



Key Questions

PEER REVIEW

14th-15th September
Athens, Greece

Pre-meeting questions

Feedback from Center of Women's Studies and Policies, Bulgaria

On Sept 14-15, you will attend the Peer Review meeting of the platform Live Without Bullying.

Prior to the meeting, we would appreciate your thoughts on the following subjects:

1. What examples have you seen regarding the importance of anonymity/technology in anti-bullying measures?

In cases of sexting, victims are really ashamed of what happened with them and may ask for support only anonymously. In case the family is not the place, where they will ask for help, because of the shame, anonymity is crucial to ask for support from the help lines and professional counseling.

2. What best practices have you encountered in expanding children's knowledge about their rights or what bullying means?

According to our experience the most effective interventions are to educate and speak about cyber bullying within the relevant class, school, parents' community. We found very useful to make discussions with pupils in school, co-organized with their teachers. Center of Women Studies and Policies has experience from 2 open discussions with children (12 -13 years old), planned in the regular program of the school as 45 minute sessions on cyber security, bullying and cyber bullying.

It was during our participation in the Delete Cyber bullying project, coordinated by COFACE. We have widespread information about the educational app, developed within the project, through teachers and pupils and therefore many of them were aware that we can assist with some educational support.

The initiative came from the teachers after evident cyber bullying incidents with their children (becoming more and more humiliating with the time). They also faced a challenge to understand why their classes participate in different video recorded challenges, some of them happening in front of the school yard, which provoked many reactions from parents about the role of the school in these

Draft agenda

situation and what parents and teachers can do together to protect children. (Apart the cyber bullying, happening because of the video challenges posts, there were also signs that these challenges are dangerous for the children's health and in some situations for their lives - some of them hid risks of unexpected suffocation, allergic reactions and so on).

Teachers were in a stress, that they have no control, neither knowledge to participate in this process and they are not sure where the limits of their responsibility and interventions are, how they can participate effectively? So they asked us to come and discuss with children some of the online problems, especially related to cyber bullying.

These 2 discussions were really helpful for students to understand that some jokes might have terrible consequences and it is worth to speak about bullying and cyber bullying in class and with their classmates and teachers together. As people from outside, showing some examples from our work, we succeeded to gain their confidence and to make them speak and discuss the problems of the class (some of them arisen offline, but continuing on line). Children saw during the discussions that this problem is very huge, it is widespread worldwide, they are super experts in online communication, but did not realized that sometimes their behavior might cause serious harm to their most close friends, classmates and that their teachers are not their enemies, they can ask them for advice and support (in some cases the support will come from their rich life experience, not necessarily from the net). It was evident that online problems were not related to technology, but more to human relationships and trust and that there is a lack of a spirit that children belong to one school community in class. This interesting and open discussion showed us that teachers and the NGOs might cooperate very much just by involving personally and regularly in simple and open discussions with the children within the school environment. Another very important issue is always to tell children who they should ask for support in bad situations and why they should address their teachers and parents, not always to find solution between them. Sometimes it is hard, but it is worth to ask for help. After the discussions, we were informed by the teachers that some of the children participating in the discussions had problems online and asked for help their parents and teachers. So we find this small, but good experience relevant to show that sometimes the hardest step is to start the conversation at the right time and the right place and than it is more easy to keep an eye on what is going on with your children/students.

3. What programmes or policies have you identified that educate children and their parents in life skills, such as communication tools, empathy and more?

We definitely identified that most of the problems online arise where there is no enough human communication and empathy and where there is no enough cooperation between stakeholders and with children.

We saw many times, that the most effective interventions are parents and teachers to speak with their children/students regularly for their behaviors and

online life and about ethics in communication. Another good topic for these conversation is how the children online life will continue to be part of their real life now, but also in the future. Children (especially 11-12 years old and less) rarely think about how some inappropriate pictures and/or comments may influence their future (to find a good job when grown up, to have a good image in the new school etc.) It is a joke that we often tell to children, but it make them think twice, when we say: "Pay attention that your grandma is watching over you in the net!" It is to say that if the pictures and comments are not appropriate to be seen by their grandmothers, it is worth to think are they appropriate at all for other audience. Or at least (in case their grandmothers are really very conservative) to think about what they will leave visible online (even in closed groups) for thousands of people and how this will affect their future. Some examples of real stories are good to be shown including how "confidential" chats in closed groups are not so much confidential. Programs that educate students on consequences of online communication to real life could be very useful.

We also find useful to educate parents and teachers on some risks and how to identify them for their children and how to speak with them, even to offer advice after being let to read the chats by their children/students. In our experience, it is every day work for parents and for teachers to gain the confidence of the children in order to be prepared to react. It is good to educate parents and teachers that for their children the online reality is very often disconnected to real life reality and some feelings and moods that children may have because of online communication may cause them harm even bigger than bullying in real life. In our experience sometimes children are suffering from online communication, which is not even aggressive, but they are feeling so and are sad and confused about what it might mean. It is a reality that online communication takes much more time for children than the offline communication and in case parents and teachers want to help, they should be informed about it and to speak with children what make them feel bad, is it real or imaginary and how to cope with these feelings.

4. What are some of the challenges that you believe an anti-bullying programme may encounter?

In our experience parents and teachers are not informed enough about the effects of the online communication on the children psychology and they are reluctant to confess that they do not know their children online life well. Most often the online life of the children is time consuming and is secret and very much a closed area, where parents have no access; it takes time and efforts for parents to be let in and gain confidence and to be listened by their children, so parents education is very necessary to be included in the programs in a way they

Draft agenda

are not ashamed of the fact that they have no enough time to be informed about the online life of children.

5. What would be an indicator of success for an anti-bullying programme?
- *More common discussions with all stakeholders involved about the problems, related to cyber bullying (parents/teachers/institutions);*
 - *The programmes are included in the regular school programs and are held in normal everyday school environment; The topic is shown in light for as many schools as possible in the country.*
 - *Cyber bullying is a topic that is discussed in more families, without difficulty of neither children, nor the parents.*
 - *The programs lead to increased emotional intelligence and strengthen abilities for children to make a difference between real and fake reality.*

6. How anti-bullying programmes can be inclusive to the needs of all children and promote diversity?

The program shall promote respect to human personality and to the value of human communication. This is all about respect of human beings and other people feelings and about empathy and ethic. In our experience we identified that the cause of cyber bullying is the illusion that online life exists and it could stay disconnected from the real life. One simple rule that all children understand very well is to show them that (notwithstanding of the fact who they are online) they should never do something that do not want to be done with them in real life and always to think about the feelings of the persons with whom they communicate. Our message has always been that imaginary online image is temporary and is really nothing comparing to having real friends in real life.

7. Is there anything that you have seen in other European anti-bullying programs that will provide a benefit to Live Without Bullying?