

Enhancing community responses to student bullying, including cyberbullying: Report and Work Program

Bullying and Cyberbullying Senior Officials Working Group

Introduction

Bullying and cyberbullying are pervasive issues for Australia's young people and school communities. They are issues of increasing national attention as communities continue to express growing concern over their potentially devastating impacts.

Bullying – inside and outside of the school grounds – can have long-term harmful impacts on students' school engagement, academic achievement, wellbeing, physical health and mental health.¹ With increased access to technology, young people's experience of bullying can extend outside of school hours into their home and other areas of their lives. School communities are also reporting increased incidents of parent-to-parent and parent-to-teacher bullying, online and in the school grounds.

Across Australia, schools, education authorities, parents and the community are taking the issues of bullying and cyberbullying seriously. There is substantial work underway and investment at all levels of government to support young people who are experiencing the effects of bullying or cyberbullying and for those students who are demonstrating anti-social behaviours. Work underway focuses on the domains of early intervention, prevention and effective responses to address student bullying behaviour.

The scale of the issues of bullying and cyberbullying requires a whole of community approach to ensure sustained change to student bullying. It is important to acknowledge the important role schools have in the prevention of incidences of bullying and cyberbullying, as well as being important partners with students and parents in responding to these incidences.

The Task

In February 2018, COAG tasked the Education Council to establish a Bullying and Cyberbullying Senior Officials Working Group to consider existing strategies and potential initiatives to help reduce bullying and cyberbullying and keep Australia's children safe. The Terms of Reference for the Working Group are at **Attachment A**.

Since May 2018, the Working Group has:

1. Conducted a desktop review of the student wellbeing landscape and best practice strategies currently used in Australian schools and education systems
2. Considered the underlying drivers of bullying and cyberbullying
3. Refreshed the nationally agreed definition of bullying to include cyberbullying and reflect current research for use in school communities
4. Developed a work program for the Education Council.

¹ Department of Education and Training (2015). A review of literature (2010-2014) on student bullying by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group.

Key Messages

- Australia needs to take **collective action** to ensure children and young people live and learn in safe and supportive environments that support their wellbeing – whether they are at home, at school, on the sporting field, in the arts or in any area of our community.
- There are **roles for all members of the Australian community to reduce bullying behaviours**, from teachers and school leaders, to parents, coaches, support staff, politicians, policy makers, industry and businesses. **Positive role modelling** and demonstrating **respect** for all people is crucial. This includes addressing bystander behaviour as an important element of a community response.
- Cyberbullying has become a significant issue for young people. It is estimated that over a 12-month period approximately 20 per cent of young Australians aged 8-17 have been cyberbullied.²
- Effective change needs to focus on the **prevention** of bullying and cyberbullying (including culture change), being **responsive** to all types of bullying and cyberbullying behaviour and **supporting** individuals and the community. Proposed actions address these areas and support teachers, students and parents to identify student bullying behaviour and respond early and effectively, if it does occur.
- A shared understanding of what bullying and cyberbullying are is an essential starting point for positive and lasting responses within the whole community.
- **Parent engagement** is key to a successful whole of community approach. This means parents modelling appropriate behaviours and teaching children appropriate social skills including conflict resolution, as well as working with their children to prevent bullying behaviours and supporting them if they are experiencing bullying.
- Parents want to be well-informed and supported to protect their children from bullying. While most parents have a good understanding of what bullying is and its serious potential effects, many need more **information on how to protect their child** and what it is that their child's school does to respond to bullying, including cyberbullying³. Additionally one in four parents are **unaware of their child's school anti-bullying policy**.
- Clear and publicly available policies and guidelines are an important foundation in preventing and responding to bullying in school communities. All Australian schools should have a **published and readily available anti-bullying policy or plan** and guidance for community members on dealing with a bullying incident in their school community.

² Katz, I., Keeley, M., Spears, B., Taddeo, C., Swirski, T., & Bates, S (2014). Research on youth exposure to, and management of, cyberbullying incidents in Australia: Synthesis report (SPRC Report 16/2014). Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Australia.

