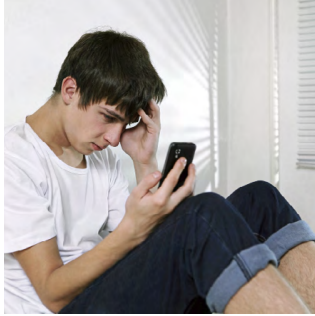


Cyberbullying: Tips for D.C. Youth-Serving Agencies

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place through technology. It includes, but is not limited to, bullying via computers, social media, cell phones, and gaming devices.



BULLYING is any severe, pervasive, or persistent act of conduct that can be reasonably predicted to:

- a.** place the youth in reasonable fear of physical harm to their person or property;
- b.** cause a substantial detrimental effect on the youth's physical or mental health;
- c.** substantially interfere with the youth's academic performance or attendance; or
- d.** substantially interfere with the youth's ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges provided by an agency, educational institution, or grantee.

CYBERBULLYING AND THE YOUTH BULLYING PREVENTION ACT

The *Youth Bullying Prevention Act* of 2012 (YBPA) requires all youth-serving agencies in the District of Columbia to adopt a bullying prevention policy that includes prohibitions on bullying that occurs:

*"On its property, including **electronic communication** on, or with, its property," and*
*"through electronic communication to the extent that it is directed at a youth and it substantially interferes with the youth's ability to **participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges** provided by the agency, education institution or grantee."*

This means that schools, after-school programs, and other youth-serving agencies need to investigate and take action for cyberbullying that:

- 1)** occurs during hours in which youth are using the agency's services;
- 2)** occurs while using agency property, including technology students may use outside of the hours they are utilizing the agency's services (e.g., a laptop or tablet that a youth borrows and uses at home); or
- 3)** occurs outside the hours a youth is using an agency's services, on personal or other technology, if is affecting the youth's ability to utilize the agency's services. For instance, cyberbullying is covered under this policy if the youth is not participating in services to avoid contact with those engaging in the cyberbullying, or if discussion among other youth at the agency about the cyberbullying is affecting their ability to focus. **If this type of cyberbullying is not substantially affecting the youth's ability to engage in the agency's services, the agency is not required to handle the cyberbullying under this policy.** However, this does not prevent the agency from addressing the cyberbullying outside the policy.

DETERMINING WHETHER CYBERBULLYING IS COVERED:

For all reports of cyberbullying to your agency, consider the following questions:

- 1)** Can the conduct be reasonably predicted to lead to fear of physical harm, detrimental effects on mental or physical health, interference with academic performance or attendance, or ability to participate in or benefit from agency services?

- All bullying covered under the YBPA, including cyberbullying, must be reasonably tied to one of these outcomes.
- Often, if the youth is reporting the bullying (as opposed to other youth or adults), this is a clear indication that they are being affected.
- If a third party reports the bullying, the agency should talk with the youth to determine whether and how they are being impacted.

2) Did the cyberbullying occur while the youth were participating in agency activities? Did the cyberbullying occur while using agency technology?

- Cyberbullying that occurs while youth are using agency services, even on personal technology, is covered under the policy.
- Cyberbullying that occurs while using agency technology, even outside agency hours and property, is covered under the policy.

3) Is the cyberbullying affecting youths' ability to participate in or benefit from agency services?

- Has the targeted youth changed their behavior or use of the agency's services since the reported cyberbullying began? For instance, has their attendance, performance, or engagement changed?
- Is the cyberbullying incident making it difficult for others to participate or has it changed the climate for youth at the agency?

4) Is the cyberbullying incident unique to your agency?

- Are all the youth involved in the cyberbullying involved in your agency's services?
- Do the involved youth also participate together in other agencies' services?
- If the youth involved are also together at other agencies, and the cyberbullying did not take place on or with your agency's property, it may make sense to coordinate response with other agencies. For instance, if the cyberbullying is affecting both a youth's participation at school and at an after-school program, and the involved youth are in both environments, the school and after-school may want to work together to ensure that the situation is resolved.

If it is determined that the cyberbullying is covered under the agency's policy, follow the agency's investigation and documentation procedures. Remember to keep all evidence of the cyberbullying, including screenshots or printouts of the offensive behavior.

IF THE CYBERBULLYING IS NOT COVERED UNDER THE POLICY:

Even if the cyberbullying is deemed to fall outside of what is covered by the YBPA, the agency can still take steps to help prevent future incidents.

1) Use the opportunity to stress the importance of digital citizenship.

- Use free curriculum to help youth build skills while using technology. Avoid referring to the particular incident or naming youth involved.

2) Use the incident to increase monitoring of the youth involved.

- Research demonstrates that the youth engaged in cyberbullying (both as aggressors and targets) often play the same roles in in-person bullying.
- Reports of cyberbullying might indicate on-going conflict and/or bullying between the youth involved that may fall under the YBPA.