

Bullying and cyberbullying

What is bullying: definition

this booklet is dedicated to all children and their families. Talking about bullying and cyberbullying is not easy because often bullying episodes are confused with occasional quarrels or underestimated when they become real crimes.

In our legal system, there is no crime of bullying. It can be defined as a series of acts of intimidation, physical or psychological oppression committed by a strong subject, the bully, towards a weak, the victim, in an intentional and repeated way over time. Bullying behaviour is a kind of action that deliberately aims to hurt or harm. The phenomenon concerns boys and girls and manifests itself above all in schools, in the street, in the meeting places of young people. Through some signals that the boys manifest, it is possible to prevent serious repercussions both physical and psychological that can lead the victim to commit serious extreme gestures.

The first official definition comes from the Law approved in Italy on May 29th, 2017.

We can define bullying as an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through verbal and social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social, and psychological harm.

To classify an aggression as an act of bullying it is necessary that:

- The offensive conduct is intentionally inflicted
- That the offensive actions are repeatedly and frequently committed
- That the action is always directed against the same person
- That there is a clear asymmetry in the relationship between the bully and the victim (the strongest versus the weakest)
- That the peer group is complicit with the bully for fear or indifference to the victim's sufferings.

Types of bullying

There are many different types of bullying that can be experienced by children and by adults too.

- Physical bullying: it includes hitting, kicking, or damaging property
- Verbal bullying: it includes insults, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks, or verbal abuse

Social bullying: it is often more difficult to recognize and can be carried out without the victim's knowledge. It aims to harm someone's social reputation and to cause humiliation. It can include

- lying and spreading rumours
- playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate
- mimicking unkindly
- Encouraging others to exclude someone
- Damage to someone's reputation

Definition of cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is intentional and repeated harm inflicted using computers, phones, and other electronic devices.

At the base of cyberbullying there is the electronic transmission of threats that can be carried out in different forms: via SMS, e-mail, chat, instant messaging programs (ex: WhatsApp, WeChat...), and social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc).

One aspect of cyberbullying is that it doesn't manifest itself through direct contact, face to face. The bully is not a physical presence, although constant for the victim. The cyberbully takes advantage of a sort of virtual mask, difficult for the victim to find in the large web network. The cyberbully doesn't leave peace to his victim, not even at home and the victim feels even more insecure and frail.

Cyberbullying characteristics

The cyberbullying has different specific characteristics:

- Pervasiveness: the cyberbully is always present online
- Anonymity which gives bullies a feeling of impunity
- Voluntary aggression: not being able to observe the victim's reactions, the bully commits persecutory acts without realizing that he has gone too far
- Wide circulation. The messages sent are transmitted, retransmitted and amplified beyond the circle of acquaintances

Cyberbullying can include abusive or hurtful texts, emails or posts, images or videos deliberately excluding others, online nasty gossip, or rumours, imitating others online, or using their log-in.

Bullying and cyberbullying are based on the rejection of differences and of certain characteristics, such as

- physical appearance (body shame)
- sex, gender identity
- a disability
- a communication disorder (stuttering)
- belonging to a particular social or cultural group
- different centres of interest.

Prevent and intervene

No one should be bullied because bullying can make people feel insecure at school and at home. The following information will provide you with skills to detect different emotional and behavioural signs of bullying.

Emotional and behavioural signs of bullying

- Changes in sleep and eating patterns
- Frequent outbursts of tears and anger
- Mood swings
- He/she feels ill in the morning
- The victim becomes withdrawn or starts stammering
- He/she becomes aggressive and unreasonable
- He/she refuses to talk about what is wrong
- He/she begins to target siblings
- He/she continually "looses" money or starts stealing

Physical signs of bullying

- He/she has unexplained bruises, cuts, scratches he/she can't explain
- He/she comes home with missing or damaged belongings or clothes
- He/she comes home angry
- He/she doesn't want to go to school
- He/she changes his/her route to school or is frightened of walking to school

- School grades begin to fall

Sometimes signs of bullying can be far more hidden: they can include:

- Being often alone or excluded from friendship groups at school
- Becoming a frequent target for teasing, mimicking, or ridicule at school
- Being unable to speak in class or at home of his/her problems and appearing insecure or frightened.

Risky behaviours. Digital education.

To increase awareness of the risks that children or adults can run by surfing the Internet, we present a list of dangers of the network.

Grooming: this is online grooming through chats and social networks, in which a cyber predator identifies a young victim, establishes a relationship that is first friendly, then confidential and intimate, and then he exploits this relation for sexual purposes.

Sexting: this term refers to the exchange of messages, photos, videos related to sexuality, made with smartphones, and widespread on the net through messaging applications or social networks.

Hate speech: hate crimes are predominantly based on racism and xenophobia (aversion to foreigners), religious and sexual differences, and discrimination against disabled people.

Vamping: it is the habit of staying online for a very long time or staying awake at night to chat or get lost on the web. it is a real form of addiction.

Fake news: they are distorted or invented multimedia news, which have become viral on the net and have the intent to misinform or spread false information.

