



# Hidden Behind the Screen

**A comprehensive guide to cyberbullying  
for schools and kura**

*Part Five*

***Tips for Dealing with Cyberbullying***

**Greater Christchurch Schools' Network**

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**GREATER CHRISTCHURCH  
SCHOOLS' NETWORK**

## Tips for Dealing with Cyberbullying

While the previous section discussed digital citizenship and the important groundwork to minimise cases of cyberbullying, incidents can and will still occur. Schools and kura then play a crucial role in promptly dealing with behaviour and stopping situations from escalating. Preventative methods can be employed to minimise future occurrences, but it is important to remain realistic about how much influence schools and kura can have in online environments, especially outside of school hours.

Cyberbullying can, and should, be integrated into other anti-bullying initiatives, and this has shown reasonable success.<sup>1</sup> This includes programmes, policies (such as a digital citizenship policy and anti-bullying policy), awareness-raising activities, and curriculum-based activities.

What is particularly important is that schools and kura help ākongā to understand what a cyberbully has done and how it affects others.

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<sup>1</sup> Stonje, R., Smith, P. K., & Frisé, A. (2013). The nature of cyberbullying, and strategies for prevention. *Computers in human behavior*, 29(1), 26-32.

# CYBERBULLYING INCIDENTS FLOWCHART

## 1 Immediate Response

### Monitor and Identify

Schools/kura and educators need to be vigilant about online platforms where cyberbullying may occur. In many cases, incidents will be hard to notice unless brought directly to the attention of an adult. Where possible, quickly record the incident and gather any available evidence, such as screenshots that have been provided.

### Provide emotional support

Depending on the situation, the victim coming to the adult may require emotional support. In serious situations, this may require a school counsellor or a psychologist to help deal with the emotional response or potential trauma.

### Notify relevant parties

Inform staff, administrators, and any relevant support staff about the incident. Encourage ākongā to tell report cyberbullying to adults they trust. Serious cyberbullying incidents will require parents/caregivers to be notified.

## 2 Communication & support

### Communicate with ākongā involved

- Speak with the victim and perpetrator separately and gather context and information. Often, cyberbullying incidents can be an extension of in-person behaviour and traditional bullying, and the precipitating events may have lasted for weeks or months.
- Encourage open, honest communication without judgement. Note that quickly resorting to punishment can make behaviour worse or lead to retaliation if not managed appropriately.
- Take note of the evidence and contextual information. Accurate records will rely on information not being distorted.

### Involve parents and caregivers

- Once there is a record of the incident, communicate with parents, caregivers, and whānau where appropriate. Whānau are often concerned that they do not hear about incidents until long after they occur and would value transparent conversations about concerning ākongā behaviour.
- Share information about the incident as it has been reported and what is supported with evidence, and discuss strategies for a resolution.
- Cyberbullying can be particularly difficult to manage as the behaviour can occur outside of the awareness of adults. For example, after an incident, the cyberbullying may then perpetuate retaliation for reporting the behaviour with threats to not tell anyone. This requires that the parents and caregivers know how they can help, such as monitoring phone and computer use, limiting social media activity, and continuing restorative conversations at home.
- Communicating with parents and caregivers is a good time to assess the digital technologies at home and how they are used. Parents and caregivers may need some advice about how to limit certain websites, enable child controls, disable Internet during certain times. Parents may also be unaware of how the Internet can be used for aggressive behaviour or may not attribute such behaviours to their own children. Candid, judgement-free conversations will help build awareness and understanding.

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### Documentation

#### Record incident details

Schools and kura should maintain detailed records of cyberbullying incidents, in line with digital citizenship policies or similar, including how issues are resolved. Details may include dates, times, ākongā involved, platforms used, contextual information for why the incident occurred, and how the issue was resolved.

Records should specify when an incident is followed up on and what the findings were of this follow-up.

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### Educational interventions

#### Provide guidance

Sessions on digital citizenship may be used with individuals or groups to deal with cyberbullying incidents and teach responsible online behaviour. This should emphasise the fact that the Internet cannot provide complete anonymity, and if necessary, their actions can be traced back to them.

Digital footprints denote what people leave behind on the Internet – the permanence of communications and actions performed online, even despite efforts to hide this activity. As ākongā learn about this, they may learn to understand the consequences of their actions online, not only for victims, but for themselves.

Offer teaching and resources on empathy, tolerance, and the impact of bullying. Relate these back to the school/kura values, such as respect, kindness, or community (whatever is relevant). A values-based approach will help ākongā put themselves in others' shoes and understand how cyberbullying affects people.

