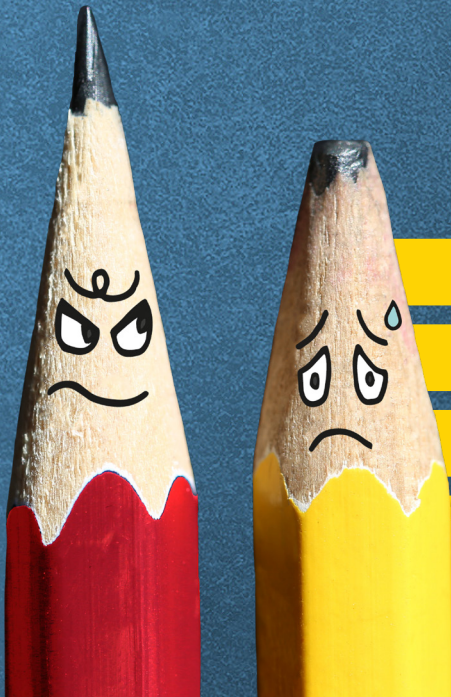




United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCHOOL BULLYING

  
MINISTÈRE  
DE L'ÉDUCATION  
NATIONALE,  
DE LA JEUNESSE  
ET DES SPORTS  
*Liberté  
Égalité  
Fraternité*



## Recommendations by the Scientific Committee on preventing and addressing school bullying and cyberbullying

***UNESCO and the French Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports organize an International Conference on School Bullying on 5 November 2020. The conference builds on commitments made at the July 2019 meeting of education ministers of the G7, under the French Presidency, and marks the celebration of the first-ever International Day Against Violence and Bullying at School including Cyberbullying.***

The online conference seeks to build global momentum to end bullying in schools by raising awareness among all stakeholders, sharing promising practices, and mobilising governments, experts and the entire education community.

Prior to the event, experts from different regions of the world working on the prevention of school bullying were asked to prepare recommendations for the conference. The process was led by a Scientific Committee comprised of French experts advising the French Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for the design of its national anti-bullying programme, as well as international experts. Two consultations were organized to inform the process: one amongst the French committee of experts and a virtual consultation amongst about fifty renowned international experts (academics, representatives of governments, NGOs, and UN agencies) to collect their opinions on what works to prevent and address bullying and cyberbullying, including scientific evidence.

This document presents a summary of a first set of recommendations made by the Scientific Committee on three key issues:

- How should the definition of school bullying be revisited to develop more comprehensive and targeted initiatives to tackle bullying in all its forms? What aspects should be considered for a more inclusive definition?
- How effective national responses to bullying should look like, based on existing evidence? What are the key components and characteristics of a comprehensive approach to bullying and cyberbullying?
- What additional or specific strategies and actions should be taken into consideration when planning and implementing responses to cyberbullying?

## Revisiting the definition of school bullying

The 1st International Day Against Violence and Bullying in Schools including Cyberbullying is taking place at a significant time in the history of research on bullying. For almost 50 years, scholars, practitioners and policy makers alike have relied on an understanding of bullying in schools that was strongly influenced by the foundational work of Dan Olweus and other early scholars in this field who defined bullying as “unwanted aggressive behaviour that is repeated over time and involves an imbalance of power or strength”. According to these definitions, this type of aggression could involve implicit or explicit intent although the intention may not always be to hurt the target.

In recent years, through the work of other scholars from different disciplines as well as the work of the International Bullying Prevention Association, the World Anti-Bullying Forum, and UNESCO, there has been a growing recognition of the need for more expansive and inclusive considerations that recognise the complexities of relationships and structures related to bullying behaviour. Consequently, the Scientific Committee considered the commonly used definition of bullying and identified a need to adopt more inclusive consideration of bullying that reflect the growth of understanding in bullying prevention and intervention. Previous definitions considered bullying as concerned largely with repeated aggressive behaviour that occurs between two individuals or a group against an individual who are unable to make it stop. However, today there is recognition that bullying of students occurs within a system of relationships and structures that exist both within the school and outside the school. As such there

is a need to recognise that bullying is a ‘whole-education’ issue. It is hoped that by positioning bullying in a more inclusive way, researchers, practitioners and policy makers will be able to develop more comprehensive and targeted initiatives to tackle bullying in schools in all its forms, as well as how we measure it.

The Scientific Committee also recognises that bullying reflects an absence of care as much as it involves a presence of aggression.