³ Royal Children's Hospital National Child Health Poll, Childhood bullying: How are parents coping? June 2018

Action: Review of landscape and best practice strategies

In February 2018, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Minister for Education and Training, wrote to his counterparts in the states and territories to request that they bring forward strategies and best practice approaches to address bullying and cyberbullying, and the available evidence on what makes these approaches effective.

Best practice approaches from Australian Government and state and territory departments of education, health, justice and first ministers were provided and considered by members. The Working Group also reviewed a number of submissions from non-government organisations that work in the anti-bullying and cyberbullying field. These submissions all provided contextual information, guidance and assistance in drafting the subsequent work program.

After reviewing the submissions, the Working Group agreed that effective approaches to responding to bullying and cyberbullying incidences included effective management of issues in the classroom and school environment, school leadership, teacher effectiveness and parent engagement.

While a range of approaches, policies and legislation operate across sectors, schools and for different cohorts of students, the Working Group identified key common elements of successful approaches to addressing these issues, including:

- Engaging with parents at all stages: prevention, responding and supporting
- Students being active agents in developing policy and procedures around bullying programs and initiatives
- Tailoring approaches to the local school context
- Strengths based approaches (rather than a deficit model)
- Implementing a whole school approach
- Using social media to more effectively communicate with the school community.

From this short review, it became clear that future work should consider existing evidence-based approaches, avoid duplication, and increase coordination of approaches. Further, the views of students about what works to address bullying and cyberbullying need to be considered by schools and policy makers in a targeted manner.

To increase the impact of bullying and cyberbullying prevention approaches and increase the ease with which communities can find support, the Working Group recommends consistent messaging and coordinated research that engages with global trends and best practice, as proposed in the work program.

Action: Addressing the underlying drivers of bullying and cyberbullying

The Working Group discussed the underlying drivers of bullying and cyberbullying in a whole of community context. The underlying drives are varied and complex and further work is required to understand these, particularly from a student perspective. The Working Group recommends concrete actions to build this knowledge in the work program through youth forums and research activities.

A strong link between adult behaviour and the frequency of student bullying has been highlighted in research, emphasising the importance of considering whole-school and community relationships in tackling bullying.⁴ Members agreed that **modelling appropriate behaviour** is one important preventative factor for bullying and cyberbullying behaviours in children and young people.

All community members have a role to play in preventing bullying behaviour including students, parents, teachers and leaders. This includes modelling appropriate behaviour by schools, parents, community organisations (such as sporting clubs) and peers. It is recommended the Education Council take the opportunity to write to other relevant COAG councils and key national community organisations (including the Australian Sport Commission) to seek action on this point.

Action: Develop a national definition on bullying and cyberbullying for use in school communities

The Working Group has developed a national definition on bullying and cyberbullying to be used in school communities and promoted to and by relevant stakeholders. This definition is intended for policy frameworks and is not intended to be used as a legal definition. The definition has been reviewed by three anti-bullying experts.

Bullying is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening.

Bullying can happen in person or online, via various digital platforms and devices and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert). Bullying behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time (for example, through sharing of digital records)

Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders.

Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

The Working Group recommends this definition is used by all schools and promoted to relevant stakeholders.

⁴ Department of Education and Training (2015). *A review of literature (2010-2014) on student bullying by Australia's Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group*

Action: Work Program for the Education Council

The work program is intended to be applicable to all students and families. Further research or consultation with groups who experience bullying at a higher rate, such as children with a physical disability or mental health difficulties, is recommended to inform any additional targeted strategies.

Proposed actions address **prevention** of student bullying and cyberbullying (including culture change), **responding effectively** to student bullying and cyberbullying behaviour and **supporting** individuals and the community.

The Working Group has assessed where the gaps are in the target areas of prevention, response and support for schools, students, parents and the community. It recommends a focus on four strategic gaps:

1. Coordinated national approach
 - Coordinating national action to create consistent messaging to the community.
2. Building knowledge through student voice
 - Further building an understanding of the underlying drivers of bullying and cyberbullying and effectively translate student voice into action.
3. Communicating available information and avenues for support
 - Increasing awareness of appropriate actions the community can take and the support available, particularly for parents.
4. National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence 2019
 - Promoting the need to model respectful behaviour across the community as a way to prevent bullying and cyberbullying.

