



East Berkshire Youth Football League

(EBYFL)

Policy on Cyberbullying

Bullying in all its forms has no place in the East Berks Youth Football League

Cyberbullying can be defined as the use of *Information and Communications Technology (ICT)*, particularly mobile phones and the internet, deliberately to upset someone else.

With more and more of us using email and mobile phones, bullying does not have to happen in person. Silent phone calls or abusive texts or emails can be just as distressing as being bullied face-to-face.

It can be an extension of face-to-face bullying, with technology providing the bully with another route to harass their target. However, it differs in several significant ways from other kinds of bullying: the invasion of home and personal space; the difficulty in controlling electronically circulated messages; the size of the audience; perceived anonymity; and even the profile of the person doing the bullying and their target.

Although cyberbullying is not a specific criminal offence, there are criminal laws that can apply in terms of harassment and threatening and menacing communications. You contact the police if they feel that the law has been broken.

Cyberbullying takes different forms: threats and intimidation; harassment or “cyber-stalking” (e.g. repeatedly sending unwanted texts or instant messages); vilification / defamation; exclusion or peer rejection; impersonation; unauthorised publication of private information or images (including what are sometimes misleadingly referred to as ‘happy slapping’ images); and manipulation.

Some cyberbullying is clearly deliberate and aggressive, but it is important to recognise that some incidents of cyberbullying are known to be unintentional and the result of simply not thinking about the consequences. What may be sent as a joke may not be received as one, and indeed the distance that technology allows in communication means that the sender may not see the impact of the message on the receiver. There is also less opportunity for either party to resolve any misunderstanding or to feel empathy. It is important that players are made aware of the effects of their actions.

In cyberbullying, bystanders can easily become perpetrators – by passing on or showing to others images designed to humiliate, for example, or by taking part in online polls or discussion groups. They may not recognise themselves as participating in bullying, but their involvement compounds the misery for the person targeted. It is recommended that anti-bullying policies refer to those ‘bystanders’ – better termed ‘accessories’ in this context – who actively support cyberbullying and set out sanctions for this behaviour. It is important that players are aware that their actions have severe and distressing consequences and that participating in such activity will not be tolerated by the league.

Forms that Cyberbullying can take

- Threats and intimidation
- Harassment or stalking
- Vilification/defamation
- Ostracising/peer rejection/exclusion
- Publicly posting, sending or forwarding personal or private information or images

Technology

- Mobile phones
- Instant messenger
- Voice over internet protocols
- Chatrooms and Message boards
- Email
- Webcams
- Social network sites
- Video-hosting sites

Responding to Cyberbullying

Teams, Clubs and Leagues should;

Always inform their Club, League or County Welfare Officer

- Show support for the person bullied

As with other forms of bullying the target of cyberbullying may be in need of emotional support. Key principles here include reassuring them that they have done the right thing by telling someone; recognising that it must have been difficult for them to deal with; and reiterating that no-one has a right to do that to them. Refer to any existing support/procedures for supporting those who have been bullied in the school, and refer them to helpful information and resources.

- Advise on online empowerment

It is important to advise the person being bullied not to retaliate or return the message. Replying to messages, particularly in anger, is probably just what the bully wants, and by not replying the bully may think that the target did not receive or see the message, or that they were not bothered by it. Instead, the person should keep the evidence and take it to their parent or manager/coach or club welfare officer. **It is important they tell someone.**

- Try to contain the incident

I.e. instantly remove any content from websites

Some forms of cyberbullying involve the distribution of content or links to content, which can exacerbate, extend and prolong the bullying. There are advantages in trying to contain the 'spread' of this. If bullying content, e.g. embarrassing images, have been circulated, it is important to look at whether this content can be removed from the web.

- Prevent reoccurrence

I.e. blocking or changing contact details

There are some steps that the person being bullied can take, depending on the service that the bully has used, which can allow users to manage who they share information with and also who can contact them. These features can help a person being bullied to stop further contact from the person harassing them. For example, blocking the person from their email or instant messenger buddy list will mean that they will not receive messages from that particular sender anymore.

- Know how to contact the service provider

All UK Mobile operators have nuisance call centres set up and/or procedures in place to deal with such instances. The responses may vary, but possibilities for the operator include changing the mobile number of the person being bullied so that the bully will not be able to continue to contact them without finding out their new number. It is not always possible for operators to bar particular numbers from contacting the phone of the person being bullied, although some phone handsets themselves do have this capability. Action can be taken against the bully's phone account (e.g. blocking their account), only with police involvement. It is possible to block particular senders, and if the bullying persists an alternative is for the person being bullied to change their email addresses. The email provider will have information on their website about how to create a new account.

- Preserve the evidence

Anyone who feels that they are being bullied is advised to try to keep a record of the abuse: particularly the date and time; the content of the message(s); and where possible a sender's ID (e.g. username, email, mobile phone number) or the web address of the profile/content. Keeping the evidence will help in any investigation into the cyberbullying by the service provider, but it can also be useful in showing what has happened to those who may need to know, including parents, coaches, managers, welfare officers and the police.

- Identify the bully

Although the technology seemingly allows anonymity, there are ways to find out information about where bullying originated. However, it is important to be aware that this may not necessarily lead to an identifiable individual, if perhaps another person's phone or network account has been used.

If the bullying was by mobile phone, has the number been withheld? If so it is important to record the date and time and contact the mobile operator. If the bullying was carried out on a particular internet service the service provider may be able to take some steps to stop the abuse by blocking the aggressor or removing content, although the police will need to be involved to enable them to look into the data of another user.

Information about cyberbullying and civil and criminal laws

It is very important that cyberbullying is taken seriously. It can be a very serious matter and can constitute a criminal offence. Although bullying or cyberbullying is not a specific offence in UK law,

there are criminal laws that can apply in terms of harassment, for example, or threatening behaviour, or indeed – particularly for cyberbullying – threatening and menacing communications.

There are four UK statute laws that are relevant to the use of IT in relation to bullying. These are:

- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994
- The Malicious Communications Act 1998
- The Communications Act 2003

It should also be recognised, where induction and education activities are not in place, that some cyberbullying has been known to be unintentional or at least carried out with little awareness of the consequences.

Determining appropriate sanctions for incidents will require sensitivity to the impact on the person being bullied as well as any misunderstanding or thoughtlessness on the part of the cyberbully.

Guidelines

The following are not permitted by EBYFL

- Sending or displaying offensive messages or pictures
- Using obscene language
- Harassing, insulting or attacking others
- Violating copyright laws
- Using others' passwords or accounts
- 'Hacking' into others' folders, work or files for any reason

Sanctions

- Violations of the above statement from EBYFL could result in a temporary or permanent ban from the League.
- Parents/carers and Coaches/Managers could be informed
- Additional disciplinary action could be added in line with existing codes of conduct on inappropriate language or behaviour.
- Where applicable, police or local authorities may become involved.
- If necessary, external agencies such as Social Networking or Email member sites may be contacted and informed
- The League could insist in the Team or Club will hold (at their own cost) an workshop involving all parties to educate the Team/Club on the dangers of cyberbullying
- There could be very serious consequences for bullying behaviour. The consequences will vary according to the severity of the incident but all incidents of bullying will be treated seriously
- County FA may be informed

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