

How to effectively engage parents and caregivers in preventing and responding to cyberbullying

Good practice guide



Copyright notice

Good practice guide: How to effectively engage parents and caregivers in preventing and responding to cyberbullying

© European Union, 2026



The Commission's reuse policy is implemented by the [Commission Decision of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents](#).

Unless otherwise indicated (e.g. in individual copyright notices), content owned by the EU within this publication is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International \(CC BY 4.0\) licence](#). This means that reuse is allowed, provided appropriate credit is given and changes are indicated.

You may be required to clear additional rights if specific content depicts identifiable private individuals or includes third-party works. To use or reproduce content that is not owned by the EU, you may need to seek permission directly from the rights holders. Software or documents covered by industrial property rights, such as patents, trademarks, registered designs, logos and names, are excluded from the Commission's reuse policy and are not licensed to you.

This report is published in good faith with regard to the validity, accuracy or comprehensiveness of the information contained within it. Please note, however, that the views expressed are not necessarily the views of the European Union, European Commission, European Schoolnet or any partner organisations. Please note also that the authors have no control over third-party references and linked sites, and any referenced links may be subject to change over time.





Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Parent and caregiver perspectives on cyberbullying and online safety	5
Addressing cyberbullying and online safety at school	5
What would parents and caregivers do if their child was involved in cyberbullying?	5
What do parents and caregivers need to protect their child from cyberbullying?	6
What would help parents and caregivers engage more?	6
3. Good practices for teachers	8
Barriers to parental participation: the “hard-to-reach” parents and possible responses	9
How do schools educate parents about cyberbullying?	14
4. Good practices for Safer Internet Centres.....	18
Effective communication methods and strategies for engaging with parents	18
Barriers to engaging: the “hard-to-reach” parents and possible responses.....	20
Annex 1: Glossary of terms related to cyberbullying	24
Annex 2: Information for parents and caregivers about cyberbullying	27
Annex 3: Additional materials and resources.....	32
Annex 4: A note on the collection and representativeness of data	34





1. Introduction

In her [State of the European Union 2026 address](#), European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stressed that children need time, support and guidance to grow into themselves and thrive, both online and offline. **Highlighting the devastating impact that cyberbullying can have, she called for the need to empower parents to help safeguard their children's well-being.**

Safer Internet Centres (SICs) work closely with parents to raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges children and young people can face online and to provide tools and resources to help parents have a meaningful dialogue with their children about their lives online. In that context, SICs regularly highlight the challenges of engaging this group, noting that **the parents they can reach tend to be those already taking steps to keep their children safe online.**

Against this background, this good practice guide highlights **effective strategies for engaging parents**, including those who are **“hard-to-reach”**, and identifies successful techniques and **good practices for developing educational messages**. It is intended to support SICs and other practitioners in developing approaches that can reach a broader range of parents and encourage meaningful engagement on cyberbullying. The guide also includes **comprehensive guidance on cyberbullying**, covering its various forms, underlying motives, potential impacts, available online reporting and support tools, and practical advice on how parents and caregivers can respond and support children and young people.

The good practices compiled in this guide are based on input from a range of stakeholders, including teachers and educators, representatives from Ministries of Education, SICs, and parents themselves. To gather examples of what works and what doesn't in parental outreach and engagement, representatives from these stakeholder groups responded to several survey questions that helped inform this guide. The sections below include summaries of their detailed responses, ideas, and suggestions.

Please note that throughout the document, we use “parents” to refer to parents and caregivers.





2. Parent perspectives on cyberbullying and online safety

Parents play a crucial role in helping children navigate offline and online challenges, such as cyberbullying. Understanding their perspectives is essential for developing effective awareness-raising, prevention, support and engagement strategies.

Addressing cyberbullying and online safety at school

Parents describe **vastly different experiences of how schools address cyberbullying and online safety**. In some schools, these topics are discussed during parent meetings, classroom activities, computer science lessons, awareness days, or workshops led by teachers and support staff. Some parents report that class teachers regularly raise concerns about online risks and discuss sensitive situations occurring in class.

However, many feel that cyberbullying and online safety are **still addressed too little and not concretely enough**. Several report that the topic is mentioned only briefly during parent meetings, mainly as warnings, descriptions of possible dangers, or possible consequences, without practical examples, guidance, or opportunities for discussion. Some parents mention that **cyberbullying is only addressed after an incident occurs**.

Others do not recall receiving any specific information from the school, even when their children discussed online safety during lessons, pointing to an important **communication gap**: schools may conduct preventive activities with pupils without parents necessarily being aware.

Some parents also feel that existing **curricula do not always reflect children's current digital experiences** and should give greater attention to privacy, respectful communication, online safety, and age-appropriate digital citizenship.

The collective experience of parents seems to indicate that cyberbullying is addressed at school, but in a way that lacks a systematic, continuous, and visible approach.

What would parents do if their child was involved in cyberbullying?

Start by talking to the child

Across parents, the first step is remarkably consistent: **talk calmly with the child**, try to understand what happened, and try to solve the problem together. Parents emphasise listening without immediately judging, blaming, punishing, or banning them from using digital devices. They emphasise the importance of creating a **safe space** where their children feel safe telling them what has happened, **regardless of whether their child was being targeted, had witnessed cyberbullying, or had contributed to harmful behaviour**.

Preserve evidence and avoid impulse responses

Parents recognise the importance of **preserving evidence**, such as **screenshots** or **messages**, and **avoiding impulsive reactions**. Some families already use preventive rules around digital communication, such as not deleting messages immediately, thinking before sending a message, and allowing time to calm down before responding when angry. Such practices can help children understand that written communication has consequences and that online conflicts can quickly escalate.

Contact the school

If cyberbullying involves pupils from the same school or affects the school environment, many parents said they would first contact the **class teacher**, then, if necessary, specialist support staff and school leadership.

Parents generally expect schools and families to work together to understand what happened, protect the child, and agree on appropriate next steps. **However, confidence in schools varies**. Some parents indicate





that they might seek support from an external specialist organisation before approaching school leadership if they were unsure whether the school had sufficient expertise to manage a complex cyberbullying case.

Seek external help and support

For more serious incidents, parents mention **contacting trusted online safety services**, such as **Safer Internet Centres**, helplines, child protection organisations, reporting tools provided by online platforms, the police, the ombudsperson for children, or other relevant authorities. **Insafe helplines can offer expert advice and support to parents and children alike**; [information about helpline services in different European countries can be found here](#).

Some parents would like to seek professional help but **do not know which organisations or services to contact, or how** to do so. Schools can play an important role by ensuring parents know where and how to access specialised support before an incident occurs.

What do parents need to protect their child from cyberbullying?

Parents consistently emphasise that they need **practical advice, clear instructions and concrete guidance** on how to recognise, prevent, and respond to cyberbullying. This includes:

- recognising warning signs of cyberbullying;
- starting difficult conversations with their child;
- information about current apps, games, platforms and communication channels children use and about digital trends;
- setting privacy and safety controls;
- preserving digital evidence;
- reporting harmful content;
- responding appropriately when an incident occurs;
- knowing when and where to seek further help.

Cyberbullying prevention as a shared responsibility

No individual parent, teacher, or expert can independently keep track of every new application, game, communication trend, or online risk. Protecting children and preventing cyberbullying requires a **wider support network** involving families, schools, public institutions, specialist organisations, and digital platforms. **Technology providers** also have a role in offering parents accessible guidance about the services children use, ideally in different languages and in formats suitable for people with varying levels of digital competence.

What would help parents engage more?

Parents consistently ask for **practical, current, accessible, and easy-to-use support**.

The following support needs, identified by parents and caregivers, are indicatively listed here and will be elaborated on throughout the subsequent chapters:

- Practical workshops and real-life examples;
- Digitally accessible and up-to-date resources;
- Access to specialist and/or more tailored support (e.g. pedagogues, social workers);
- Spaces to reflect on their own digital experiences;
- Joint parent-child activities to allow families to explore situations together;
- Regular communication, to create trust and build the foundations of a solid partnership where concerns can be raised by parents without fear of judgement or stigma.





Parents generally do not expect schools to solve every online safety problem, but they do see schools as an important bridge between families, children, experts, and reliable sources of information.





3. Good practices for teachers

Effective engagement with parents begins with a relationship based on trust, mutual respect, consistent practice, clearly defined procedures, and shared responsibility for the pupil's well-being and learning. These relationships take time to develop and require continuous effort, patience and open communication.

Trust grows when parents are involved from the outset, listened to without judgement, and recognised as important partners who know their child well. The school should contribute its professional knowledge and experience respectfully and supportively, even when perspectives differ. Constructive dialogue is strengthened when discussions focus on specific situations, behaviours and needs, rather than assumptions or labels, and when the school's perspective is considered alongside the parent's knowledge and experience.

