*PEER4PEER
ON-LINE BOOKLET*

**CYBER INCLUDING
GOES EUROPE**

# INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

# BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING

# SUMMARY

**IMPLEMENTED**

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**PRELIMINARY REMARKS**

It is necessary to have a broad and non-superficial knowledge of the phenomenon of traditional bullying and its online upgrade (i.e. cyberbullying) in order to counter and prevent the phenomenon, to trace the cultural and social roots, to read the warning signs, to be able to assess the effects and implications of bullying and cyberbullying involving both victims and perpetrators.

The personal social development, education and psycho-physical well-being of minors are at stake. Adolescents who have experienced bullying or cyberbullying are more likely to develop, even in adulthood, relational difficulties, fall into depression, feel lonely, anxious, have low self-esteem, experience disorders related to alcohol and/or psychoactive substance abuse and dependence, or even suicidal thoughts. In fact, it has been observed that children - both boys and girls - who have been victims of peer abuse at school have in many cases begun to manifest a rejection of school, difficulties in concentrating and learning in a meaningful and authentic way (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder), and have sometimes ended up swelling the ranks of school drop-outs, with obvious consequences for their educational and employment prospects*.

*See the ISTAT survey in
<https://www.istat.it/it/files/2019/03/Istat-Audizione-27-marzo-2019.pdf>.

Implementing appropriate strategies, first and foremost the exchange of good practice among peers, prevents and limits the harmful effects on the learning and behaviour of boys and girls.

## WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

## BULLYING

In order to be able to act effectively, however, let us try to understand what is meant by the term:
Bullying is an act of violence or intimidation, repeated, intentional and aggressive behaviour against one or more victims. Bullying is characterised by a disproportion of the forces at play either on a numerical level or on the level of the different possibilities of the actors in the field. We can say that we are witnessing a completely unbalanced power relationship between the one who acts violently, the bully, and the one who suffers the violence, the victim, who is incapable of defending himself independently. Repeated, intentional and aggressive behaviour can manifest itself not only on the level of physical violence but also take on the contours of direct (insults and threats) and indirect (inferences, rumours aiming at exclusion from a group or damaging the reputation of others) psychic violence.

## CYBERBULLYING

With the advent of the internet and especially social networks, bullying has turned into cyberbullying. Whereas the bully has its natural stage in school corridors, classrooms and gyms, cyberbullying on the Internet and through the megaphone of social networks hits his victims with potentially more serious consequences than offline bullying: in the virtual world the victim has no refuge or way out.

However the aims are the same as those of traditional bullying, cyberbullying has its own 'peculiarities':

- The prevalence of experience and psychological wounding;
- The impossibility of avoiding the bully and hiding the problem;
- The bully's ability to hide;
- The important role of the audience/group.

**WHAT ARE THE SENTINEL EVENTS?**

The occurrence of one or more sentinel events does not automatically translate into an act of bullying or cyberbullying, but it is certainly behind these behaviours that one of these phenomena may lurk. It is obvious that the absence of sentinel events tells us that the behaviour we are witnessing does not fall under the rubric of bullying and cyberbullying. The pedagogist Lorenzo Barbagli, a trainer within the project, identifies behaviour, sentinel events that can be ascribed to the bully, the victim and the group.

Let us see them in detail:

**What are the sentinel events reported by a bully/cyberbully?**

- criticises but does not accept criticism
- does not question
- always wants reason
- is overbearing, arrogant or provocative
- is egocentric: jealous or envious?

**What are the sentinel events related to a victim?**

- Suddenly leaves activity
- Does not express opinions
- Refuses relationships and group moments
- Avoid confrontation
- Excessive shyness and rigidity**

**What are the sentinel events reported to the group?**

- Low divergence of opinions, cultural hegemony
- Medium/low explicit conflict
- Difficulties in taking the initiative and finding spaces for expression
- High heterogeneity of the group
- Rigidity in profits and stigmatisation of roles

**WHAT TO DO? HOW TO INTERVENE?**

The phenomena of bullying and cyberbullying are complex and delicate because they act on an area of crucial interest from a social and cultural point of view, i.e. that relating to the growth, the everyday life of boys and girls, which is also fundamental for their health. It is therefore necessary to put in place prevention and early educational interventions that have as main objective the promotion of the so-called 'positive mental health' of boys and girls (self-esteem, control of aggression, frustration management, self-efficacy), the strengthening of the ability to self-regulate emotions, but also *problem solving* and relational skills (development of empathy). In order to do this, the educational intervention should run on different tracks and involve the main actors (bully and victim), focus on the training of the adult reference figures (parents, teachers and educators), and be able to operate on the group by modifying relational behaviours that revolve around the 'bully myth' thanks to the offer of alternative but at the same time attractive and positive cultural models.

