6.2 ADVICE FOR PARENTS

In order to be able to implement interventions to prevent and/or reduce bullying, parents should first of all:

- have adequate knowledge and training on the phenomenon that can enable them to recognise and best advise children when they find themselves in difficult situations;
- having a dialogue and confrontation with them;
- be watchful eyes with regard to their behaviour;
- fostering cooperation between school and family by trying to build a social network around the child, including through dialogue with the parents of fellow students.

In everyday life:

- They will have to supervise the children and observe their behaviour not only in real life, but also in virtual life, when surfing the Internet or in mobile phone activities, and try to emphasise to them the importance of greater respect for their actions.
- They will have to monitor and control the children's frequentations, understand what Internet searches they make, the sites they visit and their surfing preferences.
- They will be careful to emphasise the importance of dialogue at home, at school and with peers, trying to promote peaceful resolution of conflicts that may arise.
- Aggregation in recreational or sporting activities is certainly something to be favoured and recommended.
- It is also of paramount importance to try to pick up and understand any alarm bells that go off: in general, targets of bullying and cyberbullying tend to change their behaviour from normal everyday behaviour (a typical example is refusing to go to school in the morning or to participate in planned activities with classmates and friends).
- They should note whether their mood is sadder and more depressed than usual, whether they somatise their suffering by frequently experiencing physical pain (headaches, stomach aches, or other unwarranted ailments), whether they have restless sleep at night and an altered sleep-wake rhythm, whether they come home with visible signs of violence or with torn and wrinkled clothes.
- Another sign to note could be a noticeable drop in academic performance or a loss of interest in all those activities that were previously exciting for them.

Parents' work to prevent or reduce bullying can be carried out in several areas: the social environment, social skills and ethical skills. The context within which the child/young person lives most of his or her daily experiences constitutes the social environment, understood as the family context. In this case, acting on it means, in concrete terms, proposing relaxing activities for children to do in the family, ensuring that they attend well-regulated environments, where there are a few, clear, simple and precise rules, providing an education that tends to avoid falling into stereotypes: these, in fact, would only emphasise the real existence of negative qualities in an

individual.

Working on social skills, understood those capacities that enable a person to build and manage good relationships with others (problem solving skills, ability to manage and deal with various forms of conflict), means teaching them to know and recognise their emotions and feelings, to manage their anger in the best possible way, trying to find the best and most effective strategies that allow them to 'vent', in a healthy way, without harming others (and not repressing, therefore), the anger they feel. It also means educating them not to strive for immediate and selfish gratification: they will have to understand that not everything that is desired can always be obtained and even less can be achieved by using force and violence. Finally, working on ethical knowledge, which represents the set of behavioural norms found within a society (actual laws, but also ways of behaving, empathetic attitudes and mutual understanding between subjects) means helping children to reflect on the reference values of the social context and the reality in which they find themselves, to experience the meaning of interpersonal relationships, to share the meaning of the most important things.

Practical tips to implement

What to DO and TEACH

1. Being able to recognise and identify alarm bells that may highlight difficult situations in which children find themselves.

2. Acting as role models: what children observe at home is what they will later replicate outside the family context.

3. Placing oneself in a listening situation, avoiding judgements and respecting, without pressure, the time they need, then trying not to underestimate or trivialise their discomfort.

4. Teach them to know and recognise the emotions and sensations they perceive.

5. Supervise their online activities and investigate their real-life acquaintances.

6. Showing themselves as safe and non-judgmental reference figures, exercising non-coercive control: children should feel that in the face of any difficulties they can count on their parents' help and support.

7. Encourage them to develop their skills and positive characteristics to the best of their ability: this will also improve their self-esteem.

8. Foster relationships with peers, emphasising the importance of feeling part of a group: avoid overemphasising competitive and aggressive behaviour.

9. Promoting empathetic, social and prosocial behaviour in children.

10. Teach them to defend themselves and denounce.

TEACHING YOUR CHILDREN SAFE SURFING HABITS:

1. Do not give out their information and personal details (phone number, age, home or school address) to people who do not know us in real life.

2. Do not reveal your passwords to anyone, not even friends.

3. Do not make friends on social networks except with people you already know in real life.

4. Do not accept meetings in person with someone you met online.

5. Do not respond to provocations, whether they occur in the virtual world or in real life.

6. Do not reply to messages, emails, text messages that are offensive and/or vulgar: this would trigger a vicious circle of extreme amusement for the perpetrator. Rather, it is good to block the harassing user.

7. Make a copy of the offensive messages received (sms, mms, email), keeping a kind of diary in which to note the day and time of receipt.

8. Do not save, share, download photos and/or videos of other people without their permission: doing so entails liability.

9. Always report illicit, offensive, illegal and inappropriate content.

10. Pay close attention to what is posted on the network, emphasising that everything that is posted on the network remains there forever, even once it is deleted.