Clear roles, appropriate boundaries, and agreed next steps provide a strong foundation for sustained cooperation. The best outcomes are achieved when schools and families work as partners to create a safe, supportive and positive environment for children, both offline and online.

Teachers report that effective parental involvement is built through regular, practical, and accessible communication that reflects parents' everyday circumstances, needs, and levels of digital confidence. A blended, multi-channel approach is particularly effective, combining official communication with opportunities for more personalised contact, including:

- **Face-to-face individual meetings** offer privacy and sufficient time for discussion, making it easier to reconcile different perspectives without the misunderstandings that written communication can sometimes cause.
- **Digital communication channels** (email, official platforms, mobile messaging apps, school website, and school social media) allow parents to access information at times that fit with their schedule.
- **Thematic parent meetings** and **practical workshops** address real-life challenges and provide practical advice.
- **Joint activities and family learning** help parents understand their children's online experiences, while children see that their parents are interested in their digital lives.

Case studies

These case studies present tried-and-tested activities developed by teachers from across Europe that can be easily adapted and replicated in different contexts.

Hungary	
Question prompts for parents	<i>In Hungary, one teacher encouraged parents to ask their children, "Has anything online made you feel uncomfortable this week?" without trying to solve the problem straight away. Afterwards, several parents informed the teacher that this single question opened conversations they had never managed to start before. One mother shared that her son spoke openly for the first time about being excluded from an online gaming group. Experiences like these illustrate that meaningful parental engagement often begins with simple conversations.</i>





Hungary	
Pupils teaching parents	<i>Giving students an active role in communicating with their parents works particularly well. During a Digital Citizenship Week in a school in Hungary, students prepared short presentations and activities instead of teachers delivering all the information. One group role-played how an ordinary class group chat gradually developed into cyberbullying, while another demonstrated how generative AI can produce convincing fake images within seconds. Parents said hearing these messages from their own children made the issues feel much more real and encouraged discussions that continued at home. Whenever possible, it is important to create situations where parents, students and teachers learn together instead of treating parents simply as recipients of information.</i>
Croatia	
Structuring a constructive conversation with parents	<i>A constructive conversation begins with showing understanding and respect. Recognising that parents know their child well helps establish trust, particularly when the discussion concerns a problem or sensitive issue. It can also help to acknowledge the pressures they may be experiencing and reassure them that the school's role is to support their child's learning, development, safety, and sense of belonging.</i> <i>The conversation can begin with positive observations about the student's strengths, work habits, progress, or relationships with others. This shows the student is viewed as a whole person, not only through grades, absences, or challenging behaviour.</i> <i>The discussion can then move to the issue itself, using clear examples of situations, behaviours or needs, and avoiding assumptions or labels. The school can explain why the matter is important, what support has already been provided and what has been observed from a professional perspective. At the same time, parents can be invited to share what they have noticed about their child's learning, emotions or difficulties, and what they believe may help.</i> <i>Maintaining an honest, calm and professional tone makes it easier to explore different perspectives and identify a shared way forward. The conversation can conclude with agreed support strategies, clear responsibilities, and a concrete next step for both the school and the family.</i>

Barriers to parental participation: the “hard-to-reach” parents and possible responses

While the above communication channels provide a useful starting point for schools seeking to engage parents and caregivers, parents may face a range of barriers that limit their communication with schools. These barriers rarely occur in isolation and often require **flexible, individualised responses**.

Teachers are keen to point out that **when parents are hard to reach, this does not necessarily mean that they are unwilling to participate**. Parents may not be actively involved for many reasons, and it is important to recognise and address these. In many cases, parents are not resistant to cooperation but **face practical, social, emotional, or structural barriers that limit their contact with the school**. It may therefore be more appropriate to speak of parents who are less engaged, less visible in school life, or more difficult for schools to reach through their usual communication practices.





Some parents are managing financial pressures, health concerns, family difficulties, separation, or other demanding circumstances. In some families, grandparents or other relatives have taken on responsibility for the child's care. When everyday needs take priority, engagement with the school may become difficult even when parents remain concerned about their child's welfare and education.

The sensitive and often personal nature of cyberbullying can also make some parents harder to reach. It may be relatively easy for parents to discuss cyberbullying as a general issue, but much more difficult to accept that their own child may have behaved inappropriately, contributed to harmful online behaviour, forwarded harmful content, remained a passive bystander, or failed to understand the consequences of their actions.

Limited time and availability

Demanding work schedules, shift work, family responsibilities, geographical distance, and financial pressures can make it difficult for parents to attend meetings or workshops during the school day. **The parents who may benefit most from support are sometimes those who find it hardest to come to school.**

- Schools can respond by:
 - ◆ offering meetings at different times;
 - ◆ providing phone or online consultations;
 - ◆ incorporating short educational activities into events that parents already attend, such as parent meetings, report-card collection days, or school exhibitions.
- Short guides, infographics, and videos can provide additional support as they allow access to information at a convenient time.

Non-responsive and declining behaviour

Parental engagement may **decrease as pupils grow older** and become more independent. Some parents believe that regular contact with the school is **unnecessary** because grades, attendance, and other information is already available through electronic school platforms.

Others may respond only when a serious problem arises or may expect the school to assume primary responsibility for addressing the pupil's difficulties.

- Important messages can include a clear request for acknowledgement or a reply, allowing the school to confirm that the information has been received.
- Direct invitations, regular contact, and communication about positive progress can help sustain engagement.
- When parents repeatedly do not respond, and there are serious concerns about the child's welfare, schools may need to follow established procedures and involve appropriate support services.

Low confidence in digital knowledge and skills

Many parents feel that technology is changing too quickly for them to keep up. They may believe that their children understand applications, games, artificial intelligence, or social media better than they do and may therefore feel unqualified or even intimidated to participate in discussions about digital safety.

They may feel insecure when dealing with new technologies and believe that they can no longer influence their child. **However, technical confidence does not necessarily mean that a child uses technology safely or responsibly.**

- It is important to reassure parents that they do not need to be technology experts to support their children. Their interest, willingness to listen, ability to set boundaries, and awareness of changes in the child's mood or behaviour are often more important than detailed technical knowledge.
- Practical guidance should focus on conversations, relationships, boundaries, and signs that a child may need support. This will make them feel more confident and in control.
- Schools should also avoid relying exclusively on digital channels. Parents with limited access or digital skills may require phone contact, printed materials, or face-to-face support.





Complex and unfamiliar language

Terms such as 'AI literacy' or 'algorithmic risk' may be meaningful to professionals, but feel distant from parents' everyday concerns, making communication less effective. **Language differences** can create an additional barrier.

- Information is more accessible when it uses plain language, concrete examples, and familiar situations.
- Rather than abstract concepts, discussions can explore practical questions, such as how to respond to online exclusion, or how to talk about privacy and screen time.
- Materials should, where possible, be brief, visual, translated or otherwise adapted to the needs of the families concerned.

Limited recognition of digital risks

Some parents may **underestimate** the seriousness of cyberbullying, harmful online content, privacy risks, or problematic use of games and social media. Others may view online safety as solely the school's responsibility and may **not recognise the importance of regular conversations at home**.

- Practical workshops, real-life examples, and expert-led presentations can help parents understand how digital risks affect children and what action they can take.
- Communication should emphasise shared responsibility and provide clear, realistic steps that parents can apply at home, rather than simply describing risks.

Fear of judgement, shame or blame

Parents may avoid communication because they fear **being seen as inadequate, blamed** for their child's behaviour, or **judged** by the school and wider community. This may be especially pronounced in small communities, where families are concerned about confidentiality or "what people will say". These feelings can lead parents to minimise difficulties, withhold information, or seek help only after a situation has escalated.

- A calm, confidential and non-judgemental approach can reduce defensiveness.
- It is helpful to communicate that children can make mistakes, including online, and that the purpose of the conversation is to understand the situation and provide support rather than assign blame.
- Beginning with the pupil's strengths and focusing on specific behaviours and needs can further reinforce the message that the school is seeking cooperation, not confrontation.

Different perspectives and defensive responses

Parents and teachers may **interpret the same situation differently**. Some parents may minimise their child's behaviour, find it difficult to accept that their child has contributed to a problem, or expect the school to resolve the issue without their involvement.

Communication can become **confrontational** when parents feel that their child is being unfairly treated, or when they approach the school through formal complaints, legal representatives, or messages drafted without first attempting direct dialogue. This creates a highly adversarial environment and completely bypasses the essential step of building mutual understanding.

- Conversations are more productive when they focus on verified information, specific situations, and their impact, rather than assumptions or labels.
- Parents should have sufficient time to explain their perspective, while the school clearly outlines what has been observed, what support has already been provided, and why further action is needed.
- Beginning with positive and specific information about the child can reduce defensiveness, but difficult issues should still be addressed openly and professionally.
- The conversation should conclude with clear responsibilities and an agreed next step.