The main characteristic of a bully is targeted aggression aimed at specific victims, i.e. people who possess characteristics that facilitate their victimisation.

**EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS ON THE BULLY**

Directing one's aggression towards these people gives the bully the satisfaction he or she seeks. Therefore, analysing and understanding why a boy or girl engages in bullying behaviour is essential to identify strategies to manage and prevent the phenomenon and to possibly initiate treatment of the bully himself. The bully may often himself be the victim of a 'bullying culture' of neglect and violent behaviour that characterises the family context.

**INTERVENTIONS ON THE GROUP**

An intervention to combat bullying and cyberbullying will hardly be effective without the direct involvement of the group and the participation of the boys and girls who find themselves personally experiencing the uncomfortable situation to be countered. Such an intervention will prove to be as effective as it becomes their project, seeing them involved in all phases of its implementation. Working with the group can therefore involve different paths (methodologies and languages) and different objectives as one can act: on the individual's personal level; on the level of interaction between boys and girls (e.g. by improving mutual respect); on a systemic leve (i.e. by assuming the group as the physical environment). When bullying occurs at school an intervention on the class group,  has to be taken: it is important to consider that very often, already within the teacher's curricular work, a periodic explanation of the phenomena can be carried out by, for example, confronting them through watching a film or reading a story. Interventions, on the other hand, which are planned and included within a parallel curricular pathway, can be many and varied: role-play, social theatre, phototherapy, etc.

**NEEDS COLLECTION SHEET**

A fundamental first step in order to be able to act in a timely manner if bullying or cyberbullying events occur - at school, in the gym, etc. - is to collect all the information needed to better define the needs of those involved. This can be done by using data collection and sharing forms that we could also call "needs collection forms", i.e. tools that can be modified and integrated according to specific needs and situations. The collection of information enables reflection on the causes of phenomena and makes it possible to plan an intervention.

**What interventions must necessarily be developed in order to contain phenomena related to the manifestation of bullying and/or cyberbullying (youth deviance, school drop-out, explicit and implicit, educational poverty, learning difficulties and loss, digital inequalities and risks related to online education, post-pandemic, social violence) in formal and informal educational contexts?**

It is essential to monitor the presence and growth of these indicators in order to envisage the involvement of experts in the event that needs to be covered.

**A SYSTEM COMMITMENT: CONCEPTS, PROCEDURES AND SUBJECTS**

Any socio-educational strategy carried out at school level becomes more effective if the stakeholders of the issue in question are involved in its development and maintenance through a participative, networked model that creates a commitment to the future and provides for related social emergencies. It is therefore a matter of proceeding by adopting the methodology of the community approach and development.

It is therefore a matter of starting with existing resources, identifying and networking them, and then planning and implementing existing interventions and/or services.

This can be achieved if structured on the commitment of the local community to follow certain decisive development actions. Procedures to be adopted are listed below.

- Knowledge of the phenomena to be prevented and counteracted through both the reading of existing data and statistics - e.g. from national observatories or regional observatories - and through the promotion of specific surveys on socialising places showing on a representative sample the prevailing trends considering age and identity affiliation (social, cultural, gender, religious...). The use of mixed methods is preferable in order to return an integrated vision of the quantitative and qualitative level of analysis of the surveys promoted.

- Drafting and updating on an annual basis of a bullying and cyberbullying risk assessment document taking into account the results of the surveys carried out and related to the community context. With a focus on certain indicators such as: community area most affected; type of school; non-formal places affected; type of young people involved; prevalent age group; emerging gender and cultural stereotypes.

- Regular updating of the community education plan on the basis of research results to make prevention actions more effective: to whom, with what tools and languages.

- Communication to all community stakeholders of the actions to be taken to ensure the prevention and combating of bullying and cyberbullying through the creation of discussion spaces - including virtual ones - on the trends that have emerged. Use of regular meeting tables to plan activities.

- Awareness-raising and dissemination at community level of the actions carried out with particular attention to families as target groups.
- Establishment of a territorial listening desk to enable all stakeholders to report (also anonymously) any cases of bullying/cyberbullying and to monitor the measures taken.
- Mapping as exhaustively as possible the services activeated in the area of reference and useful in combating the phenomena under investigation. This mapping will constitute as a whole the community support network, to be implemented and/or intensified over time. Connected to this network of structures are the resources at the level of sector experts to be activated according to the needs identified.