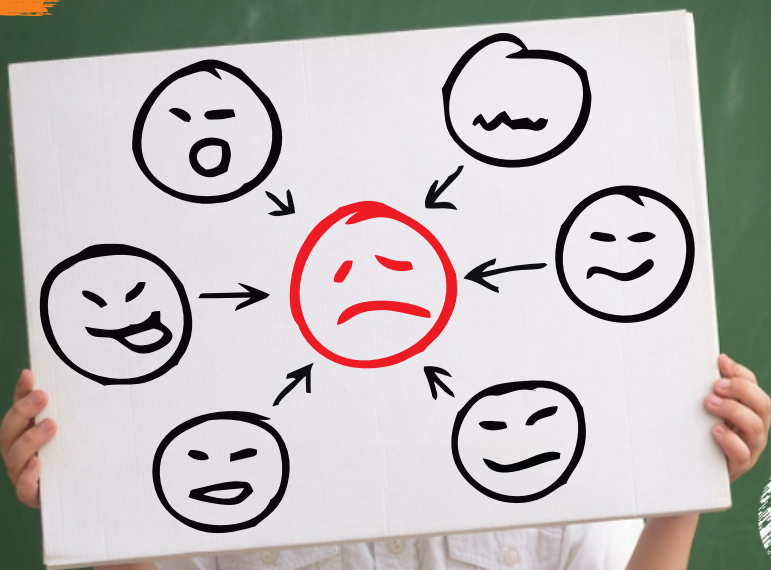


# Guiding Principles: Preventing and Responding to Bullying and Cyberbullying





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## FOREWORD

The present document was drafted within the framework of the project of the Democracy Research Institute - "Partnership for prevention violence against children."

The document is intended for professionals working with and for children, teachers, educational institutions, and anyone interested in the topic. In addition, it will be useful to parents and professionals who work in the field of parent empowerment.

The purpose of the Guiding Principles for Preventing and Responding to Bullying and Cyberbullying was to bring together international legislation, terminology, analysis of the causes of bullying and cyberbullying its prevention mechanisms, and best crisis intervention practices. Also, to share recommendations to further improve effective prevention and response policies on bullying and cyberbullying among children in the country.

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# 1. VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

In 2022, approximately 1 billion children between the ages of 2 and 17 experienced physical, sexual, or psychological abuse or neglect worldwide. Experiencing violence in childhood has a negative impact on a child's health and well-being throughout life.<sup>1</sup> Exposure to abuse is traumatic for a child and can cause severe stress that results both in immediate and in long-term physiological and psychological damage.<sup>2</sup>

All forms of violence against people under the age of 18 are called child abuse, regardless of who perpetrates it - parents or other caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers.<sup>3</sup>

## FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN ARE

Physical violence

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Emotional (psychological) violence

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Sexual violence

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Neglect

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**PHYSICAL VIOLENCE** - any physical impact puts the child in pain and/or causes various degrees of bodily injuries: hitting, pushing, slapping,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rb.gy/vzruwr>

<sup>2</sup> Global Prevalence of Past-Year Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates , Susan Hillis, James Mercy, Adaugo Amobi, Howard Kress;

<sup>3</sup> Global status report on preventing violence against children 2020, WHO;

jostling, or other physical altercation, even for " educational " purposes; these are all constituent parts of violence.

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE** - using a child for sexual purposes: erotic caressing, stalking, making pornographic images of a child, allowing or facilitating the viewing of films with sexual content or viewing pornographic magazines, rape or attempted rape, demonstration of genitals, open conversations about sex to shock or arouse the child's curiosity, *Incestum* (incest), forced sex work, etc.

**NEGLECT** - regular non-fulfillment of the child's life needs for health and development (food, housing, clothing, care, supervision, attention, education, medical care, etc.) by a parent or guardian due to objective reasons (poverty, mental illness, inexperience) or such without reasons.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL (EMOTIONAL) VIOLENCE** - is a one-time or chronic impact on a child, a hostile or indifferent attitude towards them, that leads to decreased self-esteem, loss of self-confidence, formation of pathological personality, and disruption of socialization. Emotional abuse can occur separately or can be a component of physical or sexual abuse;

### **BEHAVIORAL SIGNS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL (EMOTIONAL) VIOLENCE**

**0-1 YEARS:** disturbed sleep and appetite, tearfulness, attachment problems;

**1-3 YEARS:** attention deficit, aggressiveness, impaired speech development;

**3-6 YEARS:** difficulties relating to peers, attracting adult attention via any means, poorly developed social skills, extreme attachment;

**6-12 YEARS:** skipping school, rejection of peers, excessive attachment to an adult who pays attention to the child, aggressive behavior;

Adults (non-specific signs): depression, low self-esteem, suicidal behavior, psychosomatic diseases (allergies, skin diseases, abdominal pain, etc.).

## 1.1. RISK FACTORS FOR CHILD ABUSE<sup>4</sup>

Important risk factors for violence against children are:

### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL:

- biological aspects such as gender and age;
- low level of education;
- low income;
- mental or physical health problems;
- sexual minority;
- drug and alcohol abuse;<sup>5</sup>
- history of exposure to violence;

### RELATIONSHIP LEVEL:

- between children and parents or caregivers;
- poor parenting practices;
- family dysfunction and separation;
- relationships with peers with difficult behavior;
- witnessing domestic violence;
- early or forced marriage.

### COMMUNITY LEVEL:

- poverty;
- densely populated community;
- easy access to alcohol and firearms;
- Gangs and illegal drug trade;

### SOCIETAL LEVEL:

- a climate created by social and gender norms that normalize violence;

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<sup>4</sup> Violence against children, WHO, 2022

<sup>5</sup> Association of bullying behavior with smoking, alcohol use and drug use among school students in Erbil City, Iraq, Beena Shawki, Tariq Al-Hadithi<sup>2</sup> and Nazar Shabila.



- health, economic, educational, and social policies that create economic, gender, and social inequality;
- absence, or improper functioning of the social welfare system;
- post-conflict environment or natural disasters;
- weak governance and low level of professionalism among law-enforcement agencies.

Child abuse has a profound, lifelong impact on the health and well-being of children, families, communities, and nations.

Child abuse can also have significant immediate consequences:

- homicide, often involving the use of weapons (knives and firearms), is among the top four causes of death among adolescents, where boys account for over 80% of victims and perpetrators.
- cause severe injuries, which mainly occur in boys during fights.
- It inhibits brain and nervous system development. Exposure to violence at an early age can impair brain development and damage other parts of the nervous system, as well as the endocrine, circulatory, musculoskeletal, reproductive, respiratory, and immune systems. These may last a lifetime; Child abuse can negatively affect cognitive development and lead to a lack of educational and professional achievement.
- Alcohol and drug use, and/or high-risk sexual behavior. Abused children also suffer from higher rates of anxiety, depression, other mental health problems, and the risk of suicide.
- cause unwanted pregnancies, abortions, gynecological problems, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- abused children are more likely to stay out of education, find it difficult to find and keep a job, and are at risk of further victimization.