Lack of trust in the school

Confidentiality requirements can sometimes **unintentionally** contribute to a lack of trust. In bullying and cyberbullying cases, parents may understandably want to know exactly what happened, who was involved, and what measures have been taken.

However, schools must also respect privacy and confidentiality, particularly when minors are involved or when a case has been reported to the relevant authorities. Parents may sometimes interpret this limited information as a lack of transparency, even when the school is acting to protect the rights and privacy of the children involved.

- Trust can be strengthened by clearly explaining what the school can communicate, what it cannot communicate for privacy or legal reasons, and what educational or support measures are being taken.
- Balancing transparency about what the school is doing with confidentiality about individual children is extremely important.

Some parents associate contact from school mainly with **complaints** or **disciplinary problems**. Negative experiences during their own schooling, dissatisfaction with the education system, or a mismatch between their expectations and what the school can realistically provide may further weaken trust.

- Trust is more likely to develop when communication is regular, transparent, and not limited to difficulties. Schools can strengthen relationships by sharing positive progress, explaining procedures clearly, and involving parents before problems arise.
- At the beginning of the school year, parents should receive clear information about communication channels, availability, expectations, complaint procedures, and the roles of teachers, school leaders and specialist staff.

Misinformation in parent messaging groups

Informal messaging groups can be useful for quick updates, but they can also **facilitate the rapid spread of incomplete or inaccurate information**. Individual concerns may become public discussions, and confidential information about pupils may be shared inappropriately.

- Schools can reduce these risks by providing timely information through trusted official channels and clearly explaining which matters should be addressed individually.
- When misinformation begins to circulate, a prompt factual response or a thematic parent meeting may help clarify the situation without identifying the pupils involved.
- Clear guidance on respectful communication, confidentiality, and the appropriate use of group channels is also important.

Limited specialist capacity

Teachers may identify **needs that fall outside their professional role or require specialised support**. Although the school's support services can provide valuable assistance, many schools have limited capacity given the number and complexity of cases.

- Parental engagement should form part of a coordinated whole-school approach, supported by clearly defined procedures and responsibilities.
- Where appropriate, parents can be referred to specialist staff within the school or to external services.
- Schools also need access to reliable resources, professional development, and expert support so that teachers and support staff are not expected to address complex digital, behavioural, or family challenges alone.
- [Insafe helplines](#) can often support schools and parents in these situations.

How to reach the “unreachable” parents

When communication has been limited for years, building a relationship only after a serious problem arises can be particularly challenging. **Effective outreach begins with recognising that limited involvement does not necessarily indicate a lack of care**. Approaching parents with empathy and curiosity makes it easier





to understand the reasons behind their absence or reluctance. Communication is more likely to become productive when parents see that the school is genuinely interested in supporting their child rather than contacting them only to report a problem.

Persistence is essential. One unanswered message or missed meeting should not be treated as evidence that a parent does not wish to engage.

- **Some parents will require support beyond what an individual teacher can provide.** Cooperation with school psychologists, pedagogues and other specialist staff can help create a more complete understanding of the family's needs. Where necessary, links with social welfare services, police, libraries, local associations and community organisations can extend the support available. **Community-based workshops** or events may also feel more accessible to parents who are uncomfortable attending formal school activities. **[Safer Internet Centres \(SICs\)](#) can often provide these types of events or advise on how to access them.**
- **Progress may be gradual, but consistency matters.** Respectful outreach can help parents feel recognised, supported, and more willing to work with the school in the child's best interests.

Case studies

The below case studies present real-life examples of different approaches to engaging parents who may be described as “hard-to-reach” and who may not respond to regular outreach activities and communication channels.

Türkiye	
Changing the way of organising activities	<i>To reach parents who were not responding to traditional meetings, a school in Türkiye created interactive opportunities during school events parents were already attending, instead of inviting families to another presentation. One activity invited parents to examine screenshots of realistic online conversations, with all identifying information removed, and decide at which point ordinary teasing became cyberbullying. The discussions that followed were often more valuable than a formal presentation because parents realised how difficult it can be to recognise warning signs before a situation becomes serious.</i> <i>Another successful initiative was a Digital Family Agreement, which students completed together with their parents at home. Families discussed topics such as screen time, online respect, privacy, gaming, and what they would do if cyberbullying occurred, then agreed on a small set of family rules. Many parents later commented that this activity encouraged conversations they had never had before.</i>
North Macedonia	
Student-led engagement	<i>To engage hard-to-reach parents, a teacher in North Macedonia found immense success by shifting to student-led engagement. By organising interactive events where students lead workshops or showcase digital safety games or projects, parents are highly motivated to attend and support their children. For those who still cannot make it, sharing video summaries and images directly in Viber and WhatsApp groups can help them participate in the community on their own schedule.</i>





How do schools educate parents about cyberbullying?

Schools address cyberbullying as part of a broader approach to responsible technology use, alongside topics such as artificial intelligence, digital well-being, digital citizenship, empathy, and online identity. This work may include parent meetings, practical advice and guidance, and conversations with both parents and pupils about children's online behaviour.

To strengthen parental involvement in preventing and addressing cyberbullying, schools can integrate the following elements into their regular practice.

A systematic whole-school approach

Effective parental participation in addressing cyberbullying needs to form part of a **systematic whole-school approach** that includes prevention, clear policies, awareness programmes, regular communication and structured training, active pupil and parent contributions, and access to specialist support. Some teachers emphasise the need to move away from a model focused mainly on telling parents what they should do and towards one based on partnership, shared responsibility, and collaboration.

School leaders have an important role in ensuring that procedures are understood and consistently applied. They also need to create conditions in which teachers, support staff, pupils, and parents can work together rather than treating cyberbullying as the responsibility of one individual or department. Greater and immediate access to psychologists, pedagogues, and other support staff would also strengthen prevention and response. **Teachers should not be expected to manage complex incidents and difficult conversations with families without support from school leadership and specialist services.** Prevention would be much more effective if school support staff could spend more time working directly with pupils and parents.

A **structured programme involving pupils, parents and staff** could establish a common understanding of online safety, responsible behaviour, and appropriate responses to harm. However, such a programme should remain **adaptable** so that it can respond to changing technologies, emerging risks, and the needs of the local school community.

Preventing cyberbullying requires cooperation among schools, families, and the wider community.

External experts, including psychologists, police officers, safer internet organisations, youth services, social workers, and lawyers, can contribute knowledge, provide psychological, educational, or legal perspectives, and increase the credibility of school activities. Community centres, libraries and local associations may also help schools reach parents who do not usually attend formal school events.

Parents with relevant professional or personal experience can contribute to school activities, while **parent associations** can help identify families' priorities and invite appropriate speakers. A peer-support model could go further by preparing a small number of parent mentors or digital safety ambassadors to support other families. Parents may feel more comfortable discussing concerns with parental peers who understand their experiences and can communicate in accessible language.

Children and young people should also contribute actively. Pupil-led presentations can help parents understand what children actually encounter online, while older pupils can prepare activities for younger pupils. Hearing directly from pupils can make digital risks more relevant and encourage further conversations within families.

Schools would also benefit from greater exchange of practice with other schools, regions, and countries. Many effective approaches remain confined to individual institutions, even though they could be adapted elsewhere. Sharing tried-and-tested activities, resources, and implementation experiences can reduce duplication of effort and help schools improve their practice.

Practical, accessible and localised resources

Schools would benefit from a wider range of ready-to-use materials designed specifically for parents and caregivers. Useful formats include infographics with actionable instructions, short videos, discussion prompts that parents can use to start conversations with their children, realistic case studies, checklists, brief information sheets, "what to do if..." guides with clear protocols, as well as targeted educational games or activities that parents and children could do together.





Materials are most effective when they are easily adapted to the local context and group and connected to authentic, real-life situations that children and families experience.

Safer Internet Centres produce many awareness-raising materials for parents and educators, and a [searchable resource repository is available here](#).

Clear guidance for responding to incidents

Parents need **practical guidance** that helps them **prevent, recognise, and respond** to cyberbullying. They need to recognise possible warning signs, such as sudden behavioural changes, social withdrawal, anxiety, or reluctance to use digital devices, which may indicate that a child is experiencing difficulties online. Guidance should explain how to begin a supportive conversation, respond appropriately when an incident occurs and follow up afterwards.

Parents should know:

- who to contact at school;
- which digital evidence should be preserved, and how to do it;
- how the school will assess and investigate the incident;
- what support will be offered to the pupils involved;
- what action the family, school, and online platform can take;
- when external institutions, such as the police or social services, should be involved.

A **standardised, clearly communicated school protocol** can reduce uncertainty and ensure parents receive consistent information. **Short visual summaries** of procedures are often more useful than lengthy policy documents. **Anonymous reporting systems** may also help pupils and parents raise concerns earlier. However, such tools need clear procedures, human follow-up, and appropriate support.