<i>Coordinated national approach</i>	<i>Target area</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
1. The Working Group has developed a definition of Bullying and Cyberbullying based on the Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group definition for endorsement by the Education Council. This definition is intended for use in school communities.	Prevention	October 2018
2. It is anticipated that the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework will be released and freely available online to all school communities in October 2018. The Framework will support all educational settings (including boarding schools, rural and remote) to foster wellbeing for all students (including students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, culturally and linguistically diverse students, LGBTQIA+ students).	Prevention	October 2018

<p>3. Approved authorities (under the <i>Australian Education Act 2013</i>) should review the alignment of their anti-bullying policies and/or plans with the revised Australian Student Wellbeing Framework.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools will be requested to publish their policy and/or plan on their website to ensure all members of the school community are aware of the school's approach including support for parents and the handling of complaints. This should include information on key contacts and next steps for dealing with a bullying incident in the school community. The Australian Government will write to non-government approved authorities advising of this request. 	<p>Responding / Support</p>	<p>October 2018</p>
<p>4. <i>beyondblue's</i> National Education Initiative, to be launched by the Australian Government and <i>beyondblue</i> in November 2018, includes professional learning content for teachers and is supported by staff that will assist schools to adopt a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing, including preventing bullying and cyberbullying. This will reinforce the implementation of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework, the Early Years Framework, the Australian Curriculum, and the Australian Professional Standards for both teachers and principals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All jurisdictions should continue to consult with <i>beyondblue</i> to align their strategies and support the roll out of the National Education Initiative. In particular jurisdictions should promote the program review service of <i>beyondblue</i> to schools so that a summary of program features and the evidence-base is available for schools in a central location. Non-government organisations should submit their programs/services to the <i>beyondblue</i> review process. 	<p>Prevention</p>	<p>November 2018</p>
<p><i>Building knowledge through student voice and coordinated research</i></p>	<p><i>Target area</i></p>	<p><i>Timeframe</i></p>
<p>1. Education Ministers will request that existing state and territory student and youth forums in 2019 focus on bullying and cyberbullying.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes from these forums should be submitted to the Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group to inform future strategic planning and decisions. 	<p>Prevention/ Responding</p>	<p>October 2018 - 2019</p>
<p>2. It is recommended that youth engagement activities undertaken by the National Children's Commissioner and state and territory equivalent advocates for children and young people be mapped by the Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group to determine if there are gaps in bullying and cyberbullying.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This mapping can further inform the strategic direction of the Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group. 	<p>Prevention/ Responding</p>	<p>September – December 2018</p>

3. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner will deliver a new digital and social health program to young people aged 14-17. The program will encourage young people to be positive influencers and supportive friends in all their social spaces, especially online.	Prevention	End of 2018
4. The Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group will establish a research and evaluation agenda related to bullying in Australian schools. This could include, for example, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Generate a list of key research questions suitable for exploration by academics with a 10 year horizon b) Prioritise research into students' perspective on the drivers of bullying, including cyberbullying c) Establish the parameters for conducting appropriate research that can inform school policy and practice to reduce the tendency for 'evaluation' to use school opinion instead of outcome measures of change. d) Propose national investment in long-term, longitudinal research into bullying in Australia, including surveys of students to capture their voice and experiences in schools and in the community more broadly. This will enable a deeper understanding of the drivers of bullying and cyberbullying (which remain under developed) and help inform any future action. e) Engage with emerging global trends and best practice. 	Prevention / Responding	October 2018-2019

<i>Communicating available information and avenues for support</i>	<i>Target area</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
1. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner will develop an <i>Online Safety Best Practice Guide</i> that will leverage existing eSafety materials help proactively prevent and address cyberbullying in schools. This will include guidance for school communities on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) understanding the context of cyberbullying b) identifying prevention mechanisms including processes for engagement with parents c) assisting schools with the readiness to respond to cyberbullying d) early intervention strategies. <p>The Office of the eSafety Commissioner will also be releasing national survey results in the second half of 2018 examining parental attitudes, behaviours and information needs in relation to keeping their children safe online. This will help inform future work.</p>	Support	September 2018 onwards
2. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner will implement targeted training for key education stakeholders in each jurisdiction to increase the visibility of the eSafety Office and raise awareness of how it can help schools with cyberbullying through reporting and education.	Support	October 2018