11. Change passwords often by choosing hard-to-trace codes (alphanumeric codes).

12. Know the different options for restricting privacy by allowing only trusted persons to see what is published.

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF BULLYING:

For the parents of CYP engaged in bullying behaviour

If you become aware of a difficult situation that has arisen at school due to your child's bullying, take the time to really understand the facts and calmly reflect on how to intervene in a concrete and effective manner. Then try to explain to your child that what he is doing is wrong, that his behaviour has consequences, and make him think about how he would feel if, on the contrary, he were in the opposite situation and suffered the same treatment from others. In fact, children often

do not develop an awareness of their actions and do not realise that their behaviour actually constitutes bullying. Cooperation with the school is of paramount importance. Just as in the school environment, interventions aimed at resolving the problem must also be implemented in the family environment. CYP engaged in bullying behaviour, in fact, are very often the first children to be in trouble: they cannot control their emotions and therefore need to be helped in managing the normal conflicts that occur in everyday life. It is important, for example, to teach them to channel their anger using the right channels of venting that do not harm anyone.

For the parents of the target

1. It is essential that you talk to your child, trying to understand exactly what has happened. It is also important to inform the school of what has happened, trying to establish a climate of cooperation with the teachers that leads to the activation of the most appropriate mode of intervention. It is also possible to envisage the presence of a specialised figure (psychologist) who can mediate in resolving the problem.

2. Awareness needs to be raised not only among the children involved, but also among the school in general, the headmaster and the teachers. They are not always clear about how these events occur: this is because, most of the time, they happen during recess, in outdoor spaces, or on the way to and from school.

3. Advise your child not to react to the CYP engaged in bullying behaviour by making him realise that he is only waiting for his reaction: he finds amusement and satisfaction in seeing others in trouble.

4. Help him broaden his emotional and relational knowledge, encourage him to make new friends even outside the school sphere, and participate in activities that help him strengthen his self-esteem and self-awareness (theatre, acting, martial arts, team sports).

5. Alert the police if the situation continues and the aggression escalates to more serious and alarming characteristics (blackmail, extortion).

Advice for parents of targets of cyberbullying

1. It is important that the child does not react to provocations so as not to put himself on the same level as the cyberbully. It is crucial not to respond to attacks and instigations, emails, text messages, posts, that are offensive or vulgar. If the cyberbully does not get any reaction, he will no longer enjoy doing what he does.

2. It is essential to save all offensive and harassing messages received and to delete them from the network when possible: it is also good to make a copy on your computer and to note in a diary the days and times they were received. They will be useful if you want to make a complaint to the competent authorities.

3. Blocking the harassing user on the network will ensure that he/she can no longer be contacted

4. It is necessary to contact the Postal and Communications Police if it is really cyber bullying, providing all documentation proving the incident.

Advice from a mother/writer

We recommend reading this book, written by Janell Burley Hofmann who lives in Cape Code (Massachusetts, USA) with her husband and five children. She works on programmes to improve family relationships and maintains her own personal blog, whose posts are also published in the Huffington Post. For Christmas, she decided to give her 13-year-old son Gregory an iPhone. The gift, however, was accompanied by an actual 18-point contract that the son had to sign in order to receive and be able to use the smartphone. The letter, written in a similar way to Apple's real user licence agreements, contains some rather strict and peremptory points (hours of use, overnight delivery to parents, prohibition of searching for porn content), but is otherwise an invitation to use the new phone responsibly and intelligently, without addiction.

The book 'iRules' (published by Giunti) is aimed at parents, in order to help them untangle thousands of doubts about which educational method is the most correct in this case.

When the list was published in the Huffington Post America, it quickly became viral, making her the go-to person for many parents who decided to contact her for an advice.

Each family must have its own iRules on the use of technology. The contract printed at the beginning of the book can serve as a template.

Below are the 18 rules that every parent should follow according to Janell:

Speak! And speak again!

To be able to give your children technology rules, you first have to be in perfect agreement with your partner. Talk to each other and try to work out together which aspects of technology frighten you. They can be different: online predators, addiction, loss of imagination. Identifying them helps you establish the stakes to impose on your children. When you decide to communicate them , be willing to discuss them together; it will be easier to accept the rules if they will understand your reasons. And in the case of a well-founded rebuttal, be prepared to accept some modifications.

Passwords

Social media has turned technology into an inaccessible dimension for adults. Yet it would be the duty of parents, as 'teachers of life', to know their children's moves in order to point them in the

right direction and correct them when they make mistakes. That is why it is a good idea for your child to tell you all the passwords of the various portals he or she has access to. When you find something that does not convince you or frightens you, discuss it together, listen to his reasons and explain your own. Be careful, however, not to violate his trust. Do not go further just to satisfy your curiosity. If you come across a normal conversation with a companion of her age, stop reading it.

Sleep first

Children often use their mobile phones late into the night. Conversations with others keep them awake for longer than they should, while, as paediatricians say, 'discontinuous and interrupted sleep causes concentration and health problems in children'. To remedy the problem, Janell has imposed a few rules: the mobile phone must be handed over to parents at 7.30 p.m. on weekday evenings and at 9 p.m. on weekends. With a few exceptions in the summertime, for example. When you communicate this decision to them, be prepared to retort to their excuses. If they tell you that they use their mobile phone as an alarm clock...get them an alarm clock!