Continuous learning for school staff

Teachers also need regular professional development to keep pace with rapidly evolving forms of cyberbullying, digital culture, and the platforms young people currently use. Pupils often feel that adults do not understand their online world, particularly when teaching focuses on outdated examples that do not reflect their experiences. Teacher training should be practical, current, and informed by the perspectives and lived experiences of children and young people.

Looking beyond attendance

Finally, **the effectiveness of parental engagement should not be measured only by attendance at school meetings or workshops**. Some parents may be unable to participate in formal events yet still provide consistent support at home.

Everyday conversations about children's online experiences may have a greater impact than attending a single event. Parents who listen without judgement, notice behavioural changes, establish appropriate boundaries, and know where to seek help make an important contribution to prevention.

Schools should therefore evaluate not only attendance, but also **whether parents feel better informed, more confident, better able to talk with their children, and better able to respond to online difficulties**. This helps strengthen the connection between what children learn at school and the support at home.

Case studies

These case studies present different initiatives developed by schools and educators across Europe to address cyberbullying through education, prevention and awareness-raising activities for parents. These practical approaches can be replicated in and adapted to different educational contexts.





Türkiye	
Scenario-based workshops	<i>One activity that parents in Türkiye have found valuable is discussing realistic situations together. Teachers would present a scenario in which a student becomes the target of an embarrassing AI-generated image shared through class group chats. Before introducing recommended responses, parents discuss how they would react, what emotions their child might be experiencing, and what they believe should happen during the first 24 hours. Reflecting on these situations together builds parents' confidence and prepares them for conversations they may eventually have at home.</i>
Croatia	
Collaborative mural	<i>In Croatia, teachers have delivered activities that promote tolerance, empathy, and respect for diversity. One example is the workshop "Tolerance in my school", during which pupils create a collaborative mural or poster illustrating the values of tolerance and mutual respect. Pupils then discuss this with their parents and write down any feedback.</i>
North Macedonia	
Pupils as facilitators and gamified learning	<i>When it comes to educating parents on cyberbullying, it is necessary to move away from fear-based lectures and instead empower parents through active, practical learning. Rather than relying on dry, theoretical presentations, a teacher in North Macedonia has chosen to use highly interactive, gamified materials, involving students as workshop facilitators and presenters of their own work. There is immense power in having the students lead. When the younger generation guides adults through these tools, technical intimidation fades. This student-led work can be complemented by online resources that provide parents with ready-to-use materials. Through interaction with student facilitators and hands-on materials, parents don't just learn about cyberbullying; they experience the digital landscape firsthand and learn the language to use when discussing it at home.</i>
Greece	
National platform for easy reporting	<i>Recently, Greece launched a national digital platform for reporting bullying incidents. This tool allows parents and secondary school students to directly submit named reports regarding bullying and cyberbullying. To manage this, each school principal appoints designated educators to act as official "Report recipients". When a complaint is submitted, the platform automatically notifies the school leadership. Simultaneously, it alerts a specialised four-member action group at the regional educational directorate. This group includes specialised educators and psychologists. This new structure aims to ensure teachers are not left alone to handle complex cases. Instead, schools must follow a structured procedure in direct collaboration with experts.</i>





Italy	
School's anti-bullying and cyberbullying protocol	<i>In Italy, a school anti-bullying and cyberbullying protocol is extremely important, translating national legislation into implementable procedures. It identifies responsibilities, reporting procedures, intervention levels, and the roles of teachers, parents, students, school leadership, psychologists, and external services.</i> <i>Its underlying philosophy is particularly important: parents are considered allies with whom the school should share strategies, educational objectives, and appropriate information. The protocol also distinguishes between different levels of prevention and intervention, ranging from general awareness raising to targeted intervention in confirmed or serious cases.</i>





4. Good practices for Safer Internet Centres

Effective communication methods and strategies for engaging with parents

[Safer Internet Centres \(SICs\)](#) highlight that the strongest approaches to effective communication and engagement with parents tend to combine trusted intermediaries, practical and relevant content, and different communication formats. **The common principle is to reach parents where they already are, through people and organisations they trust, with practical information relevant to their everyday lives.**

Trusted intermediaries

For many SICs, **schools are the most effective channel for reaching parents**, particularly because the school community already has established relationships, networks, and communication channels with parents. Engagement is particularly successful when SIC-led activities are integrated into occasions **when parents are already at school**, for example, during or immediately after parent meetings or end-of-school-year celebrations, so that the additional time commitment for parents is reduced.

Schools often invite SICs to deliver lectures, thematic parent meetings, seminars, and interactive workshops. Direct “on-the-floor” contact allows SICs to meet parents in a familiar environment and provide practical guidance on online safety issues. Well-known parenting experts and child psychologists are often invited to further strengthen parents’ trust and interest.

SICs note that participation is significantly higher when school principals and teachers actively support an event, personally invite parents, and host activities in a familiar setting. **Parents are more likely to take part when the invitation comes from someone they already know and trust.**

Beyond schools, **SICs also work with different organisations that have established outreach networks.** This includes parents’ associations, libraries, municipalities, local community organisations and initiatives, foster-care organisations, organisations supporting people with special educational and additional needs, agencies, and other networks that families already know and trust.

- The [Luxembourg SIC](#) provides a practical example of how such networks can be mobilised and supported. The SIC developed a [flyer for municipalities](#) and distributed it across the country, providing practical guidance on how to organise information sessions for parents.

Focus on topics immediately relevant to parents’ everyday lives

Parents are exposed to large amounts of advice, some of it contradictory, alarmist or difficult to apply. At the same time, some parents have limited awareness of existing school protocols, reporting procedures, and available support, which can make it harder to know what to do or where to turn when a problem occurs.

Parents respond best to practical communication linked to situations they recognise from family life.

Real-life cases, short videos, stories, step-by-step recommendations, experience-sharing, and practical problem-solving tend to work better than general warnings about online risks.

Several SICs also stress the importance of **not frightening or blaming parents**. Many parents already feel that their children understand technology better than they do. Communication should therefore reassure them that they do not need to know every application or technical feature. Instead, they can focus on remaining interested in their child’s online life, maintaining open communication, agreeing on appropriate boundaries, and knowing where to seek help.

It is also helpful to **connect online safety with wider parenting concerns**, such as relationships, well-being, bullying, sleep, or school performance. Presenting online safety only as a technical issue can make it seem distant from everyday family life.

- The [Swedish SIC’s digital parents’ meeting](#) during Safer Internet Day (SID) 2025 attracted many





registrations and strong post-event views. Parents could submit questions beforehand, which were grouped into themes and addressed during the live broadcast, with additional answers and resources shared afterwards.

Different formats for different parents

Because **parents** are a **diverse audience with different needs and experiences**, SICs emphasise the importance of providing information in different user-friendly, implementable formats. These include dedicated parent hubs, videos, advice articles, tools, how-to guides, checklists, parent booklets, brochures, factsheets, tips for parents, recorded webinars, information stands, and other on-demand resources.

Printed materials remain important and are often distributed through schools and other organisations.

Press releases and national or local media can also extend the reach of SIC messages.

Online communication and social media

Safer Internet Centre websites commonly include dedicated sections for parents with practical information and resources.

- The Icelandic SIC's [Parents' Toolbox](#), for example, brings together user-friendly information on social media platforms, video games, parental controls, and sources of further support.

Newsletters and social media are also widely used to promote activities, reach out to parents, and increase visibility. However, **some SICs have noticed declining organic reach on social media**, which makes these channels less reliable for reaching parents without additional promotion. This reinforces the need to **combine social media activities with trusted partner networks**, community organisations, collaborative campaigns, and creator partnerships.

Partnerships and a whole-community approach

SICs **repeatedly highlight the importance of community work and cooperation** between schools, institutions, families, and other partners. Different organisations bring different expertise, networks, and communication channels, helping reach a broader range of parents more effectively. Sustained relationships of trust can make parents more comfortable sharing concerns and seeking professional support.

- The [Albanian SIC](#) provides an example of deeper engagement, where parents have moved from being participants in information sessions to becoming online safety ambassadors. This transformation, developed in partnership with the [Albanian Ministry of Education and Sports](#), shows the potential of involving parents as active contributors within a wider community approach involving schools, families, institutions, and other stakeholders.
- In Sweden, the Public Health Agency mailed [screen-time recommendations](#) to all parents in a certain age group, and the [SIC used this existing outreach channel to include links to its own resources and materials](#).

Joint parent-child activities are also highlighted as a promising way to strengthen engagement. Involving children and young people in parent-focused activities can turn online safety into a shared family conversation, creating opportunities to learn, discuss concerns, and reflect together. Youth-led activities and campaigns can further enrich this approach by giving young people an active role in communicating their experiences, concerns, and perspectives on online challenges and risks.

