory of cyberbullying, which states that bullying tends to originate in traditional settings and then follows the victim online. Research also looked at perpetrators of cyberbullying, physical, psychological and behavioural consequences, and cybermentors.

Document link: <http://archive.beatbullying.org/pdfs/Virtual%20Violence%20-%20Protecting%20Children%20from%20Cyberbullying.pdf>

**DIDDEN, R. and others (2009)**

Cyberbullying among students with intellectual and developmental disability in special education settings. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, Vol.12, No.3, PP146–151.

This study aimed to explore the types, prevalence and associated variables of cyberbullying among students with intellectual and developmental disability attending special education settings. Students (n = 114) with intellectual and developmental disability who were between 12–19 years of age completed a questionnaire containing questions related to bullying and victimization via the internet and cellphones. Other questions concerned sociodemographic characteristics (IQ, age, gender, diagnosis), self-esteem and depressive feelings. Between 4–9% of students reported bullying or victimization of bullying at least once a week. Significant associations were found between cyberbullying and IQ, frequency of computer usage and self-esteem and depressive feelings. No associations were found between cyberbullying and age and gender. The study concluded that cyberbullying is prevalent among students with intellectual and developmental disability in special education settings. Programmes should be developed to deal with this issue in which students, teachers and parents work together.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who contributed to developing this guide. Including:

- Common Room Consulting Limited
- Childnet International
- Equal Lives Youth Forum, Norfolk
- Young Leaders, Darlington Association on Disability.
- Junction 17, Greater Manchester West Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust.
- Lincolnshire Shadow Transition Board, Action for Children, Disability Lincolnshire.