<p>3. Communicating with the community will be strengthened by the Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group by engaging with school leadership associations and disseminating resources and supports for parents through national parent bodies (for example Facebook pages, newsletters and apps).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicating through all services providing a health, welfare, education, sporting or recreational service wholly or partly for young people should be strengthened. 	Support	Ongoing
<p>4. In September 2017, the AFP and the Alannah and Madeline Foundation formalised a partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to raise awareness of safety issues affecting young people online.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MOU aims to encourage schools, libraries and the broader community to be involved in online safety initiatives such as eSmart Schools, eSmart Libraries, Connect and the ThinkUKnow program. As part of the existing MOU, the AFP and the Alannah and Madeline Foundation have taken the first steps towards collaborating on online safety initiatives. 	Support	Ongoing

<i>National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence 2019</i>	<i>Target area</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
<p>The Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group manages the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence, an annual campaign for all Australian schools.</p>		
<p>1. Working with schools, parent bodies, sporting codes, employers of young people, and other relevant community groups to engage with parents and promote the 2019 National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence. This event will aim to gain participation from all schools and disseminate key messages to the broader community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed focus and messaging of the event would be the importance of modelling appropriate and respectful behaviour across the whole community. The development of the NDA 2019 is currently underway. The Safe and Supportive School Communities Working Group would need to scope these activities and propose indicative costings for this action to occur. 	Prevention	March 2019
<p>2. Promoting key messaging through sporting/youth ambassadors and promotion of materials through parent peak bodies and social media channels.</p>	Prevention	March 2019

Bullying and Cyberbullying Senior Officials Working Group

Terms of Reference

Purpose

The Bullying and Cyberbullying Senior Officials Working Group will consider existing strategies and potential initiatives to help reduce bullying and cyberbullying and keep Australia's children safe.

To effectively address bullying, including cyberbullying, a clear and coordinated approach is needed. It is important to ensure that future actions make best use of the available evidence of what works and avoids duplicating resources and effort.

Context

At the 9 February 2018 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting, it was agreed to establish a working group of senior officials from First Ministers', Education, Justice and Health departments to consider existing and potential initiatives to help combat bullying and cyberbullying and establish a work program to be led by the Education Council.

Responsibilities

Four strategic objectives have been identified which are consistent with:

- the 9 February 2018 COAG Communiqué
- discussions at the 13 April 2018 Education Council meeting
- recommendations from relevant national reports and inquiries.⁵

Strategic objectives of the Working Group are to:

- consider the underlying drivers of bullying and cyberbullying
- develop an agreed national definition of bullying and cyberbullying to establish a common language for school communities
- share strategies and best practice approaches to address bullying and cyberbullying and consider the available evidence on what makes these approaches effective
- establish a work program for the Education Council based on these objectives.

Members

The Working Group will be chaired by the Group Manager, Improving Student Outcomes, Australian Government Department of Education and Training. If the Chair is unavailable, the department will appoint an Acting Chair to convene and conduct the meeting.

Membership will comprise two senior executive officials from each jurisdiction across First Ministers', Health, Justice and Education departments.

The **Commonwealth** will be represented by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Communications and the Arts. The Office of the eSafety Commissioner will be involved as a national agency.

⁵including but not limited to the Senate Inquiry into the adequacy of cyberbullying laws, the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse, the Senate Inquiry into the Harm being done to Australian children through access to pornography on the

Prior to meetings, the Secretariat will seek the views of the Department of Health, Department of Home Affairs and Attorney General's Department.

Two nominated members from the states and territories will represent the views of First Ministers, Health, Justice and Education departments.

Ad-hoc members may be co-opted as required and agreed by Working Group members.

Administrative arrangements

The Working Group will operate from May 2018 as the work program is developed for the Education Council and presented to COAG at its next meeting in 2018.

Working Group meetings will be scheduled as required. The Working Group may also conduct business out of session or by correspondence, as appropriate.

The first meeting will be held in person, with further meetings to be held via teleconference.

The Australian Government Department of Education and Training will provide secretariat support, including:

- communication with members
- coordination of agendas and meeting papers
- recording, minute taking and following-up action items.

When possible, draft agendas and meeting papers will be circulated approximately one week before meetings. Minutes will be provided to members promptly after each meeting.