- The Luxembourg SIC's [Digital Discovery Day](#) is a particularly successful example, having received very positive feedback from parents: interactive workshops where families explore digital topics together, solve challenges collaboratively, and discuss online safety in a playful and engaging way.
- In Cyprus, the [SIC's](#) "Parents and children at the same desk"¹ initiative brings parents and children together for cyber-safety workshops during school hours, encouraging them to learn, collaborate, and discuss online-safety issues together in the classroom.

¹ Workshops are 80 minutes long and take place during school hours, typically in the early morning (07:30–09:00).





A combination of trusted, practical and accessible approaches

The strongest approach combines trusted, practical, and accessible communication strategies.

Combining school-based engagement alongside websites, social media, newsletters, webinars, printed resources, public events, and traditional media supports more successful engagement.

- The [Maltese SIC](#), alongside school- and community-based activities, maintains a consistent presence in national media, including on television programmes, newspaper articles, and a monthly radio slot on online safety, reaching parents in their everyday routines and homes, including those who may never sign up for a talk or follow SIC social media channels. The SIC also invests in face-to-face public outreach beyond formal sessions by attending public exhibitions and large events. Around [SaferInternet Day \(SID\)](#), it organises in-person outreach in the city, choosing weekends or public holidays so working parents and families already out in the community are more likely to encounter and engage with the SIC.
- As Ireland has one of the highest radio audiences in Europe, the [Irish SIC](#) also uses radio as a valuable way to reach parents with national radio campaigns proven to be very effective.

Reaching parents through multiple channels is only one part of an effective approach. These channels are most effective when they are supported by **coordinated action across the education system and wider community**.

- The [Spanish Ministry of Education](#) emphasises that, although there is no single national strategy aimed exclusively at parents, several coordinated measures provide guidance, training, reporting mechanisms, and professional support. These measures operate across national, regional and local levels and involve schools, families, parent associations, municipalities, and other public services. Schools are supported through common protocols, practical family resources, and designated well-being coordinators. Different nationwide initiatives, regional programmes and municipal good-practice models involve parents through training and development of their digital competences, guidance, prevention activities, and follow-up procedures. The emphasis is placed on coordinated action between schools, families, public authorities and other services, rather than leaving parent engagement to schools alone.
- The [Irish Department of Education and Youth](#) similarly emphasises that Ireland does not have a separate national strategy devoted exclusively to engaging parents on cyberbullying. Instead, parental engagement is embedded within the broader national frameworks for [preventing bullying](#) and [promoting online safety](#). Different measures and initiatives provide training, practical guidance, reporting, and support mechanisms for families. A key feature is a partnership approach that involves students, staff, parents, boards of management, government services, and specialist organisations in prevention, early identification, reporting, and response. The overall Irish approach is an integrated whole-education and online safety framework, rather than a single parental cyberbullying strategy.

Barriers to engaging: the “hard-to-reach” parents and possible responses

While the strategies and good practice examples above provide a strong foundation for engaging parents and caregivers, SICs recognise that some parents remain unresponsive to their general communication and awareness-raising activities because of a range of barriers.

Frequently mentioned hard-to-reach groups by the SICs tend to include, among others, families from minority groups facing language, cultural, socio-economic, geographical, or digital barriers; parents with limited time, educational attainment, or engagement with schools; parents and caregivers of children with disabilities or special educational needs; and parents who feel they do not need additional education on these topics.

Each parent in a hard-to-reach group faces different circumstances and challenges. However, the barriers that limit their engagement often share common characteristics. SICs' experiences suggest that difficulties reaching parents rarely stem from a single factor. Instead, they often result from a combination of practical, emotional, structural, social, and relational barriers.

Importantly, lower levels of engagement should not be interpreted as a lack of interest or willingness





to participate. In many cases, parents value support and cooperation, but certain challenges make engagement more difficult. Understanding these barriers can help inform more targeted and inclusive approaches that better meet the needs of different parent and caregiver groups.

Limited time and availability

Limited time and competing priorities are among the most frequently mentioned challenges. Parents often struggle to attend sessions, webinars or events because of work or other family commitments. Some SICs report seeing a drop in webinar attendance as parents juggle many competing priorities.

- **Flexible formats** and timing help address availability barriers. SICs offer sessions at different times of the day, organise evening activities, and deliver online sessions. Some organise activities during weekends or public holidays, or embed parent sessions into school induction events and parent-teacher meetings.

Non-responsive behaviour and lack of trust

Preventive activities tend to attract parents who are already interested in digital parenting, while those who might benefit most often do not participate. Many parents become interested **only after something has already happened**, or they do not see online safety as an immediate risk or an important family concern until a problem directly affects their child.

Some SICs also report a broader lack of interest or resistance to engagement. The [Bulgarian SIC](#) notes that only around **10 per cent of parents are consistently active and willing to engage in school initiatives**. At the other end of the spectrum, up to 10 per cent tend to oppose or undermine the work of schools and teachers. The remaining majority, approximately 80 per cent, are relatively passive and rarely participate unless a specific issue directly affects their child.

- SICs emphasise **transparency, open communication, and building trust** when trying to engage with parents and caregivers. Communication should be practical, non-judgemental, and easy to understand, without unnecessary technical language, and include real-life examples from families' everyday experiences.
- Some SICs also highlight the **value of personal stories** and competence-building approaches. For example, a well-known person sharing their own experience of being bullied can make the issue more relatable and help attract attention.
- Working with other government agencies, trusted professionals, and existing networks enhances outreach to parents who may not engage directly with the SIC. Such **collaborations** help expand the visibility of SICs' resources and initiatives.

Fear of judgement, shame, or blame

Stigma can further delay engagement, as some families may view cyberbullying as something shameful or private rather than an issue to report and address early.

- For sensitive issues, **confidential counselling and online support** can lower the threshold for seeking help, as some parents may feel more comfortable asking for advice privately than attending a public seminar.
- For families who **may not feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues** through the school or in a group setting, alternative routes may be introduced. The [Czech SIC](#) introduced a confidential [parent helpline](#) where parents can seek advice privately. The SIC also helps to stimulate conversations indirectly; short online-safety messages delivered to pupils through interactive touchscreens in schools can keep the topic visible in everyday school life, while also providing a starting point for conversations at home.

Low confidence in digital knowledge and skills

Digital confidence varies significantly between parents. Some feel that their children are more knowledgeable about technology than they are and worry that they lack the skills to support and guide them effectively. Rapidly changing terminology and platforms can reinforce this feeling. Some parents also expect online risks to be addressed mainly through technical tools or bans, or see online safety as primarily the responsibility of schools or technology providers.





- Facing this barrier, SICs again highlight the importance of fostering trust through clear, transparent, and accessible communication. Messages are most effective when they are practical, relatable, and free from overly technical terminology, drawing on examples that reflect families' everyday lives.
- A promising approach, highlighted by the [Spanish Ministry of Education](#), is to **address the digital-skills gap directly by training parents in internet and social-media use**, rather than focusing only on warnings about risks.

How to reach the “unreachable” parents

Some parent groups face additional barriers to engaging with online safety advice and support. SICs increasingly recognise the need for targeted approaches that address linguistic, cultural, educational, and accessibility needs, ensuring all families can benefit from online safety resources.

- **For migrant and language-minority families**, SICs work with organisations supporting these communities and provide translation where possible. Austria works with mother-tongue teachers and organisations supporting migrant families. The [Austrian SIC](#) has also involved older siblings in migrant families who often play a role in their younger siblings' media education.
- **Collaboration with organisations and professionals that already support different groups has proven successful**. These partnerships help SICs better understand the needs and experiences of hard-to-reach parents and their children, and inform the development of relevant content responsive to the issues these families face.
- Ireland's [Webwise](#) has worked with various **industry partners** to provide parent webinars and practical step-by-step demonstrations on how to use parent teen accounts on social media, how to set up parental controls, and similar topics. They have worked with [Enable Ireland](#) to develop sessions for parents of **children with additional needs, and therapists who work with them**.

Advice and support for schools in engaging with hard-to-reach groups

The level of support schools receive varies across SICs. While some offer specific guidance, ready-made resources, and training, others report that they do not currently provide dedicated support in this area.

A common form of support is providing schools with practical, ready-to-use materials, such as ready-made presentations for parent evenings, leaflets, educational materials, and newsletters for professionals.

- Ireland's [Webwise](#), for example, offers free scripted talks that schools can use to host parent information sessions. It also directs schools to the [Better Internet for Kids \(BIK\) platform](#), particularly for [resources available in different languages](#).
- The [Austrian SIC](#) recommends being present in teacher and school leader professional development training, offering a trainer network for parents' evenings, and supporting schools in media interviews.
- The [Croatian SIC](#) supports schools by providing educational materials, guidance, and advice on communicating with parents about online safety.