A revised definition should make clear that:

- Bullying and cyberbullying involve power imbalance and occurs within a given network of school and community relationships, and is enabled or inhibited by the social and institutional context of schools and the education system.
- Bullying and cyberbullying are relational phenomena that occur within a network of people.
- Bullying and cyberbullying often imply an absence of effective or positive responses and care towards targets<sup>1</sup> by peers and/or adults.
- Bullying and cyberbullying often cause emotional, social, and/or physical harm.
- Repetition is not only linked to the number of times that incidents of bullying and cyberbullying occur, but it also relates to the effect on the target who may fear that a once-off event might be repeated or re-shared online.
- Not all perpetrators of bullying act intentionally. Students involved in bullying may do it as a result of group dynamics rather than because they want to harm the student who is targeted.

## How to respond effectively to bullying and cyberbullying: the whole-education approach

International research suggests that successful initiatives aimed at tackling school bullying and cyberbullying are delivered as part of a whole-school approach. However, these whole-school based initiatives have been limited in their success because they have failed to recognise that the local school exists within a wider education system and community that is supported and maintained by society.

Consequently, the Scientific Committee proposes that an effective response to bullying and cyberbullying should be described as a “**whole-education approach**”. A whole-education approach ensures that local school initiatives recognise the importance of the interconnectedness of the school with the wider

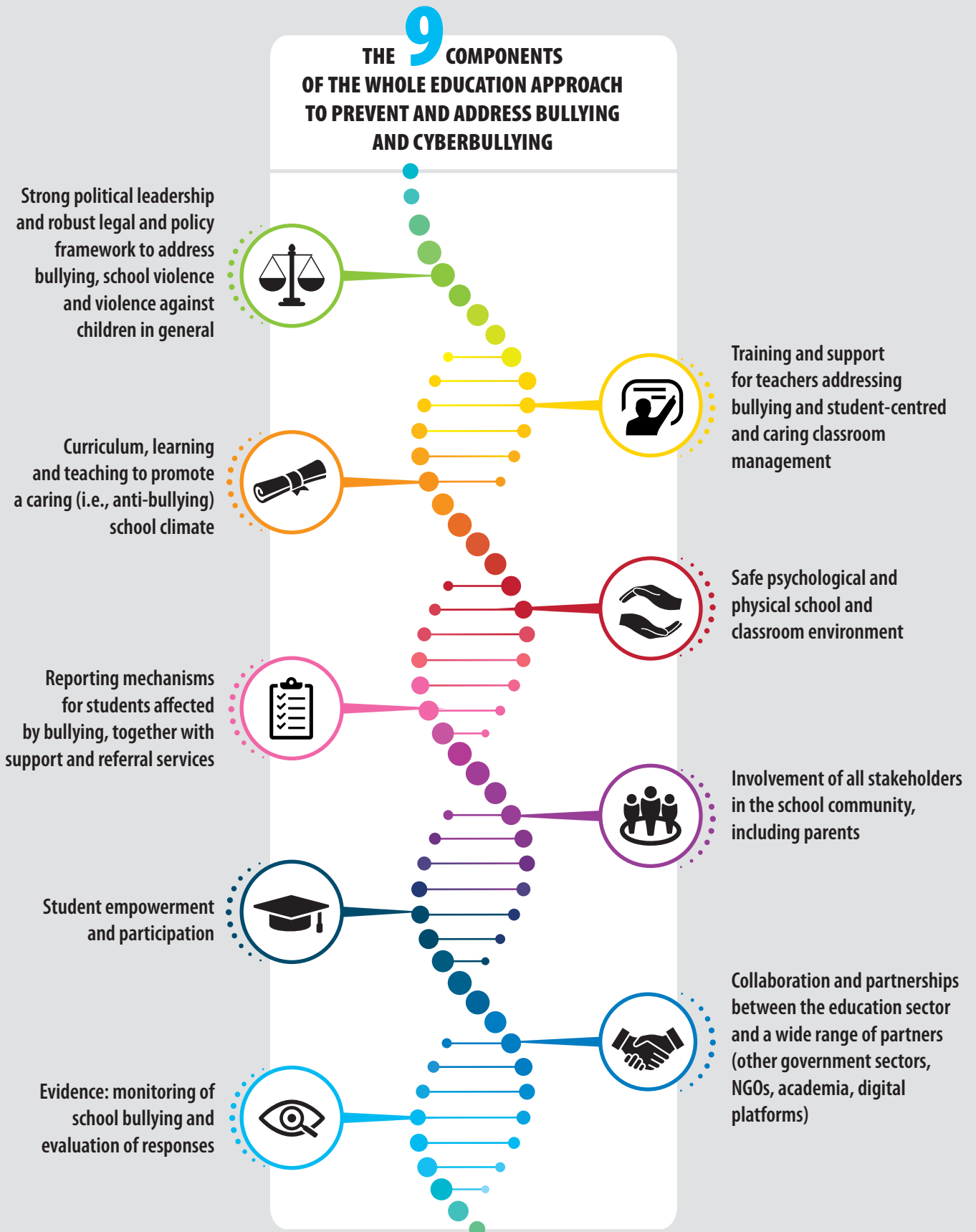
community including education, technological and societal systems, values and pressures, all of which can impact on the prevalence and type of bullying and cyberbullying that occurs in a school.



