



Using Technology to Combat Bullying in Schools: Exploring an Innovative Solution

Executive Summary

As we all know, bullying is a common problem in modern schools, both inside and outside of the school building. More than one out of every five (20.8%) students report being bullied each year, which makes bullying the most common form of violence amongst children under the age of 18 (NCES, 2016). Bullying behavior was once considered normal for kids and was not treated seriously. Now, however, teasing and bullying are seen as serious issues that can cause emotional and psychological damage to victims, perpetrators, and bystanders (CDC, 2015). Both boys and girls bully others, although generally in different ways. Boys tend to be more physical, whereas girls tend to engage in emotional and psychological bullying.

Many schools now have anti-bullying policies in place that address bullying specifically. However, addressing this problem must go way beyond a small section of a school handbook. Just as teachers and other school employees are the front line of defense in detecting and preventing child abuse, they serve as the eyes and ears of bullying awareness. All school personnel are responsible for keeping abusive language and behavior out of the classroom and the school culture. Talking openly about the issue of bullying is perhaps the most robust way that educators can prevent it from happening by making victims feel less isolated in their struggle (Evans, Fraser & Cotter, 2014).

For their part, schools must provide their educators with the strategies and resources that they need to counteract bullying in its many incarnations (Evans, Fraser & Cotter, 2014). To accomplish this, schools must be aware of the latest research and innovations in bullying prevention. The purpose of this whitepaper is to discuss the many ways in which research-based education technologies such as NetSupport DNA can assist schools in preventing bullying events before they start and responding to bullying events that become fully realized.





What is Bullying?

Bullying can be defined as aggressive, calculated actions perpetrated by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves. Bullying may be physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual in nature (Smith, 2014).

- **Physical bullying** includes punching, pushing, hair pulling, beating, biting, choking, kicking, and damaging the victim's property.
- **Verbal bullying** includes unwanted name calling, gossip, and teasing.
- **Emotional bullying** includes ostracizing; frightening; defaming; embarrassing; blackmailing; the grading or assessment of individual features such as physical limitations, height, weight, ethnicity, race or perceived sexual orientation; peer pressuring, isolating, etc.
- **Sexual bullying** includes many of the items listed above as well as exhibitionism, voyeurism, sexual innuendos or comments, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and unwanted touching.
- **Cyberbullying** involves bullying through the use of electronic media and devices, such as e-mail, text messages, social media, and/or other Internet-based platforms.

Bullying involves an imbalanced relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. The bully gains power, while victim loses power (Swearer & Hymel, 2015). Because of this, it is hard for the victim to deal with the problem. An imbalance of power can be created from physical strength, social status, etc. Power can also be gained as a result of understanding a person's perceived weaknesses (e.g., appearance, disability, home life, personal characteristics) and using this knowledge against them.

How does bullying impact students?

We as adults have to stop telling kids that bullying is a harmless part of growing up.

In reality, bullying is extremely hard for the victims (CDC, 2016). Its immediate effect is lowering a child's academic achievement and enjoyment of school. Kids who are bullied report being unable to focus, physical ailments, mental health impacts such as anxiety and depression, and low self-esteem. Feeling powerless and helpless to stop the harassment can lead to long-term psychological damage (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013).

Bullies are also negatively impacted by bullying. Researchers have found that some children who repeatedly bully others have mental health issues and exhibit criminal and antisocial behavior later on in life (CDC, 2015). This does not mean that bullying results in criminality in adulthood, but bullying is a signal that something is not right.



Children who are bystanders of bullying are not immune to its effects. They may feel distressed and anxious about seeing something that they know is wrong but feel powerless to stop it from occurring. They may be concerned about their own safety or possible loss of social stature. Also, they may be afraid of becoming bullied themselves (CDC, 2015).

The school years are a time when you are just figuring out how to be in relationships. The internet adds another level of complexity to this experience. While the online environment can be a great way to develop relationships, it can also destroy relationships. Students don't seem to understand that there is actually another person on the other side of that keyboard (Patchin & Hinduja, 2016). Another person that has feelings just like they do. Bullying is unacceptable in the real world and online and can have devastating consequences in both environments. We need to teach young people always to ask themselves if what they are posting might hurt someone.