Some SICs help schools make parent engagement more interactive and relevant. This includes involving students in parent events, giving young people opportunities to discuss their hopes and concerns, and providing practical demonstrations for parents on technology use.

Schools are also advised to use multiple communication channels, keep messages concise and practical, offer both online and in-person participation, organise sessions at convenient times, and provide multilingual resources where possible. Several SICs stress the importance of encouraging dialogue rather than lecturing and using practical, solution-oriented examples.

Another recommendation is to work through trusted intermediaries and wider support networks. Cooperation with the Ministry of Education and other public authorities can help schools reach broader audiences.

- The [Maltese SIC](#) works closely with different Ministry of Education directorates, supports schools in communicating with parents about digital technologies, collaborates on cases involving online issues, and helps some schools develop policies on cyberbullying and related online risks.





SICs encourage schools to approach parents through partnership and trust-building, but they need to recognise that it is a gradual process that develops over time. Online safety should become a recurring topic of conversation with parents. **Sustained engagement and regular communication can help strengthen relationships and gradually increase parents' participation and confidence.**

Despite these efforts, many SICs acknowledge that reaching the parents who are most difficult to engage remains a persistent challenge. In other words, the barriers can be reduced, but they have not been fully overcome. Continued efforts to understand parents' needs and adapt engagement strategies accordingly are essential. This will ensure that all families can have access to the information, guidance and support they need to help children prevent, address, and respond to cyberbullying and other online and offline risks.





Annex 1: Glossary of terms related to cyberbullying

Term	Description	Source
Catfishing	“steal[ing] someone’s identity and information to cheat others with a fake profile.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ²
Cyber-mob attacks, also known as Dogpiling (cyber-mobbing)	“when a large group of abusers collectively attacks a target through a barrage of threats, slurs, insults, and other abusive tactics.”	<i>PEN America (n.d.)</i> ³
Cyberstalking	“sending electronic content, such as messages or photos, to annoy, threaten and scare an individual.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ⁴
Deepfake cyberbullying	“hyper-realistic, fabricated content, depicting students in harmful or compromising scenarios they never participated in, leading to severe reputational damage and emotional trauma.”	<i>Alexander (2025)</i> ⁵
(online) Denigration	“gossiping or spreading fake rumours about an individual to spoil an individual’s reputation.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ⁶
Dissing	“posting information to damage an individual’s public image.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ⁷
Doxing	“personal information on others is sought and released, thereby violating their privacy and facilitating further harassment.”	<i>Chen et al. (2019, p. 1)</i> ⁸
Flaming (roasting)	“starting online fighting with anger, usually with uppercase letters to indicate such emotion.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 4)</i> ⁹
Flooding	“sending bullying content to an individual limitlessly.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ¹⁰

2 Teng, T. H., Varathan, K. D. and Crestani, F. (2024), A comprehensive review of cyberbullying-related content classification in online social media, *Expert Systems with Applications*, Vol. 244, p. 122644, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2023.122644>

3 PEN America (n.d.), Defining “Online Abuse”: A Glossary of Terms - Online Harassment Field Manual, Online Harassment Field Manual website, accessed 24 September 2025b, <https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/defining-online-harassment-a-glossary-of-terms/>

4 See footnote 2

5 Alexander, S. (2025), Deepfake Cyberbullying: The Psychological Toll on Students and Institutional Challenges of AI-Driven Harassment, *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, Vol. 98, Issue 2, pp. 36–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2025.2488777>

6 See footnote 2

7 See footnote 2

8 Chen, M., Cheung, A. S. Y. and Chan, K. L. (2019), Doxing: What Adolescents Look for and Their Intentions, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 16, Issue 2, p. 218, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16020218>

9 See footnote 2

10 See footnote 2





Hateful speech	“expression that attacks a specific aspect of a person’s identity, such as their race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc. Hateful speech online often takes the form of ad hominem attacks, which invoke prejudicial feelings over intellectual arguments in order to avoid discussion of the topic at hand by attacking a person’s character or attributes.”	<i>PEN America (n.d.)</i> ¹¹
(cyber) (online) Grooming (internet predation)	“this is generally limited to adults using technology to solicit and recruit children into online or offline sexual encounters or to obtain sexual images or videos. Online grooming offences can be perpetrated by adults encountered online and adults already known to the child from offline venues.”	<i>WHO (2022, p. 5)</i> ¹²
(cyber) (online) Harassment	“involves sending insulting and abusive messages repeatedly and continually toward an individual. The behaviour of discriminating against an individual by appearance, gender, and race falls in this type.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 4)</i> ¹³
(online) Impersonation (fraping)	“creation of a hoax social media account, often using the target’s name and/or photo, to post offensive or inflammatory statements to defame, discredit, or instigate further abuse. A harasser can also impersonate someone the target knows in order to cause harm.”	<i>PEN America (n.d.)</i> ¹⁴
Masquerading	“involves pretending to be someone else to send something to an individual by hiding his identity.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ¹⁵
Nonconsensual sexting (revenge porn)	“distributing sexual images of someone without the consent of the victim.”	<i>Gámez-Guadix et al. (2022, p. 790)</i> ¹⁶
Outing	“sharing information that encompasses private or personal content with the public.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ¹⁷
Pulling a pig	“sending messages to seduce girls considered not pretty and fat and making fun of it by publicly posting the conversation.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ¹⁸

11 See footnote 3

12 WHO (2022a), Violence Against Children Online. What health systems and health care providers can do, <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/violence-against-children-online>

13 See footnote 2

14 See footnote 3

15 See footnote 2

16 Gámez-Guadix, M., Mateos-Pérez, E., Wachs, S., Wright, M., Martínez, J. et al. (2022), Assessing image-based sexual abuse: Measurement, prevalence, and temporal stability of sextortion and nonconsensual sexting (“revenge porn”) among adolescents, *Journal of Adolescence*, Vol. 94, Issue 5, pp. 789–799, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12064>

17 See footnote 2

18 See footnote 2





(online) Solicitation	[solicitation for sexual activities] “may come from a wide variety of solicitors, including many peer solicitations that are unwanted, frightening and harassing.”	<i>WHO (2022, p. 5)</i> ¹⁹
(online) Racism	“posting something to discriminate against an individual due to different aspects of ethnicity, nationality, religion, and race.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ²⁰
Sextortion	“threatening with distributing sexual images to pressure the victim into doing something.”	<i>Gámez-Guadix et al. (2022, p. 290)</i> ²¹
Social exclusion (ostracism)	“excluding an individual from a social group or making an individual feel outcast. For instance, this occurs in the chat room or online discussion group by removing or unfriending an individual from the list.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ²²
Trickery (deception)	“tricking an individual into getting his trust but later exposing his information to the public.”	<i>Teng et al. (2024, p. 5)</i> ²³
(online) Trolling	“posting controversial content in online spaces [...] as a form of entertaining activity for both trolls and (some) bystanders at the behest of the victims.”	<i>Scriven (2025, pp. 284–285)</i> ²⁴

¹⁹ See footnote 12

²⁰ See footnote 2

²¹ See footnote 16

²² See footnote 2

²³ See footnote 2

²⁴ Scriven, P. (2025), Online trolling as a dark leisure activity, *Annals of Leisure Research*, Vol. 28, Issue 2, Routledge, pp. 283–301, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2024.2358764>





Annex 2: Information for parents about cyberbullying

What does research tell us about cyberbullying involving children and young people?

Over the past five years, **cyberbullying has been the most common issue** reported to the [Safer Internet Centre helplines](#) across Europe, accounting for **15 per cent of the 57,000 calls received in 2025²⁵**.

Furthermore, the EU estimates that around one in six children aged 11–15 have experienced cyberbullying, while approximately one in eight admit to having engaged in cyberbullying behaviour themselves.

The Insafe network of helplines uses a definition of cyberbullying which states:

Cyberbullying usually involves a child being picked on, ridiculed and intimidated by another child, other children, or adults using online technologies. Cyberbullying may involve psychological violence and can be intentional or unintentional.

Globally, there are many definitions of cyberbullying which vary slightly, with many suggesting that cyberbullying is a deliberate and repeated act.

The recently published [EU Action plan against cyberbullying](#) from the European Commission promotes a common understanding of cyberbullying:

Cyberbullying refers to behaviour carried out through digital technologies, with the primary intention or effect of repeatedly or continuously humiliating, socially excluding, abusing, harassing or harming in particular children or young people.

Some core characteristics that may be applied to cyberbullying include:

- intention
- repetition
- a power imbalance
- a sense of anonymity
- use of electronic/digital technology
- accountability (a lack of)
- publicity.

It is also important to acknowledge that, in many instances of cyberbullying involving youth, there is likely to be a form of offline bullying occurring at the same time, or a link between the victim and the perpetrator offline. Further information can be found in the [JRC research report](#).