Abused children rarely share their experiences with anyone.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Violence-Prevention Dividend - Why Preventing Violence Against Children Makes Economic Sense

## 1.2. RECOGNIZING VIOLENCE

An observant adult (teacher, social worker, or anyone who works with or cares for a child) should be able to recognize the signs of child abuse. It should be emphasized that often it is not a single sign that is key, but their combination, and ignoring these signs by an adult is not permissible.<sup>7</sup>

What should attract the attention of teachers and parents:

- the child develops poorly, their mental and physical development does not correspond to their age, and the child is disorganized;
- is apathetic, often cries or, on the contrary, is aggressive, behaves defiantly;
- the child's behavior changes - from calmness to excitement and vice versa;
- the child lacks concentration and attention; shows signs of fatigue, and sleep deprivation;
- the child shows a negative attitude toward their own body;
- injures their own body;
- the child refuses to undress and tries to hide bruises;
- the child is often weak and has a headache or abdominal pain, external urogenital inflammations;
- the child is clearly afraid of their father (other familiar men) or mother (other familiar women);
- the child displays fear or aversion to the physical proximity of some adults;
- the child reacts to the raised hand with a convulsion (as if shrinking out of fear of being hit);
- the child is too eager for the approval and love of any adult;
- is afraid of conflicts and arguments with other children; engages in an exaggerated caring behavior for everything and everyone;
- the child shows inappropriate "adult" behavior for their age: is too rational, is interested in sexual issues;

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<sup>7</sup> The list is illustrative and not exhaustive

a child discusses incidents of violence or sexual harassment that are supposedly inflicted on other children;

### Signs of parental / caregiver behavior that may point to child abuse

- conflicting, confusing reasons given for the child's injuries and indifference to the desire to uncover what happened;
- late inquiry for medical help or lack of initiative to ask for help;
- blaming the child for injury;
- the inadequate reaction of parents and neglect of child injury;
- the lack of concern for the fate of the child;
- carelessness in the relationship with the child, lack of love and emotional support;
- stories about how they were punished as children;
- the signs of mental disorder in behavior or manifestation of pathological signs (aggressiveness, excitability, inadequacy, etc.).

## 2. PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

In 1989, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which mandates signatory states to review policies, laws, and cultural norms to ensure that the universally recognized rights of the child are applied. The United Nations defines physical violence against children as a violation of the child's rights, including when it is described as a "tradition" or disguised as "disciplining." Apart from the fact that violence infringes on the rights of the child, physical punishment is ineffective in producing the desired behavior. Qualitative research has shown that teachers and parents believe that corporal punishment in schools improves academic performance and corrects misbehavior.<sup>8</sup> However, studies with children have shown that many children do not find this approach helpful in learning or developing discipline. Instead, violence scares, confuses, and saddens them and

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<sup>8</sup> Anderson and Payne, 1994; Parkes and Heslop, 2011; Rojas, 2011: 16-18; Nguyen and Tran, 2013

normalizes violence, and contributes to behavioral difficulties and aggression in children.<sup>9</sup>

In speaking of violence prevention, it should be emphasized that universal preventive interventions are effective. Universal preventive interventions and associated policies work for everyone, regardless of additional risk factors.

INSPIRE Strategy is an important resource for child abuse prevention and response.<sup>10</sup> INSPIRE is the evidence-based resource for everyone ready to prevent and respond to violence against children – the 7 strategies, which will help countries and communities to fully attend to these preventive programs and services, as these can reduce violence against children. **The seven strategies are:** Law Implementation and Enforcement, Norms and Values, Safe Environment, Support for Parents and Caregivers, Income and Economic Empowerment, Response and Support Services, and Education and Life Skills.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.1. THREE LEVELS OF CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

Child abuse prevention measures are implemented at 3 different levels: universal, targeted, and individual.<sup>12</sup>

**FIRST LEVEL** - universal prevention addressed at a wide spectrum of society;

**SECOND LEVEL** - targeted prevention addressed at the societal group, in which one or several risk factors for child abuse are present;

**THIRD LEVEL** - Individual Prevention aimed at families or other places where child abuse occurs. Its purpose is to protect children from recurring violence.

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<sup>9</sup> Burnett, 1998; Clacherty, Donald and Clacherty, 2004; 2005a; 2005b; Beazley et al., 2006: 183; Rojas, 2011:11

<sup>10</sup> INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children, <https://rb.gv/qnjhci>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.who.int/activities/preventing-violence-against-children>

<sup>12</sup> FRAMEWORK FOR PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE BY THE PROMOTION OF HEALTHY FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES , Office of Child Abuse Prevention, 2022

## LEVEL I - UNIVERSAL PREVENTION

According to the doctrine of universal prevention, the entire society must protect a child from violence. Therefore, its strategy focuses on society as a whole. The long-term goal of universal preventive measures is to educate the public, achieve social change, prevent tolerance of violence, etc.<sup>13</sup>

### The base goals of universal prevention:

- expanding the knowledge of parents/caregivers so that they know how the child's development process goes, what kind of behavior or situation corresponds to this or that stage of development;
- strengthening the relationship and communication between parent and child;
- stress management training for parents whose children require special care;
- increasing the knowledge of parents in matters of family management;
- access to social and medical services for all members of society.

Various strategies are used to achieve these goals, such as, for example, measures for future parents so that they can easily cope with foreseeable difficulties related to raising a child; Programs for parents - about child care and the peculiarities of its development; also - programs through which children learn the skills of peaceful conflict resolution, protection from violence, social interaction and more. In crises, self-help groups and 24-hour crisis protection programs that provide quick help to parents are very important. For this, it is necessary to have a telephone hotline, crisis centers, and counseling services that help in a crisis.<sup>14</sup>

## II LEVEL - TARGETED PREVENTION

- This level of prevention includes measures aimed at the group of society where one or more risk factors of child abuse are present - families in stressful situations, young parents; Drug and alcohol-

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<sup>13</sup> The European Union's Plan for Children's Rights ;

<sup>14</sup> Why Preventing Violence Against Children Makes Economic Sense, Report.

dependent parents, as well as risk factors related to the child (for example, children with disabilities).

### **Key goals of targeted prevention:**

Increasing parental awareness, so that they understand how their childhood experiences influence parenting behavior;

- regulating the relationship between parent and child;
- if necessary, connecting parents with services in the community, aimed at solving specific problems of the family, parents, and children;
- helping parents of a child with disabilities to cope with stress;
- availability of social and medical services for all members of society.

Strategies used to achieve these goals include parenting education programs available to at-risk families; programs that teach parents how to use community resources; Programs that provide young parents with information on important issues such as child development and care, and more. It is necessary to have access to services where parents with mental health, depression, alcoholism, drug addiction, and other issues, can get help.<sup>15</sup>

### **III LEVEL - INDIVIDUAL PREVENTION**

Individual prevention includes working with families in which child abuse and neglect have been observed. It is aimed at preventing the recurrence of violence.

#### **The major goals of individual prevention are:**

- reducing the recurrence of child abuse and neglect by changing the child's living environment or by restricting the freedom of the abuser;
- reducing drug and alcohol addiction of parents;
- ensuring the child's safety;
- reduction of damage caused by violence;

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<sup>15</sup> Preventing child maltreatment in Europe: a public health approach , the European child maltreatment prevention action plan , 2015-2020

- connecting the family-to-family protection groups and other protection systems;
- Strengthening parents' connection with support services in the community.

