

MEDIA AND DIGITAL *literacy*



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The background features a stylized illustration in shades of teal and blue. On the left, a silhouette of a person is shown reading a large book. On the right, a silhouette of a person is shown holding a flag on a pole. The scene is set against a backdrop of rolling hills, clouds, and a sun or moon in the sky.

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CONTENT

INTRODUCTION:

About Recommendations	130
Media and digital literacy	131
Media literacy in Montenegro	132
1. Decoding media content	135
2. Privacy and security	144
3. Advertisement	149
4. Social networks and algorithms	154
5. Influencers on social media	159
6. Mental health and well-being	165
7. Stereotypes and prejudices	174



MEDIA
AND DIGITAL
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Introduction

ABOUT RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of these Recommendations is to help parents, guardians, educators and media professionals to gain a better understanding of digital challenges, to communicate more successfully with children, and to encourage them to positively use the huge range of opportunities provided by digital platforms on the Internet.

The topics in the Recommendations present various concepts, ideas and theories of media literacy in a simple and understandable way. Each of the chapters offers a summary of what is current and important, as well as specific ways and ideas for family conversations and activities.

The aim of the Recommendations is to empower parents, guardians and educators to become involved in the media education of their children, by first gaining themselves an understanding of topics such as influencers, disinformation or algorithms. When parents, guardians and educators are empowered and have the knowledge to be **media mentors**, then they can make it possible for children to grow up with the positive power of digital media and technology to learn, create, explore and connect in new ways. But it doesn't come without challenges.

The authors of the book "Parenting for a Digital Future", Sonia Livingstone and Alicia Blum-Ross identified in an extensive study three dominant parenting styles:

- ✓ Parents who have embraced technology for education, creativity, family fun and enjoyment;
- ✓ Parents who balance and constantly try to "calibrate" their approach - what to allow and what to forbid;
- ✓ Parents who reject and put preferences on different types of activities that are often related to family values (1).

However, what the authors point out is that sometimes families have one set of rules for one child, and a different one for another child, or for example they can refuse digital platforms before noon, while that changes by evening.

This interesting insight into the functioning of today's families shows that it is not easy to prepare yourself or the children for the digital future. Children learn by watching adult behaviour - these Recommendations will help you think about how you use digital technologies and how you can make changes to your "media diet" so as to create a healthy balance and good communication.

MEDIA AND DIGITAL LITERACY

The media and digital environment is constantly evolving and expanding. It covers a wide variety of content and technologies - traditional media such as press, television, radio, online media, and applications, digital networks, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, algorithms, etc. The digital environment is becoming increasingly important in the lives of children in various aspects of their lives, and **every child has the right to access to the digital world**, which is recognized and included in the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, which was amended in this context in 2021 - Comment no. 25 (2) to Convention



instructs states in detail how to protect the rights of the child in the context of an extremely dynamic digital environment.

The Council of Europe's (3) Strategy on the Rights of the Child also recognizes that children access the Internet via computers, play consoles, tablets, smartphones, so **digital literacy is increasingly seen as an integral part of child's rights to freedom of expression and education.**



It is stated that one of the main challenges is the lack of knowledge and support for parents and teachers to respond to their task in raising children and protecting their rights due to the emergence of new information and communication technologies, which increases the generation gap.



In this context, it is not enough to think of communication as a mere transfer of information from one person to another - we must recognize that communication plays a fundamental, key role in representing common beliefs. (4) Our role in the media environment has also changed: we are no longer passive recipients of media content, but we share it further and create new ones.

Media literacy teaches us to look at all the information we are exposed to through the prism of **critical thinking**. Media literacy is an emerging and evolving concept - a dynamic field that crosses many disciplines, including media education, information sciences, social sciences, economics and other fields, and covers a wide range of media types: digital media, film, books, music, online games, etc. There is no single harmonized definition of media literacy, but all descriptions have a common basic element: the development of critical thinking.



Media literacy enables us to understand, analyse and think critically about the media and media content that comes to us, and ultimately provides us with knowledge of the fact that we can create media content ourselves (cf. Aufderheide, 1993). (5)

MEDIA LITERACY IN MONTENEGRO

Media education is the process through which a person becomes media literate, which means that he/she critically observes, analyses and understands the impact of media content. It can take place formally, through the activities of the entities that have the obligation to protect and raise children, such as the education system, and informally, for example through trainings of non-governmental organizations. The role and obligation for the development of media literacy belong to different subjects - states through institutions, such as ministries of education or regulatory bodies for communications, and parents and guardians.