What forms can cyberbullying take?

Cyberbullying can take many forms and encompass a broad range of behaviours. The use of technology and online tools or services means that instances of cyberbullying can include any of the following forms:

- Text (such as threatening or offensive comments, social media posts, website content or messages).
- Visual – images or videos (such as embarrassing or compromising images of a victim, fake, manipulated or AI-generated images/videos, visual content designed to elicit fear/shock/upset, and memes designed to mock or offend).

²⁵ [2025 recap in figures infographic - Better Internet for Kids](#)





- Audio (such as threatening voice messages or phone calls, offensive in-game audio chat, or other audio designed to intimidate, offend or upset).
- Behaviours that mirror offline violence (such as behaviour where a user may repeatedly invade the 'physical space' of another, or repeatedly target and attack them in a game or VR experience).
- Public communication (bullying behaviour visible to other online users).
- Private communication (bullying behaviour visible only to the victim(s)).

The [Joint Research Centre \(JRC\)](#) published [Cyberbullying: Insights from science, policy and legislation](#) (2025), which includes a glossary of terms denoting behaviours and practices related to cyberbullying.

Considering the main roles involved in cyberbullying can also help explain the nature of the phenomenon. Pozza et al (2016)²⁶ proposed three main roles with subtypes:

- **Perpetrator(s)** – a bully or bullies, i.e. the person(s) who conduct(s) cyberbullying activities:
 - ◆ **Entitlement bullies** – feel they are superior/have the right to bully others.
 - ◆ **Retaliators** – those who have been bullied and seek revenge.
- **Victim(s)** – i.e. the person(s) who are targeted by cyberbullying activities.
- **Bystander(s)** – i.e. the person(s) who witness the cyberbullying activities:
 - ◆ Part of the problem – encourage the bullying or do not intervene at all.
 - ◆ Part of the solution – stand up to the bullying or seek to stop it.

These three main roles can be useful to consider in the context of prevalence rates and what that can mean for how professionals support those involved in instances of cyberbullying.

A systematic review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying prevalences in EU countries by Henares-Montiel et al (2022)²⁷ found that **cybervictimisation** rates (youth reporting that they are victims of cyberbullying) across studies varied between 2.8 and 31.5 per cent, and **cyberperpetration** rates (youth reporting they have bullied others) varied between 3.0 and 30.6 per cent. The role with the highest prevalence (and greatest range) was that of **cyberbystander**, varying from 13.0 to 53.1 per cent across studies.

Therefore, the most common group of young people experiencing cyberbullying are typically those who are bystanders rather than those who are victims or perpetrators. It is important to consider the practical advice and support given to youth who are concerned about cyberbullying but who are not directly involved.

What are the motives behind cyberbullying?

There are a number of different reasons why an individual may bully someone else online. These include:

- **an extension of bullying offline** – shifting the behaviour online allows the bully to target someone at any time of day or night, and from any geographical location. It also allows them to abuse or harass someone multiple times very quickly, whether through repeated behaviour on one app or platform, or a wide-ranging attack across multiple online platforms and services;
- **seeking 'revenge'** on someone who they believe has wronged them;
- treating someone else badly to make the **bully feel 'better' about themselves**;
- **displacement** – some bullies are the victim of bullying themselves and seek to displace their feelings about their own abuse by targeting someone else with the same behaviour;
- perceiving bullying to be 'fun' or a **game** (and sometimes anonymous) can disinhibit people to see cyberbullying behaviour as 'not real';
- **a lack of** engagement in, or understanding of, morals, emotions and **empathy**;

26 Pozza, A., et al. (2016). Cyberbullying among young people.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307864766_CYBERBULLYING_AMONG_YOUNG_PEOPLE

27 Henares-Montiel, J., Benítez-Hidalgo, V., Ruiz-Pérez, I., Pastor-Moreno, G., & Rodríguez-Barranco, M. (2022). Cyberbullying and Associated Factors in Member Countries of the European Union: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Studies with Representative Population Samples. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(12), 7364. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9223899>





- **joining in** with bullying behaviour by others to conform to social norms or ‘fit in’, or because of **peer pressure** on them;
- an attempt to **get attention** from others;
- a **targeted attack** on an individual or group motivated by dislike, prejudice, or hatred for personal characteristics (such as race, gender, sexual orientation and so on). In these cases, bullying could also be considered hate speech, and if inciting violence, possibly also a hate crime.

What is the impact of cyberbullying?

The way in which cyberbullying can impact the young people involved **can vary dramatically from incident to incident**. It is dependent on a number of factors, such as the previous experiences of those involved, the specific nature of the bullying, the resilience of the victim, the way in which the issue is resolved (if it is resolved at all), and the potential for impact to vary over time, from short-term to long-term.

While there can be significant differences across cyberbullying incidents, there are some **patterns and shared characteristics regarding their impact**. A systematic review by Bottini et al. (2015)²⁸ identified greater emotional and psychosomatic problems in both victims and perpetrators, as well as both experiencing difficulties and feeling less safe or cared for at school. Associations between cyberbullying and depressive symptoms, substance use, and suicidal ideation and attempts were also established. The Annual Bullying Survey 2020²⁹ by Ditch the Label in the UK found that a significant number of youths felt depressed because of being bullied (36 per cent), with a third (33 per cent) experiencing suicidal thoughts, and over a quarter (27 per cent) self-harming in some way.

How to support children and young people

When supporting a young person in understanding and dealing with a cyberbullying issue, it is important to consider the following areas:

- **The nature of the bullying** – what are the specific forms of bullying that they are experiencing? How frequently have these occurred? Is offline bullying also taking place?
- **Local laws** – does any of the bullying behaviour (potentially) break the laws in your country?
- **Their involvement** – are they being bullied or expressing concern for others who are? Are they a perpetrator and struggling with managing their own behaviour?
- **The perpetrators** – are they known to the victim? Are they identifiable or anonymous?
- **The impact** – how is this bullying behaviour affecting the mental health and well-being of the young person? What emotions are they experiencing? Are they in danger of being physically harmed or abused? Is the bullying affecting their reputation (online and/or offline)?
- **What actions have they taken?** Have they attempted to challenge/stand up to the bullying? Have they spoken to anyone about their concerns? Have they used any online tools to seek help or support?

The advice provided to each individual and the actions taken will differ depending on their circumstances – a young person in significant distress because of bullying may require more urgent counselling and support than a young person who has spoken up to express concerns about online behaviour towards their peers.

There are several **strategies** that you can share and discuss with children and young people on how to respond to cyberbullying, applicable to many instances:

- **Don't ignore it** – for some young people, there is a belief that cyberbullying is “one of those things that happens to you” during childhood. This can lead to a passive acceptance of the behaviour when it occurs. Other youth have experienced situations where they have told a trusted adult about cyberbullying, and the response has been to “just ignore it”. It is important to take all concerns about cyberbullying seriously and not brush them off as merely being a friendship issue or a problem that will go away on its own. Ignoring cyberbullying prevents the root cause of the problem from being tackled. While ignoring it may bring the cyberbullying of one young person to an end, there is a risk that it just

28 Bottino, S. M. B., Bottino, C. M. C., Ribeiro, W. S., Aora, A., & Ditzel, C. (2015). Cyberbullying and adolescent mental health: systematic review. *Cadernos de Saúde Pública*, 31(3), 463-475. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25859714/>

29 Ditch the Label Annual Bullying Survey 2020. <https://www.ditchthelabel.org/research-report/The%20Annual%20Bullying%20Survey%202020>





redirects a bully's attention onto another victim to allow the process to start again.

