

**To: Secretaries of Local Government Branches in England and Wales  
with members in Education, Education Convenors**

ED/12/2011

04 April 2011

Dear Colleague

Following an increase in the number of reported cases of cyberbullying we have updated our cyberbullying factsheet for members working in schools.

Branches are asked to circulate this information to all schools in their local authority and encourage member to report cases of cyberbullying to their local representative including the head teachers and governing bodies.

The updated factsheet can also be found on the UNISON education workforce web pages under schools health and safety and can also be downloaded from our school's health and safety web pages at <http://www.unison.org.uk/education/schools/hand.asp>

Branches are also reminded that UNISON's general health and safety web pages has a wide range of information to inform members on various health and safety issues

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina McAra". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

National Secretary  
Education and Children's Services

## Cyber Bullying

# factsheet

**An issue for children and young people**

Even though cyber bullying cannot physically hurt you, it can still leave you feeling mentally vulnerable and very upset. You can feel scared, lonely and stressed and that there is no way out. Escaping cyber bullying can be very difficult because anyone can get access to a mobile phone or the internet almost anywhere. It can be tough for those on the receiving end to avoid it, even in the safety of their own home. Cyber bullying can be defined as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to cause upset to a person. It is seen by many as an extension of face to face bullying, with ICT providing the conduit for the bully to harass another person. Cyber bullying is different to other forms of bullying in that it can be very difficult to control and can be an invasion to home and personal space. The nasty

threatening e-mail, text message, twitter or Facebook entry circulated to an audience or to the victim can have devastating consequences to both an individual and other family members.

### **An issue for staff too**

While school employees have a duty of care to protect children and young people, they may themselves become targets of cyber bullying. Like other forms of bullying, cyber bullying can seriously impact on the health, wellbeing, and self-confidence of those targeted. It may have a significant impact not only on the person being bullied, but on their home and work life too.

Career progression may be affected, and there have been cases where the person bullied has chosen to leave the education sector altogether.

### **Tackling cyber bullying**

Dealing with incidents quickly and effectively is key to managing potentially highly stressful cyber bullying situations, which if not checked can lead to other fundamental problems such as a stress-related illness. Cyber bullying prevention is an essential practice for schools which should be reflected in their existing anti-bullying agreement, policy or procedure.

There should be a whole school approach and buy-in from governors and the leadership team. Investigation, support and sanctions should be consistent and records kept of incidents and the school's response. Clear advice should be offered to those who are experiencing cyber bullying at work and this should include looking at how to avoid recurrence.

As a further precaution school staff should not accept pupils on their social networks. Any form of cyber bullying should be reported to appropriate persons.

There is comprehensive cyber bullying advice which was developed as part of the *Safe To Learn* guidance and with input from UNISON on a steering group. It can be accessed online at the Kidscape site along with support materials from Digital Citizenship, an organisation that provides information about using social network sites and social media sites creatively and safely (see below).

The DfE also offer website advice which includes advice on racist and homophobic cyber bullying and counter strategies. It confirms that dealing with cyber bullying is best done within a robust framework of policy and practice, which includes and supports the whole school community.

If school policies and practice are not tackling cyber bullying incidence or members are experiencing personal difficulties which are not being resolved, they should contact their UNISON representative.

## USEFUL LINKS

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<http://www.kidscape.org.uk/cyberbullying>

Government Advice <http://yp.direct.gov.uk/cyberbullying/>

TeacherNet <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/>

childnet <http://www.childnet.com>

TUC <http://www.tuc.org.uk/search/start.cfm>

Digital Citizens Advice <http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying>

Teachers TV Advice <http://www.teachers.tv/bullying>

Childline Advice

<http://www.childline.org.uk/Info/OnlineSafety/Pages/CyberBullying.aspx>

For the very latest information regularly check the UNISON Education and Children's Services web pages <http://www.unison.org.uk/education/> or ring UNISON Direct on 0845 355 0845