To achieve these goals, the measures invoked at level III of prevention can be a removal of the abuser, if necessary, changing the place of residence of the child, rehabilitation of abusive parents by ensuring their treatment, treatment of the abused child, creation and preparation of host families, and others.<sup>16</sup>

STRATEGY	APPROACH
strengthening economic support of families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strengthening the financial security of the family</li> <li>• policy focused on strengthening the family</li> </ul>
shaping social norms to support parenting and positive parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• community involvement and educational campaigns</li> <li>• legislative mechanisms to reduce corporal punishment</li> </ul>
early development support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• working with families of preschool children</li> </ul>
supporting parents, improving parenting skills and popularizing healthy child development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family involvement in preschool education</li> <li>• improving the quality of child care through licensing and accreditation.</li> <li>• visiting the homes of young children</li> </ul>

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<sup>16</sup> D. DARO , E. JARPE-RATNER , Child Maltreatment Prevention: A Planning Framework For Action, 2020;

intervene to minimize damage and prevent future risks

- strengthened primary health care;
- involvement of parents in educational programs
- treatment to reduce damage;
- support to prevent difficult behavior and subsequent involvement in violence.

### 3. WHAT DOES BULLYING MEAN - DEFINITION AND FORMS, CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Up to 130 million (just over 1 in 3) students between the ages of 13 and 15<sup>17</sup> experience bullying worldwide. Bullying is an aggressive behavior perpetrated by a peer or group of peers that is repeated and aims to physically and/or emotionally harm others.

Scandinavian scientists were one of the first to study this problem (Heinemann, 1973; Olweus, 1984; Pikas, 1975, 1989; Roland, 1983, 1989). However, the school administrations and teachers still paid less attention to cases of children showing aggression towards each other. Skipping school remained a priority challenge. The relevance of the issue increased thanks to the works published by Tatum, Lane, Roland, and Munte (Rolland&Munte, 1989; Tattum&Lane, 1988) and school bullying (mobbing) became a prominent issue.

Today, Roland's definition (Roland, 1988) is the most prevalent - **bullying is long-term physical and psychological abuse by an individual**

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<sup>17</sup> A FAMILIAR FACE, Violence in the lives of children and adolescents, UNICEF;



or group from another individual or group unable to defend themselves in a specific situation.<sup>18</sup>

"Bullying is a behavioral problem that affects the lives of thousands of school children and their families. Bullied children experience humiliation, fear, frustration, social isolation, and loss of self-esteem, which subsequently leads to frequent school absences, poor work performance, personality changes, illness, depression and sometimes even suicide. There are no age, gender, or socioeconomic barriers to bullying. It can be manifested in many forms and can last for short or long periods." (AntiBullying Centre, "Bullying at School; Key Facts", Dublin: 2001)

According to **the UN General Assembly Report on the Protection of Children from Bullying**,<sup>19</sup> bullying is a repeated intentional and aggressive behavior towards the victim when there is a real or perceived power imbalance and the victim feels vulnerable and does not have the strength to protect themselves. Unwanted behavior is harmful: it can be **physical** - for example, hitting, or even intentionally destroying the victim's belongings. - such as teasing, insulting and threatening, or **damaging relationships** - spreading rumors, marginalizing/expelling someone within/from the group.

Based on the urgency of the problem, on October 17, 2017, the Center for Children's Rights of the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia presented the results of the monitoring of violence against children in the general educational institutions of Georgia during the 2016-2017 academic year.

As a result of the interviews, it was found that in 64 focus groups, students discussed various forms of bullying, both from their peers and seniors.

Ridicule among peers or name-calling is rarely perceived as a problem. It becomes clear from the students' conversation that nicknames are normalized. Verbal bullying is common because of appearance and physical traits, social status, as well as academic performance. In

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<sup>18</sup> School Influences on Bullying, Erling Roland, 1998;

<sup>19</sup> UN General Assembly Anti-Bullying Agenda, July 30, 2018;

addition, during the focus groups, the students mentioned many cases of physical bullying: fighting, stepping on their feet, pulling their hair, twisting their hands, hitting them, etc. Because of all this, the students turn to the teacher, mostly "in vain." Working in focus groups revealed that cases of cyberbullying are not perceived as violence at all. The level of identification of such violence is very low among both adults and students. A certain category of students admits that they have committed various types of violent acts against their classmates and/or schoolmates. The facts of violence, according to students, mostly happened in the classroom (60.8% of cases) or outside the school (43.4% of cases). In addition, the specific share of violence is high in the schoolyard (31.5% of cases) and in the school corridor, where there are no cameras (27.1% of cases). However, there were 10 cases of violence even in the part of the school corridor where the cameras are installed. Students report that cases of violence occur both in the morning, before the beginning of classes, and during breaks and after classes, but more often - after classes (sometimes - 43%; often - 17.4%).

### 3.1. MANIFESTATIONS OF BULLYING

There is direct and indirect bullying. Direct bullying is when direct harm is done - beating, confiscating belongings or money, etc. Indirect bullying is moral and emotional abuse that is not directly directed at the target. Bullying is difficult to reveal. The bully acts behind their back to threaten the victim's reputation and humiliate them in public. Its forms are: lying, spreading rumors, humiliating other students, putting the student in social isolation ("if you are friends with them, you can't be friends with us"), neglect, etc.;

Direct bullying mostly happens in elementary grades, and indirect bullying reaches its peak in adolescence. Boys are more likely than girls to be victims of physical bullying, threats, and coercion, while girls are more likely to be victims of rumors, obscene language, and gestures.

## 3.2. PEOPLE INVOLVED IN BULLYING

There are three key roles of participants in a bullying situation - victim, oppressor, and witness. Roles can change in different situations and groups.

- **DIRECT VICTIM** - a person towards whom aggression is directed;
- **BULLYING WITNESSES**
  - **Defender** - a person who is on the victim's side and tries to shield them from aggression;
  - **Supporter** - a person who is on the aggressor's side, does not directly take part in bullying, but resists neither;
  - **Bullying witness** (observer) - a person who knows about the details of aggressive effects, and humiliations, but maintains neutrality.
- **A BULLY** is a person who oppresses a victim.

### 3.2.1. A VICTIM OF BULLYING

In 2012, a diary of a former school student was published in Germany. The text shocked the author's parents, teachers, and school. It turned out that they had been subjected to organized psychological and physical abuse at school for years, but no one in the family or at school knew about it.

"I decided to publish the diary for the sole reason: even now, twelve years after graduation, I still cannot get over the fear and anxiety I experienced while studying at school. Every evening, I asked God to send me some serious illness so I would miss school. I begged my mother and came up with a thousand reasons so that I didn't hear the approaching school bus because that's where the hell started. My classmates wouldn't let me sit on the chair, they would definitely hold my bag or hat and throw them at each other. The school bus driver was watching all this, but the boys were laughing and telling them that obviously everyone was having fun, and the driver would always turn their eye back to the wheel. The only time I tried to raise my voice was with the teacher, but the teacher put me in front of my violent

classmates and asked me to repeat the same thing. Of course, I denied everything, I knew what was waiting for me later in the school toilet or at the exit."

These candid accounts paint a classic portrait of a victim of bullying. A child who is constantly bullied by peers is afraid to be honest with adults because it might have even more serious consequences. The victim tries to be inconspicuous; when in danger, they do not counterattack or defend themselves, are scared, tearful, looking miserable, and unhappy. The child victim spends most of their time in the classroom, does not leave it even during breaks, and avoids the noisy gatherings of their peers. Such a child may also have medical complaints: restless sleep, headache or abdominal pain, loss of appetite, and enuresis.