<sup>1</sup> Use of the term target, rather than victim, has been preferred as it avoids negative labelling that overly focuses on the attributes of an individual.

Elements operating at different and sometimes simultaneous levels need to be considered if a school is to truly develop a whole-education approach to reducing bullying and cyberbullying.

The following nine core components have been identified to form part of a whole-education approach that can help to effectively reduce bullying and cyberbullying (see infographic).



## Characteristics of the whole-education approach

This whole-education approach to reducing violence and bullying in schools including cyberbullying is holistic as it provides a comprehensive and systemic framework including legal and policy influence that are beyond a whole-school approach. This approach to reducing bullying contributes to the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and SDG16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies. By proposing this broader approach to school bullying, the education system can be even more inclusive and sustainable for the future.

The Scientific Committee recognizes the following pre-requisites that ensure that the whole-education approach to bullying and cyberbullying has a wide national coverage, is sustainable, inclusive and benefits all children, and is comprehensively implemented across the entire school system.



- Each of the nine components is important and necessary but not sufficient alone. These should be considered as integrated elements of the whole-education approach. A coherent combination of these nine components will enhance the long-term effectiveness of responses to bullying. In summary, the 9 core components of a whole-education approach are not a menu (or 'shopping list') from which only some aspects can be selected to reduce bullying.
- It is necessary to plan and implement well-coordinated systematic actions that are sustainable. **Once-off measures are not effective.**
- This places a **greater emphasis on the significance of the whole system of education** underlying the commitment not only to help students involved in bullying (perpetrators and targets alike) but to make the entire education system better equipped to reduce violence, bullying, and cyberbullying among learners.
- National or sub-national education authorities should design **programmes that can be effectively implemented in all schools and across the network of relationships attached to schools.**
- **Education authorities should support schools, with the implementation** of bullying prevention programmes with guidance and resources.
- **Children and young people need to be centrally involved** in designing, implementing and evaluating the nine components of the whole-education approach. Schools exist for children and young people, and need to be involved in an age-appropriate manner to develop and implement the whole-education approach.
- A whole-education approach, along with addressing directly bullying, **should also explicitly promote positive, respectful and caring interactions.**

## KEY MESSAGES ON EACH COMPONENT OF THE WHOLE-EDUCATION APPROACH



### STRONG POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND ROBUST LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS BULLYING, SCHOOL VIOLENCE, AND VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN GENERAL

- National leadership is critical, as well as leadership all the way down to the school level, to champion a strong response to bullying, school violence, and violence against children in general.
- Anti-bullying laws, policies, frameworks and guidelines should be provided at a national level with corresponding policies at the local and school levels.
- There should be laws and policies on inclusive education that address identity-based bullying (for example race or sexuality). These should be translated into explicit policies against discrimination at the local and school levels.
- Laws, policies, frameworks and guidelines should evolve and be adapted to new forms of school aggression such as cyberbullying.



### TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS ON BULLYING AND STUDENT-CENTRED AND CARING CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

- Teachers should be supported through training, mentoring and accessing resources such as appropriate teaching & learning materials to foster a student-centred and caring school environment.
- There should be pre- and in-service training to increase teachers' familiarity with bullying prevention and intervention and to learn about how to achieve student-centred and caring classroom management and school environment.



### CURRICULUM, LEARNING & TEACHING TO PROMOTE CARING (I.E., ANTI-BULLYING) SCHOOL CLIMATE

- To reduce bullying, schools need to provide a student-centred and caring school climate.
- Curriculum, learning and teaching, plus teacher-student relationships should all be geared towards fostering a student-centred and caring school environment.
- To achieve this, student-centred teaching and learning is essential.



### SAFE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

- Education authorities, school principals and other school staff should create an environment where students and the whole school community feel safe, secure, welcomed and supported.
- All school staff, not only teachers, should be sensitized and supported to foster a caring school environment free of bullying.
- The school leadership needs to model caring relationships. Authoritative, democratic leadership should be promoted by principals, boards, teachers and other staff.
- Every bullying situation should be recognized and responded to in a timely, consistent and effective way.



