

CROYDON PUBLIC SCHOOL



POLICY: CYBER-BULLYING

NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC) approach to cyber-safety

The NSW Department of Education recognises that technology plays an important role in engaging students in education. However, the Department also acknowledges the inherent risks of young people having access to a range of sites, particularly where such access is not carefully monitored. It is important to educate young people on responsible technology use and equip them with the skills to keep safe. Schools and families must work together to ensure that students know that bullying by any means is not acceptable and that young people use technology appropriately and can resolve conflict without violence. The Department has policies, programs and supports in place to help raise awareness and counter inappropriate use of technology.

The DEC suspension guidelines say a short suspension may be imposed for the following reasons and will be reported in the following categories:

Aggressive Behaviour: This includes bullying (including cyber-bullying); verbal abuse and abuse transmitted electronically such as by email, SMS text messages or by other electronic means. Advice should be sought from the School Safety and Response Hotline as to whether the police should be informed.

Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is commonly defined as the use of information and communication technologies to support repeated and deliberate hostile behaviour intended to hurt or harm others. It is sometimes used as an extension to other forms of bullying, and can result in the target of bullying experiencing social, psychological and academic difficulties.

How cyber-bullying works

There are two kinds of cyber-bullying, direct attacks (messages sent to your kids directly) and cyber-bullying by proxy (using others to help cyber-bully the victim, either with or without the accomplice's knowledge).

Cyber-bullying can be conducted through many different media including:

- the sending of abusive texts or emails (Instant Messaging/Text Messaging Harassment)
- taking and sharing unflattering or private images
- posting unkind messages or inappropriate images on social networking sites such as Facebook
- excluding individuals from online chats or other communication
- assuming the identity of the victim online and representing them in a negative manner or manner that may damage their relationship with others
- stealing Passwords

- blogs

Like other forms of bullying such as verbal abuse, social exclusion and physical aggression, cyber-bullying has the potential to result in the target of bullying developing social, psychological and educational issues.

While cyber-bullying is similar to real life bullying it also differs in the following ways:

- it can be difficult to escape and invasive—it can occur 24/7 and a person can be targeted while at home
- it can involve harmful material being widely and rapidly disseminated to a large audience, for example, rumours and images can be posted on public forums or sent to many people at once
- it can provide the bully with a sense of relative anonymity and distance from the victim, so there is a lack of immediate feedback or consequences.

Identifying and responding to incidents of cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying can happen to anyone, not just those generally considered more vulnerable. Confident, outgoing individuals can also be targeted.

Research has identified that girls are more likely to report that they have been victims of cyber-bullying than boys, potentially because they engage in a higher level of technology-assisted social communication such as SMSing, emailing and social networking.

One or more of the following signs and changes in behaviour could indicate that a student is being cyber-bullied.

- Decline in academic performance and social interaction.
- Dislike and avoidance of school sometimes resulting in higher absenteeism.
- Complaints of feeling unwell though parents report no specific illness.
- Having less to do with friends.
- Increased social exclusion and peer rejection.
- Falling behind in homework.
- Poorer physical health and sleepiness.
- Increased negative self-perception.
- Increased reluctance to participate in regular school activities, including classroom discussions.
- Becoming withdrawn, appearing depressed or anxious, having mood swings, crying for no apparent reason.

The above signs should be considered in light of the student's usual behaviour.

Dealing with cyber-bullying at Croydon Public School

Cyber-bullying outside school is still an issue for the school and as such the school will impose consequences on perpetrators and support the victims. If your child is a victim of cyber-bullying outside school please inform the school so we can act and keep copies of transcripts to help identify the bullies. The school will:

1. Provide support for student to work through the effects of the cyber-bullying and to help them develop and implement effective coping strategies.
2. Contact the student's parents to alert them to the issue, and ongoing concerns regarding the welfare of the student, and discuss the issue and how best to deal with it.
3. Reassure the student that the school is taking the incident seriously and that the reported bullying will be acted on.
4. Gather basic facts about the suspected cyber-bullying and, if possible, identify the students involved.
5. Implement appropriate responses to address the bullying using evidence-based responses such as restorative justice approaches to conflict resolution.
6. Contact the families of the students doing the bullying to keep them informed of what is happening and to arrange a meeting to discuss the problem.
7. Implement the DEC guidelines for possible suspension, remove IT privileges at school for up to 2 weeks and organise for the Police Youth Liaison Officer to speak to the students.

Dealing with cyber-bullying at home

If your child is a victim of cyber-bullying:

1. Don't respond to messages/postings from the bully and, if possible, block further correspondence from them (block their mobile number or email address).
2. Report the incident to the principal or deputy principal
3. Keep evidence of any bullying to assist with tracking down the bully and potentially reporting the matter to police (screen captures, bully's screen name, text and images).
4. Report any concerns to the administrator of the service used, including the mobile phone provider (if SMS is involved), website administrator (if social networking or chat services are involved), or internet service provider, as most have measures to assist with tracking and blocking the bully. Some block the bully's access to their services entirely as bullying is often a breach of website terms of use.
5. If the student is distressed by the bullying, ensure they are provided with options for psychological support including school counselling or contact kids help line

The school will follow its established approach to incidents of bullying as outlined in the school Anti-Bullying Policy.

Reviewed July 2012