After an episode of physical and psychological terror, a child's academic performance deteriorates. Such students avoid taking part in social events held at school, lose friends among classmates, the joy of learning, and motivation. An extremely severe form of bullying may end in suicide.

Victims of bullying are characterized by high sensitivity, anxiety, a tendency to cry, physical weakness, low self-esteem, have little social support; the victimized children prefer to spend time with adults. An example of a victim of bullying can be described as a marginalized child with behavioral problems, low self-esteem, and social and communication difficulties.

A wealth of studies shows that children with learning difficulties, attention deficit disorder, autism spectrum disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, eating, and other disorders, or chronic illnesses, especially if they affect the child's appearance, are at risk of becoming victims. Bullied children are three times more likely to experience health and academic difficulties than their peers and have anxiety-depressive disorder symptoms, apathy, headaches, and suicide attempts. Because of this experience, children imagine the world as full of dangers, and themselves as a person who cannot influence what is happening around them.

### 3.2.2. WHO IS ENGAGED IN BULLYING?

Bullying people are characterized as big, very strong, rude, and unpleasant "monsters." However, these are only stereotypes. In fact, there are no specific traits that are the same for all bullies. Moreover, the person who commits bullying may come from any social, emotional, physical, intellectual, family, or environmental conditions. Perhaps they are a victim, who then directs their anger at someone weaker than them.

Despite such a diverse background, people who commit bullying are divided into several conditional categories (the purpose of the division is to correctly define the intervention):

**REACTIVE BULLYING:** In this case, the person bullying another person is actually asking for help. They may have experienced a grave family loss in the recent past. For example, maybe a loved one has died, or their family is going through a financial crisis. This person feels pain, so they try to make others feel the same.

**ANXIETY BULLYING:** Due to life experiences and circumstances, these people may suffer from low self-esteem. They don't have a sense of security and therefore experience a lot of emotional stress. Accordingly, by oppressing others, they raise their status and gain self-confidence.

**SADISTIC BULLY:** This is a person who has a long history of aggressive behavior and who has little or no empathy for their victim. Their self-esteem is high, and they enjoy causing pain to others. They rarely experience remorse or guilt.

**BULLYING FROM HOME:** A person grew up in a family where they had many problems or where they were bullied. In such cases, bullying is a learned behavior. By observing family members, they learned that the only form of control is physical aggression and the oppression of others. Role models, when children learn this type of behavior from a "successful" bully, such as an older sibling or parent, they are more likely to do the same themselves.

**LOW-ACHIEVER BULLY:** the person has low academic performance and tries to gain status by bullying others.

**VICTIM:** The person is a victim of bullying and tries to express their pain and anger by oppressing someone weaker than them.

**PARENTING STYLE AND PRIOR LIFE EXPERIENCES:** warmth and affection a child receives in the early stages of life are associated with later bullying behavior. If the child grew up in such a way that they were not recognized, they were not praised, if they did not receive love, or if the parents were too loyal and there were no specific rules of behavior, a framework for correct behavior, or any boundaries in the child's upbringing.

**FAMILY DISCIPLINE:** children raised in families where discipline is systematically performed as corporal punishment are at high risk of engaging in physical abuse themselves.

**SOCIAL VALUES:** The child is greatly influenced by the values of society. For example, cases of bullying are more common in a society where there is strong political stress or conflict.

**CULTURAL INFLUENCES:** media violence, videos, or computer games are sources that may push a child toward aggressive behavior.

**SCHOOL CODE AND TEACHERS' VALUES:** In schools with strongly defined and understood values, there are fewer cases of bullying. Also, the role of the teacher as an authority is important, who uses their "power" fairly and timely to detect and eliminate cases of bullying. The administration's focus on creating a safe school environment also affects the reduction of cases.

Bullies stalk other children, tend to be rude and lack empathy towards their victims, and may be aggressive towards adults. For them, it is difficult to follow the rules. Bullies are less depressed and lonely than their peers and often have a higher social status. In turn, most often they are victims of violence, as a result of which their injuries are transferred to other people.

The main motivations for bullying by the bully are the need for power, the feeling of satisfaction as a result of harming others, and rewards -

material (money, cigarettes, other belongings taken from the victim) or psychological (prestige, social status, etc.).

Up to 3% of children combine both roles, at the same time behaving aggressively and provoking other children to harm themselves, or in some situations become bullies in the classroom, and others, become victims. The characteristic features they often show are hyperactivity, impulsivity, clumsiness, aggressive behavior, low self-control, poor social skills, difficulty concentrating and learning anxiety, depressive symptoms, and a relatively higher level of infantilism versus other peers.

### 3.2.3. BULLYING BYSTANDERS

A child who is being bullied can find themselves in three roles while being bullied. Some become defenders and try to help the victim, others, on the contrary, support the bullies, and others simply observe and remain neutral.

An Upstander is someone who takes action when they witness bullying. Even one person's support can make a big difference to a victim. When bullied youth is protected and supported by their peers, they experience less stress.<sup>20</sup>

According to John Darley and Bibb Latané, who first studied the bystander phenomenon in 1970, bystanders' reactions to bullying are rarely immediate because the fear of victimization prevails.<sup>21</sup> Bullying prevention programs are often aimed precisely at raising the awareness of those who witness bullying so that they can be proactive and support victims.

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<sup>20</sup>Bullying in schools: prevalence, bystanders' reaction and associations with sex and relationships, Temesgen Demissie Eijigu & Seleshi Zeleke Teketel, 2021

<sup>21</sup>The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn't They Help? Bibb Latané, John M. Darley, 1970;

### 3.3. RISK FACTORS LEADING TO BULLYING

Social norms established in the culture play a decisive role in forming a child as a person. The child stands at the center of the universe - with its internal and external factors.

Psycho-social development, the child has special needs and requirements that determine their behavior. Meanwhile, the social environment in which a child grows up can be both a positive and a negative influence.

Peculiarities of adolescence are a significant component in the analysis of factors causing bullying. At this age, the child becomes extremely vulnerable and needs special support and empowerment. The school environment makes it even more conducive for bullying to occur and spread.

#### **An illustrative list of bullying risk factors:**

- Bullying is peer encouraged. They get attention and become popular, others fear them, etc. Such encouragement encourages the bully to keep committing violent acts;
- Sometimes the cause of bullying is conformity - to be a member of the group, the individual will adopt the rules and norms accepted by it. If bullying is encouraged and accepted in a group, and an individual wants to be a member of that group, there is a certain probability that they will become a bully;
- fear of becoming a victim of bullying is another motivating factor;
- physical traits, social status, different religious beliefs, and different views are often the cause of humiliating treatment, hate speech, and sometimes even physical violence among adolescents.



## 3.4. THE EFFECTS OF BULLYING

To illustrate, it should be noted that bullying can inhibit physical, emotional, and cognitive development and growth. Depending on the duration of the bullying, the child may suffer both short-term and long-term consequences.