Baiting: it consists in targeting users, specifically beginner new users, in virtual group environments for example chats, forums, making them the subject of aggressive discussions through insults and threats for mistakes made due to inexperience.

Catfish: it's a term used to indicate those who assume a false identity online because they belong to another user.

Cyber bashing: it consists in videotaping a physical assault in real life and then posting it online.

Cyberstalking: it is an offensive and harassing behavior on the net, insistent and intimidating such as to make the victim fear for his life.

Harassment: it is s repeated sending of insulting and vulgar messages through computers and/or mobile phones.

Impersonation: it is the ability to hack into an account and gain unauthorized access to another person's programs and content.

Outing or trickery: it consists in publishing or sharing with third parties the information, confidences, confidential or intimate photographs of a friend without any authorization from the interested party.

Phishing: online identity theft.

Troll: it's a person who writes a provocative comment to a negative post or phrase to generate a grumpy response.

BE CAREFUL!

What is not harassment: attacking someone with knives, dangerous objects, threatening, causing injury, committing theft, sexual harassment, or abuse, including pedophilia, inciting suicide: these behaviours are real crimes!

EXAMPLES

The blue whale. The blue whale is a social phenomenon born in Russia and spread on social networks. There are several extreme tests to overcome. They can include self-harm or incitement to suicide.

Pedophilia: it indicates a sexual perversion that manifests itself in actions, recurrent impulses, and erotic fantasies involving sexual activities with children.

To design paths for a responsible use of new technologies.

to summarize: what are the risks and the advantages of the Internet?

RISKS	ADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Circulation of false or damaging information towards somebody (cyberbullying)● Internet addiction: isolating in a virtual world, desocialization● Unintentional exposition to violent or shocking images: pornography, violence, hate...● Defamation and circulation of personal information or of photos and videos without one's consent● Internet hackers● Identity theft● Fake news● Computer attacks: password, bank information or account number theft● Exerting psychological pressures: sexual bullying, incitement to suicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Attending school and University online● Communicating all over the world● Getting new information to widen one's knowledge● To play, to exchange music, photos, movies with people all over the world without moving from one's room● To attend courses, to make work experiences and to take a degree online● To make videoconferences● To pay bills● To make virtual trips

problem solving. Common sense solutions

PROBLEM	SOLUTION
<p>Circulation of false or damaging information towards somebody (cyberbullying)</p> <p>Internet addiction: isolating in a virtual world, desocialization</p> <p>Unintentional exposition to violent or shocking images: pornography, violence, hate...</p> <p>Defamation and circulation of personal information or of photos and videos without one's consent (permission)</p> <p>Internet hackers</p> <p>Identity theft</p> <p>Fake news</p> <p>Computer attacks: password, bank information or account number theft</p> <p>9. Exerting psychological pressures: sexual bullying, incitement to suicide</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If it concerns Internet or an email, print the page, mark the date and the hour of the unlawful act, and report the fact to the nearest commissioner's office 2. Play sports, cultivate your interests, your hobbies, telephone your friends up 3. Set up parental control to limit the access to the websites 4. If it's the case of a video through webcam, or of a chat or a message, make a screenshot 5. Chat, communicate only with people you know well: partners, friends, classmates; when in doubt, talk to an adult you trust (parents, teachers, etc) 6. Don't touch anything, go to the nearest commissioner's office, report the fact to the police and, if it's the case lodge a complaint. Place the computer at the investigators' disposal to produce evidence 7. Read the same information from different sources and websites to look for more reliable sources 8. Contact immediately the nearest commissioner's office 9. Be trustful, speak with an adult you trust without any fear to be judged or blamed.

And now, the Decalogue of the good use of the Internet.

1. Surfing the Internet...Great! But pay attention to the "sharks"!
2. Don't give your password, your name, your age to anybody
3. Pay attention when you chat: do you know all your contacts?
4. Never send your photos or those of your friends
5. Never accept meetings with people you don't know
6. Don't believe all that other people say
7. Never answer emails that may upset you
8. If a picture upsets you, close the website and talk to your parents
9. Don't be/play a bully with your friends, don't make fun of them
10. Always signal unappropriated or illegal contents

Sometimes children have difficult family situations, they live with divorced parents who are often very busy at work: they have not much time in the morning or evening to talk together, to inquire about how their

sons live at home, at school, and outside within the circle of their friends. to make up for this lack of time, parents are very concerned to give them everything that is material: food, clothes, toys; they leave them, without adequate control, with substitutes capable of filling every empty space of time: television, video games (often unsuitable for their age) and they allow them to be present on social media since a very young age. Children of 9/10 years old, own the latest generation of mobile phones only because, as they say: "now everyone has it" even though all these devices are not toys but can become, in their inexperienced hands, real weapons capable of hurting them. Today adolescents seem apparently strong, eager for autonomy, and no control (mobile phones and access to social networks are increasingly protected by them by secret passwords), but often, behind this self-confidence there are hidden fragilities that they live in absolute solitude. As time goes by, the dialogue with them becomes difficult if not impossible because they are no longer used to talking or because they are afraid of hasty judgments and, therefore, they no longer want to confide. In addition to the difficulty of communicating there is also the difficulty to listen because social networks and the world in which young people live, are deafening, they absorb, immobilize them (some adolescents live eternally with headphones on, or connected all day long on social networks that fascinate them and turn them away from real life). in extreme cases, they don't want to leave home any more to take refuge in virtual reality, and parents often notice the damage caused when it's too late.