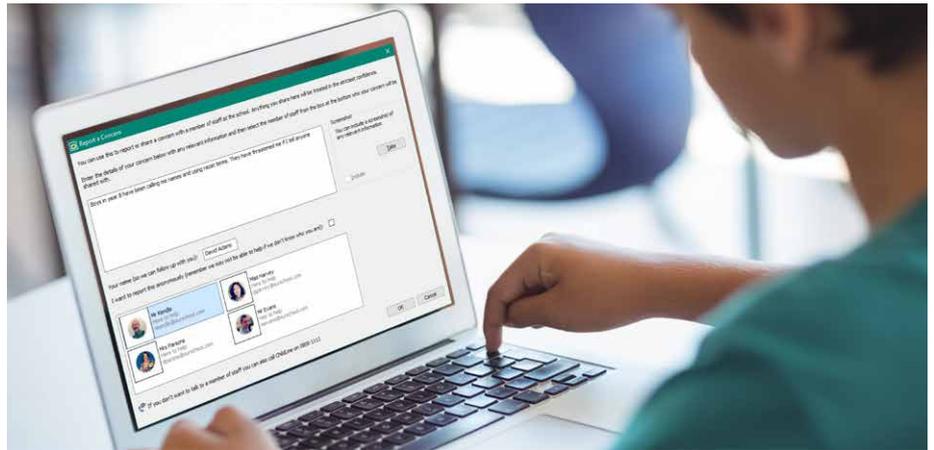
How can technology help?

In spite of all of the national campaigns to stop bullying in schools, many parents still have significant concerns about their child's safety. Every state has passed some kind of law or policy banning bullying in schools, but it continues to proliferate (Smith, 2014). In response to this, a large number of edtech companies are creating products to help schools prevent and respond to all forms of bullying. Schools have shown themselves receptive to the idea, and are investing in bullying prevention and school safety apps, as a way to make their campuses safer.

NetSupport is one of the most promising companies in the bully prevention/school safety space. Their award-winning IT Asset Management and Internet Safety solution, NetSupport DNA, helps technicians to track, monitor, and manage IT assets across individual schools and entire districts. NetSupport DNA offers a **"Report a Concern"** feature that allows students to swiftly and anonymously report any problem (e.g. cyberbullying) that they may have encountered to a staff member that they trust.

NetSupport DNA even includes the contact information for **national support resources** so students can reach out to these support organizations if they are in need. Now, students can feel empowered to confront bullying without fear of retribution from their tormentors.

School IT administrators can use NetSupport DNA's **Contextual intelligence-based Risk Index** which automatically flags high-risk events and vulnerable students.



It creates a risk index number for each event based on sophisticated contextual intelligence risk analysis, meaning staff can see quickly see who needs help urgently. Staff can also set up **real-time monitoring** and look for exact keywords or phrases in several languages to keep an eye on student activity. These keywords are displayed in a word cloud format, along with other insights so school officials can spot trending topics across clusters of students. If phrases that you think suggest bullying/harassing behavior or may place the student at risk show up, they will be displayed in the **word cloud**. Not only does it display the word cloud, but it also puts the word into the context it was being used. For example, a triggered phrase being used in a Word document during lesson time would be perceived as a lower risk than if the same phrase was being used in a messenger app during lunchtime. Within NetSupport DNA, the system can determine the **severity of the phrase** used and assign different sensitivity levels based on those conditions. Another useful feature that educators find helpful is the ability to **capture screenshots** and **screen video** clips to assist in more severe instances of bullying. These features can all be accessed from the **cloud-based console** which allows staff to access key information and alerts from triggers across the school's local network while on the go. Educators can use these features as a starting point for discussing the importance of leaving a positive online footprint. This can help students understand that when you are online, you are shaping your reputation, whether you like it or not. It is just as vital for us as adults and professionals to set a good example by being responsible digital citizens. This can help teachers curtail cyberbullying and assist students in learning valuable digital literacy skills.





Conclusion

School should be an environment where students feel safe and protected and where they can expect to be treated with respect. Unfortunately, the reality is that a large number of students are the victims of bullying events that can result in severe, long-term academic, physical, and emotional consequences. It is disheartening to know that school personnel often trivialize or underestimate the extent of bullying and the harm it can cause. In many cases, harassment is ignored or tolerated. When educators do not intervene, some victims take matters into their own hands, often with deadly results.

In a perfect society, issues such as bullying would be nonexistent. As education professionals, we have to live in the real world, where harassment continues to be a significant problem in classrooms throughout the globe. However, as products like NetSupport DNA demonstrate, the purposeful use of technology can be used to prevent bullying events and respond to those events that become fully realized. Educators can breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that they can protect their students from being bullies. Students can also exhale, knowing that NetSupport is keeping them safe.



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