National policy definition of bullying and cyberbullying

Working Group members have developed a national definition on bullying and cyberbullying for use in school communities and to be promoted by relevant stakeholders.

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The definition has been reviewed by three anti-bullying experts.

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Bullying of any form or for any reason can have immediate, medium and long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders.

Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying.

The Working Group recommend this definition be used by all schools and promoted to relevant stakeholders.

***beyondblue's* The National Education Initiative**

Background

In 2014 the National Mental Health Commission Review found there were multiple, siloed programs supporting social and emotional health and wellbeing for children and young people. The Commission recommended they should be integrated into one single, end-to-end national initiative.

This led to the Australian Government's 2015 National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health program, which includes the National Education Initiative (NEI) focused on providing education and training to educators in early learning services, primary and secondary schools. Total funding of up to \$98.6 million over five years to June 2021 has been committed from the Health portfolio.

beyondblue is partnering with headspace and Early Childhood Australia in the design and delivery of the NEI. The strengths of current school-based mental health programs, including KidsMatter, MindMatters, headspace School Support and ResponseAbility, will be built upon, cover the continuum from early childhood to secondary school and be promoted through the Student Wellbeing Hub.

Key Issues

The Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2015) found that almost one in seven 4-17 year olds experienced a mental health condition in the previous year. For many young people, these issues will continue into adulthood: half of all 'adult' mental health problems begin before the age of 14. The Australian Institute of Family Studies (2017) found up to ten per cent of 14 and 15 year olds self-harm and up to five per cent will attempt suicide each year. Learning outcomes are vastly improved when a student is both physically and mentally well.

The NEI will become the national mental health framework for schools and early learning services, designed with and for educators. The NEI will enable schools and services the flexibility to design and build a strategy that meets its unique needs.

What will schools see?

The NEI – through a professional development package, evidence based, practical tools and strategies supported by staff located around the country – will provide educators with:

- Increased mental health and suicide prevention literacy;
- Advice, tips and practical strategies to maximise their own mental health;
- Knowledge, skills and confidence to know what to look out for in children and young people (identify signs and symptoms of poor mental health), what to do and how to link them to the right support at the right time;
- A directory of existing evidence-based and evaluated third party programs and more specialist training, on topics such as bullying, so that schools and services can be confident in selecting and commissioning additional programs; and
- Greater capability to work together with families and carers of children and young people.
- For secondary schools, the NEI will assist educators to proactively plan against suicide and safely respond if it occurs with the support of a dedicated suicide response service.

The NEI and the soon to be released Australian Student Wellbeing Framework are mutually reinforcing. The enhancement of wellbeing through active participation in safe, inclusive and connected learning communities in the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework is closely aligned to the first three domains of the NEI framework – Mentally healthy communities, Family partnerships, and Learning resilience. The frameworks differ in that the NEI offers content that extends into the provision of early intervention and support, through to responding to critical incidents like a suicide.

Next Steps

The NEI will be launched on 1 November 2018 and will be available free to all early learning services, primary and secondary schools in Australia. Educators will have access to the NEI content and to 70 front line staff who can work with them to implement the NEI. Pre-service educators currently completing their qualification will also have access to the NEI to complement their learning.

Proactive recruitment of new schools and services will then commence with the support of a marketing and communications strategy and a best practice approach to implementation to ensure services and schools are equipped to shift and embed practices to create mentally healthy learning communities. All KidsMatter and MindMatters participating early learning services and schools will be transitioned to the new initiative.

While not compulsory, the NEI is designed to complement existing state and territory social and emotional wellbeing frameworks. It will assist schools and services to activate a whole of setting approach that reinforces the implementation of the Early Years Framework, Australian Curriculum, and Australian Professional Standards for both teachers and principals.

beyondblue has engaged all state and territory departments of education through advisory groups, formal briefings with government officials, and State and Territory implementation and engagement groups. The continued input of state and territory Departments of Education to the development and implementation of the NEI will help ensure its success.

As noted above, the NEI will support future educators. A communications campaign targeting pre-service educators completing their qualifications will be released post launch to engage them in the NEI. The NEI is also working with the tertiary and vocational educational sectors to embed specific NEI tools and resources within the respective courses.