### **The short-term effects are:**

- receiving physical injury;
- the feeling of inadequacy, loss of self-confidence and self-esteem;
- losing faith in friends. Believing that they cannot protect or support them;
- feeling angry towards the abuser and living in fear of them;
- daily fear of going to school;
- loss of appetite because of anxiety;
- complaining of physical pains because of holding back crying and pain. For example, a complaint of abdominal pain.
- insomnia and nightmares, especially on Sunday nights when you know you have to go to school the next day;
- stealing money, candy, or food to please your abuser and pause the abuse from them. Refusal to take part in social activities outside of school, fearing that the bully may be nearby;
- feeling angry at the school and teachers for not stopping the violence;
- lying to parents and hiding the problem;

### **According to WHO data, the long-term consequences of bullying are:**

- maintaining negative beliefs about oneself throughout life;
- avoiding conflicts because of a lack of self-confidence;
- achieving less success in an academic or work environment;
- problems in the formation of romantic relationships;
- feelings of intense pessimism, depression, social anxiety, phobias, loneliness, or isolation;
- addictions (alcoholism, drug addiction);
- problems in the sexual domain;

- finding and keeping a job;
- suicidal behavior.

### **Social consequences**

According to another study, both victims and perpetrators have difficulty adapting to society. The first ones feel lonely, it is difficult for them to make friends. The latter and those in both roles feel isolated from society. In addition, victims are characterized by social immaturity.

### **3.4.1. IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED.**

Not all children can and want to tell their parents about their problems, and the older the child is, the less likely they are to complain to their parents about what is happening to them. You should pay attention to your child's condition, but in such a way that your attitude does not turn into supervision. If they say nothing, observe. First, go to school, talk to the teachers about your child's relationship with classmates, see how the child behaves in class after school or during recess, on holidays, whether they take the initiative in communication, whom they communicate with, who communicates with them, etc. You can consult a psychologist, it is easier for them to understand the child's condition.

#### **Parents must pay attention if their child has the following symptoms:**

- reluctantly goes to school and is thrilled about any opportunity to skip school ;
- returns from school bored/ depressed;
- often cries for no apparent reason;
- mentions none of their classmates;
- talks very little about school life;
- does not know whom to call to learn about class assignments, or refuses to call anyone at all;
- is lonely and does not invite anyone to their birthday parties.

### **If you know your child is a victim of bullying, you can help them<sup>22</sup>:**

- listen to your child openly and calmly. Focus on being supportive instead of trying to find a reason for the bullying. Make sure they know it is not their fault.
- tell the child that you believe them, that you are glad that they told you that it is not their fault and that you will do everything to help them;
- talk to the teacher or school. You and your child don't have to deal with bullying alone. Find out about the school's bullying policy, code of conduct, or anti-bullying programs;
- make sure the child knows they can talk to you anytime and reassure them that things will get better.

## **3.4.2. IF YOUR CHILD BULLIES OTHER CHILDREN**

### **Signs that your child is bullying other children:**

- behaves aggressively, and often gets involved in conflicts and fights. you are often contacted by the school about the child's behavioral problems
- befriends children who bully others;
- does not take responsibility for their behavior. Blames others for their problems;
- pays too much attention to one's reputation or popularity;
- Has things you did not buy, or money you did not give.

### **What should a parent do if their child is a bully?**

If you think or know that your child is abusing other children, it is important to remember that the child's behavior can be due to many reasons. Such behavior in children can be caused by attention deficit and/or lack of anger and emotion management skills. There are several steps you can take to help your child stop bullying:

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<sup>22</sup> How to talk to your children about bullying Tips for Parents, UNICEF;

**Communication** - understanding why your child acts the way they do can help you understand how to help them. Do they feel safe at school? Do they often fight with a friend or sibling? If your child is having trouble explaining their behavior, you can turn to a professional for help.

**Work on developing healthy socialization skills** - such as "putting yourself in their shoes" by imagining the experiences of the person who is being bullied, help develop a sense of empathy through various means.

**Observe yourself** - children often repeat the behavior they see at home;

**Discussing consequences and ways to make amends** - suggesting non-violent methods, encouraging apologies, and asking for forgiveness.

### 3.5. Teachers Facing Challenges in Identifying Bullying

Bullying is often a hidden process, and to prevent it, resolve the conflict, and eliminate the consequences, it is necessary to have a practical mechanism of coordination between the child's environment and all persons involved in educational activities.

Students prefer to deal with the situation on their own and, without the involvement of adults, take it upon themselves and choose behavioral strategies that sometimes only contribute to the development of the spiral of bullying, but not to escape from it. Therefore, adult sensitivity, timeliness of intervention, and support can be crucial. Bullying is difficult to uncover, as evidenced by the following research findings:<sup>23</sup> when the teacher is close to the children, cares for them, and observes them, the extent of physical violence, which is easier to assess, bullying, decreases; bullying becomes a less obvious form of emotional pressure.

Deciding whether a situation is truly the case of bullying and how abusive (serious) it is, is the most common difficulty preventing

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<sup>23</sup> Craig et al., 2000

teachers, parents, administrators, and peers from intervening in potentially dangerous situations.<sup>24</sup> Intervention should be proportionate to the severity of the incident. Overestimating a situation is just as risky as not recognizing it.

Recognition of bullying is associated with the presence of explicit or implicit knowledge about bullying and the ability to distinguish it from other forms of violence. According to global experience, anti-bullying policies and implementation of anti-bullying programs begin with raising awareness of school bullying, its impact on the victim's personality, and determining the ability to recognize a bullying scenario. This paves the way for response and intervention. Recognizing bullying is essential when it comes to choosing a way to deal with a conflict: bullying requires a special coordinated effort from all involved.

It is important to note that only a combination of select signs can identify bullying. Also, children who witness bullying can become signal transmitters. Of course, the maximum information can be obtained as a result of an honest conversation, however it is not allowed to persistently "interrogate" a child or teenager with questions about bullying.

You can use brief questions to assess the classroom environment. For example, the questionnaire "atmosphere in the classroom." Students are asked to answer the following questions anonymously:

1. Can you call your class "friendly?" Why?
2. Do you like the psychological atmosphere in your class? Why?
3. Is there a person in the class who you can call a loyal friend?
4. What would you like to change to improve the atmosphere in the classroom?
5. Would you agree to study in the same school, with the same teachers, but with other children? Why?

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<sup>24</sup> Hazler, 1997.

## 3.6. PREVENTION OF BULLYING IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

For the prevention of bullying in school, it is important to raise the awareness of all participants in the educational process and to be involved in prevention. The effectiveness of bullying prevention in a general education organization will depend on how much it is systemic and not episodic. Systematic prevention is carried out at the following levels: personal, group, school-wide, and family.

**The following directions of prevention are carried out at the school level:**

- creating a favorable and safe environment for the development and socialization of the student's personality;
- improving the quality of cooperation of all participants in the educational process;
- creating a safe climate at school;
- use of restorative approaches;
- introduction of school mediation;
- introduction of the peer educator institute;
- introduction of non-violent communication methods;
- raising the competence of teachers in the issues of bullying prevention and establishing a coordination system among the school staff;
- developing and implementing a school-wide anti-bullying policy with the participation of children and all actors;
- involvement of school students in informal education activities (considering the educational and extracurricular interests of children, clubs, professional interests, sports, etc.);
- implementation of internal mechanisms for responding to bullying.