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

This means instructing them not to use the iPhone to lie, to say things they would not say out loud and to speak ill of others. In this sense, the biggest threat is called cyber bullying, of which it is easy to become a targets or perpetrator. In the first case, teach them to have the courage to report and pay attention to the signs that say something is wrong: if they no longer enjoy the things that used to amuse them, if they hide the PC screen when you enter the room, if they eat or sleep less. To make them trust you and feel comfortable telling you about an experience they may be ashamed of, first tell them about an incident in which you were picked on. It will help them feel closer to you and understand that you can understand them, without judging them.

Good manners

The purpose of the mobile phone is also aimed at facilitate communication with your children: this is surely one of the reasons why you decided to buy it for them. So it is good that they never ignore your calls. If they should read the name 'mum' or 'dad' on the display, they must answer, and when they do, whether to you or to anyone else, they must be polite, saying 'hello' and never showing annoyance.

Label

It often happens that you pick up your mobile phone almost without realising it. It has become automatic to start checking it even when perhaps you are at the dinner table, at the cinema or talking to someone. Parents do this and children do this. To reverse the habit, it is first necessary to start by setting a good example and then help them to control the impulse. How to do this? By pointing out to them that technology is taking over good manners, making them rude people. Help them to see reason, they are capable of it.

The value of money

Make a list of their technological privileges and the contributions they make in the home to fix and repair. It will seem like a fair exchange. They will get to keep their mobile phones, for example, if they make their bed every morning and take out the rubbish every now and then. Help the children understand the value of money by inviting them to do small jobs (cutting the grass, babysitting) and to save up pocket money so that they can provide for themselves in case the mobile phone breaks down.

The School

Children should have more attention at school. Not only is the mobile phone distracting, but the ease with which they can contact their mum and dad at the slightest difficulty prevents them from overcoming normal conflicts on their own. Janell has therefore made it one of his rules that, during school hours, the mobile phone must remain at home. Again, there are exceptions, in the case of school trips, after-school activities and other special incidents, which she will discuss with her child from time to time.

Insist on safe messages

Children often accidentally or deliberately stumble upon pornography while doing their homework, searching for video games or films. Curiosity about sexuality is normal among children. What is important to make children understand is that sexuality should not coincide with pornography.

Practice safe messages

Nowadays, self-shots of teenagers in provocative poses are multiplying. Technology is more and more invasive and new fashions, such as selfies, are born periodically. It is good for a parent to be familiar with them, to know how to counter their degeneration. Let your children understand that the selfie is fine when it captures their face and their smile. This is referred to as sexting, to define the dissemination of sexually explicit images via mobile phones. Talk to them about this will make sure there is no embarrassment in doing so, so that you can give them the right advice, to make

them understand how risky it is to share an image that can be shown to anyone, ruining their reputation.

Photographs

Children often abuse their mobile phones, taking photos all the time and spending much of the time editing them with various effects and then posting them on social networks. All this happens by distracting them from what is happening around them. They do not live in the moment to keep their heads fixed on their mobile phones. Advise your children to take only the necessary photos, to think about it for a moment before picking up the mobile phone to capture new images. It is not necessary to document everything, by living the experiences these will remain imprinted in their minds.

The fear of being cut off

Learn and teach the value of the 'pause': that moment you take before using technology to think and do things in a more reasoned manner. You may decide to buy your children a smartphone or a video game without thinking about it enough, just because your other friends have it and you fear they might be excluded because of it. Use the pause to work out what effects those items will have on him/her and what restrictions to impose on him/her. And if you should decide to wait before buying, this will help him appreciate the value more and he will take better care of it.

Welcome and appreciate

A parent should be able to recognise the value and goodness of technology. He should encourage their children to make the most of it. One example is the ease with which any kind of music can be listened to today, including songs from many years ago. Being able to find a common passion with one's children (such as music) helps to strengthen the relationship and is the best way to enjoy the benefits of technology, using it to reduce the generation gap.

Put the remote control down

The relationship with video games and mobile phone and tablet apps must be balanced and never invasive of their daily routine, distracting them from everything else. It necessary to establish days and times when it is possible to play, preferably limited to the weekend. Pay attention to the content of video games, also informing yourself from shop assistants, who are able to make competent judgments. Finally, persuade your children to use pastimes that do not require technology, such as puzzles, brain teasers and board games.

Live and love

This rule for your children also applies to you: look up, observe the reality around you, look out of the window, take a walk. Let the kids be bored, don't use technology as a filler. Boredom stimulates creativity. You don't have to eliminate all technology to be able to appreciate what is around us, just let it not take over.

Make messes! Make mistakes! Being human is just fine!

Sooner or later your children will make mistakes, it is natural and right. Establish rules and punishments in case of transgression, they will be grateful, because they need stakes to learn how to juggle in life. Make sure, however, that they can feel comfortable coming to you to talk about anything at any time, that fear does not prevent them from being honest and confessing to you when something is wrong. Do not let them face technology alone.

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