Cyber-bullying Policy
Most recent update: 08 September 2025

Scope

This approach covers all provision, delivered internally by Cheshire West & Chester Council's Skills and Employment Service and externally by our sub-contracted partners delivering adult education. It covers all service participants: learners and participants on employment support programmes.

We have a statutory responsibility regarding safeguarding vulnerable adults/adults in regulated activity (activity that by its nature makes the adult vulnerable e.g. providing personal care). We extend this requirement to all our service participants.

All staff, in whatever setting and role, are in the front line in preventing harm or abuse occurring including alleviating distress and in taking action. This policy should be read in conjunction with our Safeguarding Policy and its associated policies.

Background

The rapid development of, and widespread access to technology has provided a new medium for bullying which can occur in or outside learning sessions. Cyber-bullying is a different form of bullying and can happen at all times of the day, with a potentially bigger audience and more accessories as people can forward on content at a click.

What is Cyber-bullying?

Cyber-bullying may be defined as 'the use of electronic communication, particularly mobile phones and the internet, to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature': children and adults may be reluctant to admit to being the victims of cyber-bullying. It can take a number of different forms:
- threats and intimidation
- harassment or cyber-stalking (e.g. repeatedly sending unwanted texts or instant messages)
- sexting (e.g. sending/receiving sexually explicit messages, primarily between mobile phones)
- vilification/defamation
- exclusion/peer rejection
- impersonation
- unauthorised publication of private information and images
- trolling - abusing the internet to provoke or offend others online

It can be an extension of face-to-face bullying, with technology providing the bully with another route to harass their target.

Cyber-bullying differs from other forms of bullying in several significant ways:

- By facilitating a far more extreme invasion of personal space. Cyber-bullying can take place at any time and intrude into spaces that have previously been regarded as safe and personal

- The potential for anonymity on the part of the bully. This can be extremely distressing for the victim

- The potential for the bully to play very rapidly to a larger audience so the scale and scope of cyber-bullying can be greater than for other forms of bullying

- Through the knowledge that the data is in the world-wide domain, disproportionately amplifying the negative effect on the victim, even though the bully may feel his/her actual actions had been no worse than conventional forms of bullying

- The difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages as more people get drawn in as accessories. By passing on a humiliating picture or message a bystander becomes an accessory to the bullying. In some cases, this can be a criminal offence and result in prosecution

- The profile of the bully and target can be different to other forms of bullying as cyber-bullying can take place between peers and across generations. Staff, including our tutors, can be victims and age and size are not important.

Many cyber-bullying incidents can themselves act as evidence so it is important the 'victim' saves the information.

Bullying is never acceptable and Skills and Employment fully recognises its duty to protect all of its service users and staff and to provide a safe, healthy environment for everyone.

Civil and Criminal Law

There is not a specific law which makes cyber-bullying illegal but it can be considered a criminal offence under several different acts including Protection from Harassment Act (1997), Malicious Communications Act (1988), Communications Act (2003) Obscene Publications Act (1959) and Computer Misuse Act (1990) last updated in 2020.

Preventing Cyber-bullying

As with all forms of bullying the best way to deal with cyber-bullying is to prevent it happening in the first place. It is important to discuss cyber-bullying with service users and ensure positive online habits are developed. Tutors and employment mentors must ensure they create safe, supportive environments to provide the space for learners or programme participants to disclose any issues. The Cyber-bullying Policy is available on our website.

There is no single solution to the problem of cyber-bullying. Skills and Employment (S&E) will do the following as a minimum to impose a comprehensive and effective prevention strategy.

Roles and Responsibilities

S&E have a Designated Safeguarding Lead and a Designated Deputy Safeguarding Lead who take overall responsibility for the coordination and implementation of cyber-bullying prevention and response strategies. Each sub-contracted partner delivering adult education has a Designated Safeguarding Lead. Under this remit, we will work together to:

- ensure that all incidents of cyber-bullying are reported and dealt with immediately and will be managed and/or escalated in line with procedures set out in the S&E Safeguarding Policy

- ensure that all policies relating to safeguarding, including cyber-bullying are reviewed and updated regularly

- ensure that all staff know that they need to report any issues concerning cyber-bullying to their organisation's Designated Safeguarding Lead and in turn on to the local authority Safeguarding Lead

- ensure that all staff are aware of their Prevent duties. Provide training so that all staff feel confident in identifying learners or programme participants at risk of being drawn into terrorism, to challenge extremist ideas and to know how to make a referral when a service user is at risk

- ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities by providing clear guidance for staff on the use of technology within S&E and beyond

- ensure that all learners are given clear guidance on the safe and positive use of technology. This guidance will be provided by tutors, employment mentors and other staff. It will cover technology use within learning and support venues and beyond, including how to manage personal data and how to report abuse and bullying online

- provide ongoing awareness-raising for parents and carers (via family learning) about online safety and the positive use of technology

- maintain 2 CEOP trained ambassadors within the family learning team to raise staff awareness of issues, particularly relating to children and families

- plan a curriculum addressing online safety and support staff to deliver it. This will build resilience in learners and programme participants so that they can protect themselves and others online

Guidance For Staff

S&E will deal with inappropriate use of technology in line with our Online Safety Policy. Abuses could result in disciplinary procedures and in some cases may result in the involvement of the police and criminal charges being brought.

If you suspect or are told about a cyber-bullying incident, retain any available evidence and report to your organisation's designated lead through our safeguarding reporting procedures.

Online Safety at Home

Several sites offer helpful advice to parents and carers, particularly with respect to how they can best monitor their child's use of the computer at home:

- www.thinkyou.know.co.uk/parents
- www.saferinternet.org.uk
- Vodafonedigitalparenting.co.uk
- www.childnet.com

- www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk
- www.nspcc.org.uk
- www.cyberangels.org

Further information can be found on our website in the following related documents:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Online Safety Policy