### REPORTING MECHANISMS FOR STUDENTS AFFECTED BY BULLYING, TOGETHER WITH SUPPORT AND REFERRAL SERVICES

- Schools should have staff responsible for monitoring bullying.
- Reporting channels and mechanisms need to be consistent and known by the whole school community, appropriate to different ages, and confidential.
- The school system should be integrated with community support and referral services that are known by and accessible to the school community.
- Students (in particular but not exclusively targets and bystanders) as well as school staff should feel they can talk about bullying to a trusted person known to them, in the school or outside the school.
- Collaboration should be established with social media platforms to ensure that school communities have effective channels to report cyberbullying.



### INVOLVEMENT OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY, INCLUDING PARENTS

- All stakeholders in the school community should be involved in anti-bullying initiatives including principals and board, teachers, other school staff, students, and parents, together with other stakeholders in the wider community, such as children and adults who participate in extra-curricular activities, e.g. sports, arts, etc.

- Parents, including groups such as Parent Teacher Associations, should be supported to engage on the issue of bullying.



### STUDENT EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION

- Bullying is a relational phenomenon that occurs within a network of people; thus, all students should be involved in prevention programs instead of focusing only on perpetrators or targets.
- Bystanders play a key role in the dynamics of bullying and should be empowered to support students targeted by bullying.
- Attention should be paid to the involvement of students who belong to a minority group in the design and implementation of bullying prevention strategies, to ensure these strategies are inclusive of all students.
- Student-led initiatives and peer approaches to prevent bullying should be implemented in conjunction with programmes involving school staff and other adults.



### COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THE EDUCATION SECTOR AND A WIDE RANGE OF PARTNERS (OTHER GOVERNMENT SECTORS, NGOS, ACADEMIA, DIGITAL PLATFORMS)

- Education authorities should effectively collaborate with different sectors including health, social services, etc.
- Other relevant sectors should provide resources and support to reduce bullying and cyberbullying, including social media companies
- Collaboration between the educational sector and academia should be fostered to enable research to better understand bullying and how to reduce it.



### EVIDENCE: MONITORING OF SCHOOL BULLYING AND EVALUATION OF RESPONSES

- It is essential to monitor bullying within schools and across the education system.
- Regular assessment of the effectiveness of preventative and intervention measures at a school and system level is essential.
- Monitoring and assessment should involve both students and school staff and should include questions about the school climate.

## Responding to cyberbullying more effectively

**Research suggests that distinctions between face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying may have been overstated and that students are often targeted off-line and online at the same time. Hence a whole-education approach is needed to provide systemic initiatives to reduce bullying and cyberbullying as two dimensions of the same experience.**

However, there are some additional features of cyberbullying that need to be considered when planning and implementing responses. These include the anonymity afforded to the individual who bullies, the scope of potential humiliation including repetition to the target, the lack of adult or system controls to support cyberbullied students, and the pervasiveness of the Internet making it almost impossible for the target to remove themselves from the experience of being bullied.

These additional features can result in serious stress and fear among those who are targeted. The lockdowns implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have led to an unprecedented rise in screen time use by children and adolescents. Without appropriate structure and oversight, this increase in time spent online may put children and adolescents at greater risk of cyberbullying.

With this in mind, the following additional considerations are suggested:

- Governments and education authorities should publish a specific action plan with related legislation and guidelines on cyberbullying, online safety, digital citizenship and technology use.
- Governments should ensure the provision of extensive pre-and in-service training and curricular supports and resources to assist schools in the development of policies and practices related to safer use of the Internet and other digital technologies.
- Governments should ensure that teacher education programmes, continuing education and professional development include student social and emotional learning, wellbeing and safety online.
- Schools should ensure they implement a range of policies including policies addressing the safer and ethical use of technologies, cyberbullying and a code of behaviour.
- National and sub-national authorities should ensure that online safety is included as a dimension of each subject across the school curriculum.
- National and sub-national authorities should provide a digital learning framework aimed at promoting digital citizenship.
- Mandatory personal safety skills programmes in schools should include specific lessons addressing privacy, and how to safely meet and respond to strangers online including through gaming, social media and other apps. Some programmes are aiming to start with children at very early ages, based on evidence that children interact with screens from a very early age.
- Education classes about cyberbullying and online safety should be integrated into wider bullying prevention programmes.
- National and sub-national authorities should develop specific forums where social media companies and Internet providers can be included in planning for children's safety online.
- A specific national or sub-national point of contact should be established with responsibility for online safety education, complaints mechanisms, and reporting illegal or offensive online content.
- Governments and international governance bodies should mandate transparency and ensure accountability and promote collaboration with social media platforms in relation to cyberbullying and online safety.
- Governments should ensure that parents are involved in the development of action plans and policies that are designed to tackle cyberbullying and online safety.
- Governments should consider engaging in large-scale media campaigns to promote awareness and educate parents on how best to mediate their child's safety online, as parents, families and siblings have a key role to play in supporting civil behaviour online, and to help protect children from online abuse.

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