The school and educators have tried to deal with this discomfort experienced by adolescents and by children too: unfortunately, they cannot do much alone; schools, educators, families, and meeting places, (becoming increasingly rare and insignificant), must join and cooperate. It is necessary that children can find everywhere reference figures to talk to, to trust and find the support they need, despite their appearance of tough guys.

In addition, for immediate help, families can contact the following emergency numbers:

113 Polizia di Stato

114 Emergenza infanzia

112 Carabinieri

19696 Telefono Azzurro (linea gratuita fino ai 14 anni)

199.15.15.15 Telefono Azzurro (linea istituzionale dai 14 anni in su e per gli adulti).

And now, here's some useful suggestions from State Police.

- Protect the device you use to access the Internet.

Constantly update the software you use for browsing the Internet. Use firewall, antivirus and antispam. Always lock the screen of your computer, tablet, or smartphone with password. For added security set your device to lock automatically when it goes into standby.

- Protect your password.

Create a solid password and keep it safe. It must be at least 8 characters long, contain letters, numbers, special characters, and punctuation. Use a different password for each account, change the password at least every 3 months.

- Use secure networks.

Pay close attention to personal information when accessing the Internet using a network that you do not know, or you are not sure of. If you use a wi-fi network at home, protect it with a password to prevent other people from using it.

- Protect your personal information.

Before entering personal data in a form or web page, check for its security, such as that the address contains the word: https and the lock symbol closed next to it. Never provide sensitive information online such as your name, address, phone number, account number, or password.

- Avoid scams.

Use your head before clicking on a link or documents attached to an email from an unknown sender promising you a gift, a free trip, or any other reward: it may contain viruses or malware that can harm your device or even steal your personal information. When shopping online, do researches on the seller. If an offer seems too convenient to be true, it could hide a bad surprise. Buy products only from safe, reviewed, reliable and well-known sites. To protect yourself from scams, you must prefer the use of prepaid cards, choose reliable sites, be wary of excessively low prices, buy original and non-counterfeit products, read the conditions of sale and delivery well.

A practical guide to communicate successfully on the Internet

The manifesto of non-hostile communication is a chart that lists ten style principles useful for improving the style and behaviour of those on the Net; it wants to encourage respectful and civil behaviour so that the Net is a welcoming and safe place for everyone

THE MANIFESTO OF NON-HOSTILE COMMUNICATION

- Virtual is real
On the Internet, I only write or say what I would dare to say in person.
I communicate online as I do in the real world, respecting people and their differences, fragility, and strengths. I choose to include without judging or discriminating.
- You are what you communicate
The words I choose define who I am. They represent me
I respect my identity and freely decide to define myself as I am, or not to define myself at all. I welcome complexity and multiplicity. I value creative diversity.
- Words shape the way I think
I take all the time I need to express my views the best possible way.
I carefully avoid stereotypes, clichés, allusions or offensive or demeaning idioms. I contrast all prejudice. I always choose clear and easy-to-understand, correct, kind words.
- Listen before you speak
No one can always be right, and nor am I. I listen with an honest and open-minded attitude.
I build relationships based on patient listening, understanding and empathy. I know that different opinions broaden my horizons, and that exchange gives rise to a sense of community.
- Words are bridges
I choose words to understand, make myself understood and get close to others.

I cultivate curiosity, openness and positive dialogue that is born when mental, social, cultural, and hierarchical barriers are overcome. My language can create inclusion and citizenship.

- Words have consequences
I am aware that what I say or write can have consequences, small or serious.
I know words can hurt or heal, sustain, or crush. I speak in such a way as to understand all identities, conditions, affiliations, orientations, and cultures.
- Share with care
I share texts and images only after I have read, assessed, and understood them.
Before sharing texts, videos, or photos I wonder if they add quality to the discussion and if they promote respect. I verify that the sources are honest, neutral, and truthful.
- Ideas can be discussed. People must be respected
Those whose views and opinion differ from mine are not enemies to be destroyed.
I value the plurality of opinions and experiences and welcome every different thought as a richness. If I disagree, I favour open, civil, and constructive confrontation.
- An insult is not an argument
I accept no offensive and aggressive words, even if they support my point of view.
Insulting is a violent and primitive way of expressing oneself. It is doubly regrettable if it targets those who are discriminated against and experience poverty, hardship, fear, or marginalisation.
- Silence says something too
When is better to keep silent, I do.
I choose silence to listen and reason better. Or to turn off destructive polemics. Or when there are no proper words, and a gesture of empathy is worth more than any speech.

“No one should feel excluded. The education to cyber respect must be learned by all, adults first.”

The weight of words
“How heavy are the words?
The weight of a feather,
To tickle the heart.
The weight of a stone,
To drown a pain.
The weight of a butterfly,
To fly far away.
The weight of words
Is worth the love we spread in the world,
For a moment or for a lifetime”.

My friend Ketty