#### Peer support

One means of allowing ākongā to take initiative is to create a peer support programme or similar that allows ākongā to support one another, lead change, and stand up to cyberbullying. They can be messengers of the school vision and values and help develop the culture of digital citizenship as part of their peer support work. This would ideally be co-created with ākongā so there is a shared agreement on what the responsibility of the peer support group is and how they offer support. This could allow for leadership opportunities for ākongā, and linkages could be made to the Digital Technologies Curriculum | Hangarau Matihiko.

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### Follow-up

#### Ongoing monitoring

Staff should continuously monitor the online activities of ākongā involved in cyberbullying incidents and their behaviour when using digital technologies. Any recurring issues or misuse of technology should be addressed promptly and consistently.

#### Behavioural contracts

Behavioural contracts may be an effective form of behaviour management. This would be created with input from the perpetrator on what behaviour is appropriate with regard to digital technology usage and communications with others. This would be signed by the ākongā with a clear expectation that they are to follow the contract, and a breach of the contract would result in a disciplinary action, such as a loss of a privilege.

#### Evaluate interventions

Assess the effectiveness of interventions and determine whether the actions resulted in the cyberbullying ending. Where necessary, make adjustments to the interventions, adjust the school policies or programmes as needed and address issues head on. Repeated incidents highlight areas where digital citizenship may need to be strengthened, and this can be planned for by senior leadership.

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT FLOWCHART

## 1 Immediate Response

### Emergency protocols

In a crisis event, activate emergency response protocols. These may be outlined in a digital citizenship policy. Actions may include having emergency meetings, scheduling staff meetings, suspending ākonga for the rest of the day. An extreme case may require Police to be contacted to de-escalate a situation. This would involve unlawful or dangerous behaviour. In some scenarios, schools have not contacted Police when they should have, and dealing with the fallout from parents of victims can then make this a regrettable decision.

### Crisis communication

School senior leaderships, deans, counsellors and any other relevant staff members should be immediately notified of the crisis event to quickly mobilise restorative action. Parents and caregivers should be immediately notified of the incident and helped to understand why the incident is being considered a crisis and what the school is proactively doing to remedy the situation. Address safety measures and provide any guidance for their home environment, such as Internet moderating suggestions. In the event that media are involved, communications to media should be handled by the Principal and Board of Trustees.

## 2 Support for victims

### Trauma response

In the event that the event may lead to trauma, a trauma response team may be required. Contact the [Ministry of Education](#) for advice. At the least, counselling services should be provided either by a School Counsellor or another professional, such as an Educational Psychologist or similar. Ongoing wellbeing and emotional support should be offered to those involved.

### Implement safety measures

Ensure there are safety measures in place for the victim. Assess cybersafety protocols in place and make any adjustments as necessary, for example, blocking social media sites where the cyberbullying incident is taking place. In some cases, schools may collaborate with Police to ensure a safe online environment.

### Investigation and documentation

Conduct a thorough investigation of the crisis incident. Gather all evidence and testimonies from involved parties and gather contextual information for how and why the cyberbullying crisis occurred. Where there are legal implications, document these and cooperate fully with legal authorities.

### Engage with external support if necessary

As outlined above, a trauma response team may be a helpful resource to deal with childhood trauma. Mental health professionals and psychologists may provide support also. Community resources may be useful, such as in supporting minority and marginalised groups or complex family dynamics.

### 3 Review & revise protocols

#### Conduct a post-incident review

Evaluate the school's response to the crisis incident. Identify areas for improvement in protocols and intervention strategies.

#### Review policies and procedures

Following the crisis incident, related policies and procedures should be reviewed with a lens of improving them for any future incidents and addressing any problems. Communicate changes to the school community to help prevent and future crisis events.

### 4 Community engagement

#### Community meeting

A crisis event may involve many ākongā or be very wide in scope. In such a case, the school/kura community may be engaged in a meeting to discuss the event, the processes being followed by the school/kura to remedy the situation and provide support to families/whānau. This may provide essential information to keep ākongā safe at home, engage families and whānau in open conversations with their children around Internet usage, and help prevent future instances of cyberbullying.

#### Educational campaigns

The school/kura may also create educational campaigns, such as in the form of newsletters, posters, educational resources etc. that engage ākongā and their families/whānau in digital citizenship and raise awareness of cyberbullying and prevention. These should align with school values and have clear messages around treating others as one would want to be treated.

## References

- Paul, S., Smith, P. K., & Blumberg, H. H. (2012). Revisiting cyberbullying in schools using the quality circle approach. *School Psychology International*, 33(5), 492-504.
- Slonje, R., Smith, P. K., & Frisén, A. (2013). The nature of cyberbullying, and strategies for prevention. *Computers in human behavior*, 29(1), 26-32.