



Blog Post #6

"Cyberbullying and Screen Time: Protecting Mental Health in the Digital Age"

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"Tech with Care, Mind Aware."

This blog deals with cyber-bullying, a real social phenomenon that affects many young people, with consequences that can be terrible.



Reducing Screen Time for Better Physical and Mental Health: Focus on Cyberbullying

With the increasing use of digital technologies, young people are spending more and more time in front of screens. According to a study by Statista, in 2023, teenagers spent an average of 7 hours per day on their digital devices. This figure is alarming as it can have significant repercussions on their physical and mental health, notably by increasing the risks of cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying takes place via the Internet (on a social network, a forum, a multiplayer video game, a blog, etc.). It can take the form of publications on a public platform (e.g., a forum) or private exchanges (e.g., on a social network's private messaging system). As with bullying at school, cyberbullying can leave its victims with after-effects: anxiety, sadness, loneliness, insomnia, loss of self-confidence, absenteeism from school. It's a painful situation that can lead to depression and even suicidal behavior.

What is Cyberbullying?

When a person receives, on the Internet or on their cell phone, repeated, malicious messages on the Internet or on their mobile phone, this is known as cyberbullying.

These messages may contain : threats, insults or blackmail.

If the person being harassed does not do what is asked of them (a meeting, money or personal information), they may be subjected to violence or humiliation in real life, and see rumors spread about her. This is an offence punishable by law and particularly affects young people.



Cyberbullying can take several forms, such as:

- **Insults and Threats:** Offensive messages sent via social media, SMS, or emails.
- **Spreading Rumors:** Sharing false information to harm someone's reputation
- **Exclusion:** Excluding someone from an online group or activity.

« Aggressive, intentional act perpetrated by an individual or group of individuals by means of electronic forms of communication, repeatedly against a victim against a victim who cannot easily defend themselves alone ». (Ministry of Education definition)

Consequences of Cyberbullying

The consequences of cyberstalking can be dramatic for victims: depression, dropping out of school or work, psychological or emotional disorders, violence, suicide, etc.

Impact on Mental Health

- According to a UNICEF study, 1 in 3 adolescents worldwide has experienced cyberbullying.
- Victims of cyberbullying are 2 to 3 times more likely to develop anxiety and depression disorders.
- In France, 17% of young people report having been bullied online at least once in their life (Statista, 2022).

Impact on Physical Health

- Sleep disorders, headaches, and eating disorders are common among victims of cyberbullying.
- A study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health revealed that youths bullied online were 1.5 times more likely to report physical health problems.

How to protect yourself :

On social networks, you have to choose with whom you want to share personal information (about yourself, your family, your friends) because not everyone is a “real friend”.

It's important to remember that no one can publish a photo or video without asking permission first. No one has the right to make abusive or defamatory comments against a person or community (e.g. racist comments).

Protect your personal data and your privacy: only fill in the mandatory fields in online questionnaires and games, never give your phone number or address to someone you don't know.

Why Reducing Screen Time Can Help

- Less Exposure: Reducing screen time means less time spent on platforms where cyberbullying is frequent.
- Strengthening Real-Life Social Interactions: Face-to-face interactions help develop social skills and strengthen social bonds.
- Developing Healthy Hobbies: Encouraging offline activities such as sports, reading, or creative hobbies can improve mental and physical health.

Practical Tips for Reducing Screen Time

- Set Limits: Establish specific hours for screen use and stick to them.
- Alternative Activities: Offer alternatives to screens, such as outdoor activities or board games.
- Awareness and Education: Talk openly about the dangers of cyberbullying and the importance of reporting any inappropriate behavior.

What to do in the event of cyberbullying ?

- Don't answer to cyberbully
- Tell an adult (parents, teachers)
- Save all evidences (screenshots, printouts, audio or video recordings)
- Contact law enforcement
- Block the person(s)
- Report the abuse to the relevant sites
- Check your privacy control

Cyberbullying is a punishable offence. We must be able to take action against harassers.

As a victim of cyberbullying, you can file a complaint against the perpetrator(s). You can also lodge a complaint against the Internet host Person or company director who stores writings, sounds, images or videos made by third parties (hosts of a social network, a forum, an online game, a blog) if they have not respected their obligations. An investigation will be carried out, and those responsible may be prosecuted before the criminal courts. If found guilty, penalties may be imposed.

Conclusion

Protecting young people from the dangers of cyberbullying and encouraging them to adopt healthier screen habits is essential for their well-being. By reducing screen time and fostering real-life social interactions, we can help young people develop better physical and mental health.

Share your experiences and tips for reducing screen time and dealing with cyberbullying. Together, we can create a safer and healthier digital environment for all.



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