- **Don't retaliate** – in many instances of bullying, the perpetrator is looking to get a reaction from the victim or others who experience the bullying; typically, a strong emotional response such as anger or upset. Therefore, responding to cyberbullying with aggressive or abusive behaviour is never recommended, as it often leads to an escalation in behaviour. A young person being bullied who then attempts to bully the perpetrator also runs the risk of facing consequences for their abusive behaviour.
- **Look for ways to positively challenge** – while retaliation is not recommended, there may be instances where a young person (particularly one in the role of a bystander) may be able to intervene or challenge cyberbullying in a way that may lead to a faster resolution. This could include:
 - ◆ Publicly calling out unacceptable behaviour to draw attention to it.
 - ◆ Privately messaging the perpetrator(s) to ask them to stop or explain why their behaviour is unacceptable.
 - ◆ The suitability of challenging cyberbullying depends on the context – if a young person feels that challenging the behaviour will place them or others at risk, then it is not a recommended strategy; there are other ways to deal with the behaviour.
- **Look for ways to positively support** – in many instances, supporting the victim(s) may be more effective than focusing on the perpetrator(s). Strategies to positively support include:
 - ◆ Publicly sharing something positive about the victim(s).
 - ◆ Privately messaging the victim(s) to offer help, make your support known, give advice, or attempt to improve their mood.
 - ◆ Seeking support on behalf of the victim(s), such as speaking to a helpline or trusted adult.
 - ◆ Reporting content and users to the games/apps/platforms where the bullying behaviour occurs.
- **Saving evidence** – bullying through technology can be captured in a variety of ways, which can be helpful in collecting proof of the behaviour, as well as patterns of behaviour. Most smartphones, tablets and computers allow screenshots to be captured (saving any content on screen at the time) through pressing one or two buttons on the device. Game consoles and newer phones/tablets also allow easy video capture of a screen. On some apps/platforms, chat logs or message history can also be backed up or saved, retaining evidence of bullying behaviour even if a perpetrator deletes the content. This evidence can then be shared with people/organisations who can help, or referred to online platforms as proof of rule-breaking (or possibly illegal) behaviour on their service.
- **Seek help and support** – some young people may be very reticent to tell a trusted adult about cyberbullying for fear that they won't understand or might dismiss it rather than help. However, it is important for a young person to reach out to someone offline for help and recognise where they can find this support. This may include parents and caregivers, teachers, other trusted adults, and law enforcement. Peer support can also be very important to youth – discussing issues with friends to seek advice or decide next steps can be a powerful way for youth to take some control of the situation and take positive action.

Tools to tackle cyberbullying

This section provides a brief overview of some of the main types of tools available to users on different online platforms to tackle cyberbullying incidents. Young people can be directed to these tools and encouraged to use them. [Helplines](#) can provide additional support and guidance.

- **Blocking** – many popular apps and games offer options to block (or mute) offensive users. While blocking tools can help a victim (or bystander) avoid seeing or receiving communication from a bully, they can be limited in effectiveness. Blocking a perpetrator doesn't prevent them from continuing to be hateful or offensive about the victim; it just means the victim can no longer see it. A persistent perpetrator may also easily circumvent this approach by creating a new account on the service to restart contact with the victim.
- **Reporting** – most social media platforms and messaging apps have options for reporting content





or users in breach of the community standards or terms of service. Online gaming platforms such as PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo and Steam also include reporting tools, as do many online games. Depending on the app or game, specific options available in the reporting tools may or may not explicitly include cyberbullying, but most include an option to report a user who is violating the rules or behaving inappropriately. Some young people may also be cynical as to whether these tools are effective in dealing with bullying; some platforms are more proactive than others, and some instances of cyberbullying are hard to report in isolation due to the nuances in the behaviour. Regardless, encouraging youth to use the report button (whether as a witness to or a victim of cyberbullying) gives platforms opportunities to act and provide support.

- **Safety centres** – larger online platforms such as popular social media apps may also provide a safety centre containing information and advice to users on how to use the platform positively and safely, as well as how to report issues. Some safety centres allow users to provide more detail when reporting an issue, which can help convey the context of a cyberbullying incident and get better support. Parents should encourage children to provide as much detail as possible in reporting tools and contact with platforms.
- **Signposting to sources of support** – with the introduction of the [Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#), many platforms are doing more as part of their responsibility to protect younger users. This includes raising awareness of national sources of help and support that may be useful to young people in their country. Platforms may also participate in national and international awareness campaigns such as [Safer Internet Day \(SID\)](#), and provide additional safety and well-being advice, along with other information relevant to their users.
- **Prompts/reminders** – many platforms and services use algorithms to analyse patterns in user behaviour. Some have used this data to develop assistive tools that recognise when a user is about to post something offensive or is behaving in a way that suggests a concern for their welfare. Platforms may prompt a user with a message when they recognise these behaviours, asking them to pause and consider their post/message, or provide signposting to a source of support or advice.





Annex 3: Additional materials and resources

The [Better Internet for Kids \(BIK\) platform](#) offers a range of useful programmes and materials that have proven successful in raising awareness of cyberbullying.

For teachers

Learning corner for teachers and educators

Practical learning modules, lesson ideas, webinars and classroom resources on online safety, digital citizenship, cyberbullying and AI.

→ [Access the resource.](#)

MOOC – Cyberbullying in a rapidly changing digital world

This MOOC (massive open online course) is aligned with the priorities of the [EU action plan against cyberbullying](#). It aims to equip educators with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to prevent, identify, report and respond effectively to cyberbullying. MOOC materials remain accessible for general use beyond the active MOOC.

→ [Access the resource.](#)

Teaching online safety, media literacy and digital citizenship

A comprehensive guide with classroom activities, whole-school approaches and links to additional European resources.

→ [Access the resource.](#)

Generative AI for educators

Practical guidance on helping students use generative AI safely, responsibly and critically.

→ [Access the resource.](#)

For parents

Learning corner for parents and caregivers

Practical resources on topics such as parental controls, gaming, and managing screen time. It includes learning modules that provide parents and caregivers with the knowledge needed to understand the risks and opportunities children and young people face online, as well as the skills they need to support them.

→ [Access the resource.](#)

For everyone

#NotOnOurFeed campaign

The BIK campaign - #NotOnOurFeed - brings young people, parents and caregivers, teachers and educators together to raise awareness of cyberbullying and promote safer, more respectful online experiences.

Inspired by the three pillars of the [EU action plan against cyberbullying](#) - protection, prevention, and reporting and support - the campaign explores emerging challenges, including AI-related abuse, and highlights the support available through Safer Internet Centres, helplines, and trusted flaggers across Europe.





The [campaign page](#) includes practical resources, real-life stories, youth voices, creative content, and webinars designed to help everyone recognise, prevent and respond to cyberbullying. All materials remain accessible for general use beyond the campaign timeline.

#NotOnOurFeed toolkit

The #NotOnOurFeed toolkit brings together resources, actions, trainings, campaigns and other initiatives available across Europe. It includes a catalogue of resources addressing cyberbullying, a family-friendly factsheet explaining the EU action plan against cyberbullying in clear and simple terms, as well as [practical tips](#) from the Insafe network of Safer Internet Centres for young people, their families, and teachers and educators.

→ [Access the toolkit here.](#)

Catalogue of resources addressing cyberbullying

As part of the [#NotOnOurFeed campaign](#), the network of Safer Internet Centres helped identify existing resources on cyberbullying.

[Access the catalogue of resources addressing cyberbullying here.](#) It is possible to browse by language, country, and target audience:

- [Victim](#) – have you been cyberbullied? Get help and support.
- [Bystander](#) – have you witnessed cyberbullying? Find out how to help.
- [Adult](#) – are you a parent, caregiver, teacher or educator? Learn how to support a young person.

“Cyberbullying? The EU is here for you” factsheet

Explore the EU action plan against cyberbullying and discover how the EU is helping to make the internet safer and tackling cyberbullying in the [family-friendly factsheet](#) (available in multiple languages).

→ [Access all the campaign resources here.](#)





Annex 4: A note on the collection and representativeness of data

Understanding parents' experiences, concerns and needs is a crucial step in developing effective awareness-raising, educational, and support activities. To inform their work, SICs gather insights from parents and caregivers through a variety of mechanisms while also clearly distinguishing between operational feedback received through activities and representative national research.

SICs use a range of different methods to collect operational feedback:

- online surveys, including through the SIC websites;
- ad hoc qualitative and quantitative research on children's and families' online lives;
- focus groups with parents and with professionals working with parents;
- informal discussions and questions raised during training;
- feedback from educational professionals, freelancers, and other practitioners who work with families;
- enquiries received through helpline, hotline, and counselling services.

Whenever possible, some SICs also **involve children and young people themselves through consultations**, as their perspectives can complement those of parents and provide a fuller picture of family experiences online.

Feedback collected through voluntary educational, awareness-raising, and counselling activities can provide **valuable insights, but it is not necessarily statistically representative** of the wider parent population.

When SICs (or their national partners) conduct representative research, they use more systematic approaches, such as collaborating with research institutes, national statistical offices, population registers, or ministries of education that can produce representative samples.

To improve representativeness, SICs seek to include parents from diverse backgrounds and contexts. Variables such as age, level of education, geographical location, and gender may be considered, along with efforts to ensure participation from different socio-economic and educational contexts and from both urban and rural communities.

A common approach is to **collect feedback and gather insights from parents after seminars, webinars, awareness-raising campaigns, and other educational activities**. Both online and in-person events, where parents can share their experiences, concerns and questions, are used for this purpose. The collected insights are then used to further develop targeted educational materials and activities.





better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu



[@Insafenetwork](https://twitter.com/Insafenetwork)
[@safeinternetday](https://twitter.com/safeinternetday)



facebook.com/saferinternet
facebook.com/SaferInternetDay



linkedin.com/company/better-internet-for-kids



youtube.com/@betterinternetforkids



info@betterinternetforkids.eu