

Cyber-bullying Policy

Most recent update: 02 April 2025

Scope

This approach covers all provision, delivered internally by Cheshire West & Chester Council's Skills and Employment Service and externally by our Adult Education contracted partner providers. It covers all service participants.

We have a statutory responsibility regarding safeguarding vulnerable adults/adults in regulated activity (activity that by its nature makes the adult vulnerable eg 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 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' (eg repeatedly sending unwanted texts or instant messages), sexting (eg sending and receiving sexually explicit messages, primarily between mobile phones) vilification/defamation, exclusion/peer rejection, impersonation, unauthorised publication of private information/images and '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 the Service 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 on-line habits are developed. Tutors and mentors need to ensure they create safe, supportive environments to provide the space for learners/customers to disclose issues they are having. The Cyber-bullying Policy is available at all times on the Portal but there is no single solution to the problem of cyber-bullying. The Service will do the following as a minimum to impose a comprehensive and effective prevention strategy.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Skills and Employment team 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 provider of 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 Skills & Employment 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 and provide training so that all staff feel confident in identifying learners at risk of being drawn into terrorism, to challenge extremist ideas and to know how to make a referral when a service users is at risk.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities by providing clear guidance for staff on the use of technology within the Service and beyond.
- Tutors and other staff will ensure that all learners are given clear guidance on the use of technology safely and positively both in sessions and beyond including how to manage their personal data and how to report abuse and bullying online.
- Provide ongoing awareness raising for parents/carers (Family Learning) on online safety and the positive use of technology.
- Family Learning maintain 2 CEOP trained Ambassadors to raise tutor awareness of issues relating particularly to children and families.
- Plan a curriculum and support staff in delivering and addressing on online safety which builds resilience in learners and customers so that they can protect themselves and others online.

Guidance For Staff

The Service will deal with inappropriate use of technology in line with our Online Safety Policy which 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/carers, particularly with respect to how they can best monitor their child's use of the computer at home.

Here are some that parents/carers might like to try:

- www.thinkyou.know.co.uk/parents
- www.saferinternet.org.uk
- Vodafoneparenting.co.uk
- www.childnet.com
- www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk
- www.nspcc.org.uk
- www.cyberangels.org