

School Strategies for Dealing with Cyberbullying

Establish and communicate clear rules to staff for handling cyberbullying. Make sure all school staff are aware of who they should report cyberbullying incidents to and how they should handle inappropriate use of cell phones.

Provide students with an anonymous or confidential way of reporting cyberbullying. The school might place a box in the guidance office or main office for this purpose. If students do not trust that the source of the information will be kept confidential, they will be much less likely to report cyberbullying incidents to school personnel.

Respond to cyberbullying incidents quickly. It is important that schools send a message to students that they take reports of cyberbullying seriously by investigating promptly when incidents are brought to their attention and taking action when appropriate.

Tailor discipline to the severity of the incident. It is not enough just to have cyberbullying incorporated into the code of conduct. School officials must also respond to reports of cyberbullying and take appropriate action. While suspension may be warranted in response to severe cyberbullying incidents, it can sometimes be counterproductive if it causes the punished student to spend time at home seeking revenge by continuing to harass the victim in perhaps more anonymous ways. Schools should be creative in finding disciplinary methods for minor cyberbullying incidents (for example, having the student write a paper on how cyberbullying can affect children or having the student speak to students in a lower grade about cyberbullying).

The school also needs to use counseling and mediation methods to deal with these incidents. Counseling can

help the student understand the impact of the cyberbullying on the victim and experience remorse or regret for the harassment so that he/she is less likely to repeat this behavior. Also the student should be helped to understand the impact of the cyberbullying on his/her reputation with classmates. If the cyberbullying relates to a conflict with the victim, try to resolve this disagreement. You will also want to notify the parents of both the offending party and the victim, and perhaps bring them in for a conference.

Keep a record of computer activity. Schools might consider installing software that can maintain a record of all online activity conducted on school computers. If a school opts to do this, it must disclose this information in its technology policy. Students' awareness of the school's capacity to keep track of this information will likely deter them from sending inappropriate messages on school computers.

Provide support to the victim. As noted above, victims of cyberbullying can experience emotional distress and even trauma. Provide counseling support to this student upon learning of the incident and continue to monitor his/her emotional well-being in school.