

Preface

An integral part of how young people interact and live is increasingly evident in their online environment. Young people are exposed to imagery and behaviour they may not experience so early in their offline world. Cyberbullying is a recent phenomenon and presents challenges for researchers, schools, government policy makers, parents and the wider community. Cyberbullying is another form of bullying behaviour and not a separate issue in itself. Cyberbullying, like other forms of bullying behaviour, is about relationships, power and control. Cyberbullying at its core is 'relational' bullying and therefore requires a relationship management-based approach to dealing with its impacts and its prevention.

The focus on behaviour rather than the technology is paramount. Using language which focuses on behaviour as opposed to using words such as 'bully' or 'victim' is evident throughout this book. The term 'bully' implies that the issue is the individual. The term 'victim' has similar connotations, inferring helplessness. The interaction among the person, the situation and the technology is important.

There is no doubt that there are serious long-term effects of cyberbullying such as youth depression, anxiety, lower self-esteem and even suicide. However, the issue needs to be addressed within the broader social context and the development of a range of skills. Building social and emotional resilience in schools, and in young people themselves, will have a greater effect than regulation or legislation in dealing with cyberbullying. Teaching young people a range of social and emotional skills will assist them with cyberbullying. These include teaching pro-social values, emotional skills, social skills and high-order thinking skills. Promoting socially acceptable behaviour is effective.

Whole-school approaches and educating adults as well as young people is equally important. Effective policy is the backbone to good practice in schools and Internet safety should be no exception. Cybersafety is essential for all young people and needs to be embedded into the curriculum. Young people also need to, and want to, be involved in the development of materials or resources, they are part of the problem, they need to be part of the solution. Student-drive programs are effective in encouraging positive relationships and open discussions about what occurs online and offline. Young people are the experts with technology and often adopt a 'teaching' role for their parents and communication between school and home is important.

Cyberbullying crosses all domains and knows no geographical boundaries. It commonly occurs outside of school and can manifest itself 24/7. The ethical and legal issues regarding cyberbullying provide concern for teachers, schools and parents as there is limited clarity on the implications of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is a behavioural issue, not a technological problem. Initiatives and programs which focus on the enhancement of positive relationships and the developmental of behavioural skills are more effective in dealing with the impacts of cyberbullying.

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