**The following pillars for prevention are performed at the group level (class):**

- diagnosing interpersonal relationships in order to identify cases of bullying in the classroom;
- conducting class discussions as a means of positive socialization, which allows participation in the decision-making process, revealing core social values, and learning to respect and be sensitive toward the needs of others;
- implementation of prevention programs aimed at unifying classroom teams, reducing competition, and teaching children "active friendship" skills.

In the prevention of bullying, the teacher has a special role, both for each student and in the process of fostering a healthy environment in the school. Each student should receive support and help in difficult moments of life, considering individual characteristics.

A teacher who prevents bullying among students should pay special attention to improving relationships, and establishing friendly and trusting relationships in the classroom. In the process of joint work in the classroom team, it is paramount to establish relationships based on mutual help and support.

In order to create a safe psychological environment in an educational organization, it is necessary to combine preventive measures into one system.

### **3.7. ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMS**

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program includes staff training, a school-based bullying prevention committee, a school-wide pre-program orientation event, parent involvement, a staff discussion group, and a classroom activity component.

The major components of the program are implemented at the school level, class level, and individual level:

The school component includes the administration of an anonymous questionnaire to assess the nature and prevalence of bullying in each school. Increased surveillance of student bullying "hotspots".

Classroom components include establishing and enforcing anti-bullying classroom rules and holding regular classroom meetings with students.

Individual components include interventions with children identified as bullies and victims and discussions with parents of involved students. Counselors and school-based mental health professionals can assist teachers in these efforts.<sup>25</sup>

KiVa is an anti-bullying program developed at the University of Turku, Finland, with funding from the Ministry of Education and Culture. The program is evidence-based, which means that KiVa's effectiveness has been scientifically proven. KiVa offers schools a wide range of specific tools and materials to tackle bullying.<sup>26</sup> The teacher program package includes teacher and parent guides, online games, information letters for parents, presentations, online surveys for students and staff, video clips, posters, and instructions.

## 3.8. WHAT DO WE DO DURING CRISIS INTERVENTION?

### FIRST STAGE – EXTINGUISHING THE FIRE

**STEP 1** - Stop the incident, separate both parties, stand between them, and prevent them from communicating. Follow the situation.

**STEP 2** - Make sure everything is OK, if necessary, call the police and/or emergency services.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov/spt/Programs/47>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.kivaprogram.net/>



**STEP 3** - Make sure that the parties cannot communicate, if the situation becomes tense, separate the children into different rooms and call an additional specialist for help.

At the same time, you can ask questions about the incident to understand the nature and severity of the incident. Do not ask them/the children to apologize.

**STEP 4** - Document the case for further intervention.

## **THE SECOND STAGE – THE ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION**

**STEP 1** – a meeting of specialists, teachers, and parents

**STEP 2** - interview the parties to better assess the situation.

**STEP 3** - based on the received information, we determine:

- What type of intervention do we do with the bully
- What kind of help does the victim need?
- What type of intervention do we conduct with other participants of the incident

### **SIGNIFICANT STEPS:**

- conduct educational training;
- psychologist services for the bully, victims, and witnesses;
- imposing sanctions against the bully.

## 4. WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying that occurs using digital technologies. Cyberbullying can take place on social networks, messengers, gaming platforms, or mobile phones. It is a deliberate pattern of behavior intended to intimidate, anger, or embarrass the person being bullied. For example:

- spreading false information or posting embarrassing photos of someone on social media;
- sending malicious messages or threats in messengers;
- sending inappropriate messages to others using other people's photos and on their behalf.

A whole range of social platforms, including chat rooms, blogs and messages, are used in cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can cause profound damage because it leaves a permanent mark in cyberspace and can quickly reach a wide audience. Bullying and cyberbullying overlap, creating a continuum of harmful behavior.<sup>27</sup>

Children use technology at a very young age - even if they may not. They have friends who have unlimited access to devices and games or older siblings who can help them achieve this.

The 2017 study of the United Nations Children's Fund: "Children in a digital world"<sup>28</sup> clearly answers this challenge. "I too was a victim of bullying as a child, but when I returned home and closed the door, my oppression ended there. It's not like that anymore. Children are never alone. Bullying, thanks to the Internet, can happen anywhere and anytime. This is one disadvantage of online life," says British expert John Carr. As they emphasized, the discussion about the safety of children on the Internet is relevant in all countries and the risk is the same everywhere.

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<sup>27</sup> Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, 2016

<sup>28</sup> Children in a Digital World – Report, UNICEF, 2017.

"There are three problems. First is the content that children on the Internet engage in; Second, behavior, i.e. what they do and how they behave in the digital space, and third, commerce or business, which easily manipulates and victimizes children. There are two fundamental ways to solve these problems. First is the technical method of restricting and setting a limit on Internet access, the other is, working with children in terms of education and awareness raising," John Carr says.

Apps are designed to be addictive and your child will want to have as many followers and likes as possible. "Likes", hearts, various "emojis" are social currency that target the reward center in the child's brain, making them feel loved and needed. Children need this kind of reward and attention all the more.

Any child could be asked to send out "nudes." It is possible that they did not send it, but it is also possible that it was sent to them. It could be a peer from school, or even someone they know from an online game or other online activity. Just as it is possible to use threats or coercion to send intimate photos or video material. At such a time, it is difficult for the child to choose which is better, to tell the parent or to disagree with the abuser, because both are seen as dangerous by them.<sup>29</sup>

**Dissemination of offensive content** - Social network status, comment, gossip, photo, video, etc. Distribute or create a website that will embarrass, distress or offense to a person or group of individuals;

**Hateful / mocking content** - Sending hateful, mocking, humiliating, threatening messages or letters, spreading posts that concern a person's social status, race, religion, ethnic origin or a personal characteristic (manner of speech), appearance (red hair, fat, thin, short, etc.) clothing and others;

**Menacing** - a threat of physical harm or pain;

**Pushing to commit suicide** - inciting or giving orders to commit suicide;

**Misleading** - presenting oneself as another person in order to receive from another person or to publish personal or false information about them;

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<sup>29</sup> [www.suffolkdistrictattorney.com](http://www.suffolkdistrictattorney.com)

**Sexting** - Dissemination of a sexual name, comment, post or nude photo, which is intended to ridicule, embarrass or threaten and call for sexual violence;

**Doxing** - disclosure of personal information such as an address, personal number, passport number, bank card number, telephone number, social media page, and other personal data to cyberbully others;

**CYBERSTALKING** - Attempts to establish unwanted and repeated communication or communication that is performed electronically or through a mobile device. Cyberstalking can turn into physical stalking and sexual harassment.

Cyberbullying is a relatively recent phenomenon.

## 4.1. HOW DOES ONE RECOGNIZE CYBERBULLYING?

A teenager may be a victim of cyberbullying if there are sudden, unusual changes in their actions:<sup>30</sup>

- suddenly stops using the phone, computer, or social media or gets nervous in the process; Or on the contrary, uses them more often than usual.
- after texting, chatting, using social media, or playing games, shows anger, frustration, depression, withdrawal;
- is unwilling to go to school or go out, and academic performance has drastically changed;
- does not want to talk, especially about their online activities, locked themselves in the room;
- sleeps longer than usual or suffers from insomnia or changes diet;
- loses the desire to interact with peers.

