Responding to Cyberbullying
Top Ten Tips for Educators

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.

Educators need to respond to all incidents of cyberbullying. Here are some things you can do:

1. THOROUGHLY INVESTIGATE all incidents so that you can direct resources and, if necessary, discipline to students who require it.

2. ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF A SCHOOL LIAISON OFFICER or another member of law enforcement to help, especially when behaviors include a possible threat to the safety of students or staff.

3. Once you identify the offending party, DEVELOP A RESPONSE THAT IS COMMENSURATE WITH THE HARM DONE and the disruption that occurred.

4. CONTACT CELL PHONE PROVIDERS if threats or explicit content are transmitted via these devices. These companies keep data that may serve as evidence on their servers for a limited period of time before deleting it.

5. INSTRUCT PARENTS TO CONTACT AN ATTORNEY. Some instances of cyberbullying just don't fall under the purview of the school (e.g., incidents that don't happen at school or impact the school). In these cases, parents may want to pursue other avenues for redress. All states allow for parties to sue others in civil court for harassment, intentional infliction of emotional distress, or a number of other torts. While not ideal, this is an option.

6. WORK WITH PARENTS to convey to the student that cyberbullying behaviors are taken seriously and will not be tolerated whether they occur at school or not. Anything that disrupts the learning environment at school is subject to discipline.

7. KEEP ALL EVIDENCE OF CYBERBULLYING. Keep a file with screen shots, message logs, or any other evidence so that you can demonstrate the seriousness of the behavior and its impact on the school. This is especially critical if you intend to formally punish students (e.g., suspension or expulsion).

8. CONTACT AND WORK WITH the website, game, or app on which the abuse occurred. By now they are used to working through cyberbullying cases and can be a resource to assist you in removing offending content, gathering evidence, or to put you in touch with someone who can help.

9. USE CREATIVE INFORMAL RESPONSE STRATEGIES, particularly for relatively minor forms of cyberbullying that do not result in significant harm. For example, students may be required to create anti-cyberbullying posters to be displayed throughout the school. Older students might be required to give a brief presentation to younger students about the importance of responsibly using technology. It is important to condemn the behavior while sending a message to the rest of the school community that bullying in any form is wrong.

10. REMEMBER THAT THE GOAL IS TO STOP THE BULLYING. This objective should guide your intervention efforts. Do whatever is necessary to stop the bullying. It might be a simple talk with the aggressor or require a more significant response. Follow-up to make sure the bullying has stopped. If not, pursue additional remedies until it does.

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