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<sup>30</sup> Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D. Cyberbullying Warning Signs Red flags that a child is involved in cyberbullying;

## 4.2. HOW DO WE PROTECT CHILDREN FROM CYBERBULLYING?

It is difficult for a parent to protect their child from cyberbullying if they themselves do not understand the essence of the problem. The factor of trust between parent and child is one of the most determining factors in protecting against cyberbullying. However, parents are often the last to hear about their children's problems.<sup>31</sup>

- first, learn how different social networks and apps work. Check out Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and most importantly TikTok;
- talk to your children regularly and specifically about online issues. Remind them they can turn to you for help, especially if something dangerous, annoying, or offensive happens to them;
- set time limits on Internet use;
- talk to your children about the dangers of the Internet and raise their awareness;
- explain to your children not to respond to cyberbullying, but not to delete the received message, and save it for use as evidence if necessary;
- with cyberbullying, don't blame the child and show support. Find out how long the bullying has been going on and make sure you work together to find a solution;
- don't ignore the case because the emotional pain of cyberbullying is very real and can have long-lasting effects. Show that you take it seriously;
- do not threaten to take away the phone or confiscate the computer if the child comes to you to discuss the problem. Such behavior will make it more difficult for the child to trust you in the future;
- teach your child about the reporting function. Today, all popular social networks have already realized the extent of the cyberbullying problem. There are tools for Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and more on TikTok and other platforms that help you

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<sup>31</sup><https://www.parents.com/kids/problems/bullying/18-tips-to-stop-cyberbullying/>

limit interactions with unwanted users, report violations and harassment;

- talk to your child and tell them to behave online exactly as they do in real life. In ordinary life, no one stands in the middle of the street and shouts insulting words;
- if you feel the situation is out of your control, contact the police and a child psychologist to get help in time.

### 4.3. THREE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OFFLINE AND CYBERBULLYING

- Cyberbullying has no time or geographic boundaries. When bullying occurs in the school environment, the process does not continue 24/7. At the same time, the circle of bullies is limited only to educational institutions. There are no such boundaries on the Internet: finishing school does not stop bullying, and distance and lack of personal acquaintance do not stop other people to join the bullying. Online bullying never gives its victims a break.
- With cyberbullying, it is easier to attract new members and spread the bullying. Information on the Internet spreads spontaneously and at high speed. In reality, for example, spreading slander and rumors takes time. In addition, fear keeps many from spreading rumors. And on the Internet, the message is sent instantly, thus attracting a vast audience, and the anonymity factor also reduces the feeling of fear. Once this process starts, it is difficult to stop it.
- With cyberbullying, the feeling of impunity also plays an important role. The bully may disseminate information from a fake account and the "Fake account" adds even more power to the bully by protecting anonymity.

## 4.4. EXPECTED CONSEQUENCES OF CYBERBULLYING

The results of cyberbullying are classified according to emotional-psychological and physical damage:

**EMOTIONAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL:** depression, embarrassment, pain, nervousness, disappointment, anger, aggression, loss of self-confidence, low self-esteem, fear - such an emotional-psychological state, in turn, leads to rejection, isolation, problems within the family, in school, and with friends; low academic performance, etc. Sometimes, the teenager becomes aggressive - and their behavior turns violent.

**PHYSICAL:** self-harm, self-inflicted pain, suicidal ideations, attempts, and enactment.

Cyberbullying affects each child differently, but it can be overcome with the right help.

## 4.5. THE STOP, BLOCK, TALK STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH CYBERBULLYING.

The STOPBLOCKTALK approach is an effective mechanism for dealing with cyberbullying. This approach is used both in schools and is shared with parents so that they can find help for their child in time.<sup>32</sup>

**STOP:** Be careful and always think about what you share online;

**BLOCK:** If someone bothers you in any way and makes you uncomfortable, never tolerate it and report it;

**TALK:** Talk to someone you trust if someone is bothering you.

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<sup>32</sup> [www.suffolkdistrictattorney.com](http://www.suffolkdistrictattorney.com)

## 4.6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS

- Monitor the Internet activities of minors;
- before registering a minor in a social network or using the application, familiarize yourself with its privacy policy;
- check their primary data security settings and set them to the desired level;
- advise on their safe use and explain the dangers of posting information about them on the Internet;
- warn children not to share their password with third parties (including close friends) or to change it immediately;
- do not check the remember username/password box when using someone else's electronic device;
- by using special programs, it is possible to set basic digital rules for children on electronic devices, guide them to useful content, monitor their screen time, and set restrictions (on the use of applications, access to websites, and Internet activities).

## 5. INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION AGAINST BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING

The basic principle of international standards for protecting the rights of the child is the protection of the best interests of the child, which requires everyone to provide the child with necessary protection and care that guarantees their well-being.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3



The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, Clause 16.2 aims to "end violence, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture."<sup>34</sup>

The annual report of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General states that protecting children from bullying is not only an ethical requirement but also a matter of human rights importance.

The preamble of the UN resolution on bullying refers to the primary responsibility of the family to nurture and protect children but also recognizes the important role that legal guardians, educators, teachers and civil society have and that the media must play in bullying prevention.

According to a study published by UNICEF in 2019, one in three adolescents in 30 countries is a victim of online bullying, and one in five skips school because of online bullying and violence.<sup>35</sup>

The 2015 United Nations Global Survey on Violence Against Children found that legislation is a key component of any comprehensive strategy to address child abuse. All kinds of violence should be avoided.<sup>36</sup>

In certain countries - Belize, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Korea Republic, Sri Lanka, the UK, and the USA - special legislation was introduced to protect children from bullying. The legislation of various countries is also beginning to discuss the phenomenon of Internet bullying.

According to the 2021 General Comment of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, member states should adopt legislative and administrative measures to protect children against violence in the digital domain. Among them are the creation and subsequent enforcement of a legal framework that protects children from all forms of online violence.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>35</sup> [UNICEF poll: More than a third of young people in 30 countries report being a victim of online bullying](#)

<sup>36</sup> The government's responses to the global survey questionnaire show that 92% of countries have some form of legal prohibition against violence against children or some elements of it.

<sup>37</sup> Committee on Children's Rights General comment no. 25 (2021) Children's Rights in the Digital Environment, Committee on the Rights of the Child;

The adoption of specific anti-bullying legislation, especially regarding cyberbullying, is a relatively new phenomenon. The absence of specific legislation does not necessarily mean a legal deadlock, as states can address bullying using existing provisions in their constitutional, criminal, civil, and educational legislation.<sup>38</sup> Criminal law contains provisions dealing with harassment, assault, disclosure of personal information, and incitement of hatred. Civil law provides for such norms as compensation for defamation or harassment. At the same time, it is important to monitor the gaps between laws and their application.

According to Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the participating states shall take all necessary legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or psychological violence, abuse or maltreatment by parents, legal guardians or any other person caring for the child, from the fact that the child was deprived of care or was treated negligently, was mistreated or exploited, and was sexually abused.

For example, states can create remedies that allow victims of bullying to file civil lawsuits or obtain restraining orders. A special body could be created to deal with cyberbullying, including investigating complaints and setting internet safety standards.

For example, in 2015, New Zealand adopted the "Harmful Digital Communications Act."<sup>39</sup> The law criminalizes sending messages and posting material on the Internet that intentionally causes serious emotional distress or pushes for suicide. The legislation is designed to prevent and respond to malicious communications. It provides a wide range of judicially established remedies, including the removal of the material, correction or public apology, or disclosure of the identity of the source of the anonymous communication.

Other countries have legal remedies that allow victims of bullying to lodge civil claims or petition for protection orders, as well as measures that prohibit communication with a specific person, restrict the use of

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<sup>38</sup> <https://rb.gy/83ixrt>;

<sup>39</sup> <https://rb.gy/jdi8uw>;

electronic means of communication, or temporarily or permanently confiscate electronic devices.

In Australia, the Strengthening Children's Online Safety Act<sup>40</sup> established the Children's eSafety Commissioner, which provides for the prompt removal of child-targeted harmful material from social media through complaints, and also promotes children's online safety. The Act was revised in 2018 and a National Online Security Strategic Framework and Plan were developed by the Commissioner and the National Department of Communications.

The General Assembly report shows that bullying and online bullying feed off each other, creating an unbroken chain of harmful behavior for children. Bullying exposes children to psychological<sup>41</sup> and physical trauma, which affects their self-esteem and school performance, and ultimately, has a negative impact on the overall climate.

In Canada, school board requirements for student safety, including bullying prevention and intervention, are set out in the Education Act.

In another example, in 2021, Finland developed a new action plan to prevent bullying and harassment in schools. The Ministry of Education and Culture presented an action plan aimed at preventing bullying, teasing, violence, and harassment in schools and other educational institutions. The plan also includes preventive measures to be implemented in the early development phase to strengthen children's emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills.<sup>42</sup>

According to Articles 28-29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the child has the right to education. The goal of education shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities; the state shall ensure that the child is brought up with human values and basic respect, as well as prepare the child for a conscious life in a free society with understanding, peace, and tolerance.

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<sup>40</sup> Adopted in 2015 by the Canberra Parliament

<sup>41</sup> Hidden scars: how violence harms the mental health of children, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, 2020

<sup>42</sup> <https://rb.gy/5css0d>

The digital environment provides a unique opportunity for children to understand the right to access information, and the state must ensure that children have access to information in the digital environment, and this right is restricted only if the child's rights are violated.<sup>43</sup>

Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the child's right to access information and sets the limits in which cases the state can limit these rights.

According to a report by the General Assembly, children and adolescents are now more vulnerable to the dangers of cyberbullying, sexual texting and online sexual blackmail. In protecting children from bullying and online bullying, it is important to establish sensitive legal protection mechanisms and monitoring systems.<sup>44</sup>

According to Article 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the child must be protected from any sexual violence.

## 6. LOCAL LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTION AGAINST CHILD ABUSE

On September 20, 2019, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Child Rights Code, which includes all the main issues for the realization of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the child. In addition, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified and is the current legislation in the country.

The Child Rights Code determines the national child protection system – the legislation of Georgia, other regulatory norms, policies and services in the systems of social welfare, education, health, safety and

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<sup>43</sup> Committee on Children's Rights General comment no. 25 (2021) Children's Rights in the Digital Environment, Committee on the Rights of the Child;

<sup>44</sup> Berkeley Protocol on conducting investigations using open digital data , available at <https://www.ohchr.org/ru/stories/2020/12/berkeley-protocol-gives-guidance-using-public-digital-info-fight-human-rights> ( ENG )

justice, intended to prevent and eradicate risks related to the protection of the child. The national child protection system shall support and strengthen the child and persons responsible for his/her parenting, in order to promote social inclusion and to minimise the risk of separating the child from the family. The national child protection system is intended to prevent and eradicate in the systems of education, healthcare and justice, in the family and in any other places, all forms of violence against children, including physical punishment and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment, child exploitation, trafficking in minors, and harmful customary practices in relation to the child.

Article 53 of the Code covers all forms of child abuse - The child shall have the right to be protected from physical and psychological violence, bullying, coercion, injury, the disregarding of their opinion, negligent treatment, torture, exploitation, child trafficking and any other forms of violence in the family, at school, or in any other place or area, including the Internet. Even though the term bullying is not used in the Code, the Code clearly recognizes the responsibility to protect children from bullying and the prohibition of violence in the Internet space. The Code obliges the state bodies to ensure the prohibition of the physical punishment, torture, or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment of a child in the family, in a pre-school educational institution or a general educational institution, when providing alternative care services, in a medical institution and/or psychiatric institution, a penitentiary institution or any other places.

In the Code, the protection of violence against children in the school space<sup>45</sup> is allocated as a separate article, which includes the necessity of preventing violence between children and effective response mechanisms. Preschool education institutions have a similar responsibility.

In turn, any person or institution working with children is responsible for protecting children from violence. The order of the Government of Georgia on the approval of referral procedures for child protection

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<sup>45</sup> The Child Rights Code, Article 37;

clearly defines the procedures in case of child abuse. According to the order, the list of subjects involved in the referral process is determined, who are obliged to start the referral procedure in case of reasonable suspicion of child abuse. For the purposes of referral procedures, reasonable suspicion may arise if the following circumstances exist:

- Child's statement that he/she is being or has been abused.
- Inability of the child to explain the reasons for the injury;
- Statement of the witness that he/she witnessed the act of violence;
- Inadequate behavior of a parent/legal representative/other responsible person, such as:
  - inconsistency of the severity of the child's injury with the story of the parent/legal representative/other responsible person about receiving the injury;
  - inconsistency of the severity of the child's injury between the stories of different persons about receiving the injury;
  - Permanent change of the details of the parent/legal representative/other responsible person;
  - Inadequate response of the parent/legal representative/other responsible person to the child's injury;
  - Inexplicability of the cause of injury by the child;
- Other circumstances that with high probability create a basis for assuming that the child has been abused.

## 7. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendations developed on the basis of international legislation and best practices to combat bullying and cyberbullying among children:**

- Drafting of a national strategy for the prevention and intervention of violence against children, in which the state policy of bullying and cyberbullying will also be considered, through the participation of civil society organizations and field experts;

- Creating and maintaining a safe environment on the streets and other places where children and young people gather and spend time. Creating and maintaining such conditions is possible through close cooperation with the relevant child protection and support services. All the more, as the Children's Rights Code gave local governments several powers in the field of child protection and well-being;
- Work with a multidisciplinary team of child rights professionals, including psychologists and social workers, to develop and implement effective programs to prevent, address, and investigate bullying and online bullying;
- Creation and development of reliable, popular, confidential, and accessible mechanisms for filing and reporting complaints about violence against children. Increasing awareness about the Child Abuse Hotline - 111;
- Education and training of police officers in the field of child rights protection. A person whose responsibility it is to interview a victim or witness of bullying or online bullying must act in the best interest of the child according to their age and level of development, with an individualized approach, and have the competence to conduct such an interview. A police station should have children's rooms with spaces suitable for children;
- Establishing a monitoring system to prevent violence against children, including the collection of necessary data on child bullying and online bullying by law enforcement agencies and ensuring the protection of personal data during processing;
- Production of campaigns aimed at raising parents' awareness and strengthening their competencies;
- Creating a safe and child-centered climate through children's participation in school - Introducing restorative approaches and mediation. Raising the qualifications of staff and teachers, including child abuse referral procedures;
- Encouraging non-formal, youth, and community activities so that children have the opportunity to engage in extra-curricular activities.