Montenegro is in the early stages of developing media literacy, but there is interest and progress among the institutions and organizations dealing with media and education.



According to Media Literacy Index of the Open Society Foundation, Montenegro is very low: at 32nd position out of 35 countries. (6) (6) This problem was pointed out in 2017 in JUFREX's analysis of the media sector in Montenegro, which states that our country belongs to the group of European countries that are still in the first phase of implementing media literacy through the legal framework.



"There are no laws or established institutions to promote media literacy, to coordinate activities related to media literacy or to report on the levels of media literacy among citizens", the document reads. (7)



The final phase of drafting the Law on Audiovisual Media Services is underway, in accordance with the EU Directive on Audiovisual Media Services, which will enable better and higher quality protection of minors from the harmful content.

In the mentioned analysis, recommendations are given in which it is emphasized that the concept of media literacy, harmonized with the EU policy framework, should:

- ✓ be included in the regulations governing the media;
- ✓ develop a national policy to promote media literacy in all segments;
- ✓ the government should provide a long-term funding scheme for activities that promote media literacy;
- ✓ The Agency for Electronic Media should be given the authority and human resources to monitor the development of media literacy, and coordinate all activities in partnership with the relevant ministries.

The new Law on Media adopted in 2020 and the Law on Electronic Media oblige the media to protect the integrity of children and minors, and that content that may endanger the health, moral, intellectual, emotional and social development of minors must be clearly and visibly marked as such and distributed in a way that the minor is least likely to use.

What does research show?

Several striking findings show us that in Montenegro:

- ✓ $\frac{1}{5}$ of parents do not pay or rarely pay attention to labels of age that is adequate for certain TV content, and $\frac{1}{3}$ of parents let children watch TV content that has a label that is not for their child's age. (8)
- ✓ Nearly half of parents and about a third of children have heard of the term fake news - but most of them don't know the meaning. (9)
- ✓ Almost 40% of children find it difficult to recognize inaccurate news on television. Parents are somewhat more confident in their ability to assess the veracity of information in this regard. Both parents and children find it most difficult to assess the veracity of TV information. (10)
- ✓ Widespread belief in conspiracy theories: Three out of five citizens in Montenegro believe that there is a secret group of powerful people who control world events, and that the coronavirus was



deliberately produced and spread as a biological weapon used by some world powers for their political or economic gain. (11)

- ✔ Social circles have authority in checking information: Research shows that when searching for certain information, a little more than half of citizens say they read something they disagree with, and every other person tries to **confirm the information they learned by asking friends or family members**. (12)



1. DECODING MEDIA *content*

"If your mother tells you she loves you - check that out too"



Key topics:

- ✔ What is a media message and what do we mean when we say that content is a construct;
- ✔ How to check and critically evaluate media content
- ✔ How disinformation and media manipulation “pollute” our information space and what we can do about it

Key terms:

- ✔ Media representation, media literacy, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation

Our immediate experience cannot provide us with a comprehensive knowledge of the world that today, owing to new information and communication technologies (ICT), is multiply mediated and hyperconnected. Thus, our knowledge of the world and our place in it is largely mediated, and the media (in the broadest sense) are its key intermediaries.

That is why it is important to understand that the media are not objective mirrors of reality. They do not reflect it or convey it to us “objectively” - the media **re-present**, shape and create the reality of which we are a part. They influence and profoundly shape not only our knowledge of the world but also our attitudes.

Attitudes are important factors of behaviour, the tendency to react positively or negatively to certain characteristics, objects or situations. (13) They are formed on the basis of personal experience, but also through various influences to which we are exposed. We cannot reduce them to just knowing something because they involve emotions as well as our commitment “for” or “against” the objects to which they relate.

The attitude has a complex structure that includes three components:

- ✔ cognitive - which includes not only certain knowledge, but also judgments, including those of value,
- ✔ emotional (affective) - always include positive or negative feelings towards the subject to which they relate
- ✔ voluntary (conative) - which consists in the tendency to do something in relation to the object of attitude, to help what we have a positive attitude for, or suppress what we have a negative attitude for.

The mentioned components of the attitude will correspond with four dimensions of mass media communication: cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and moral (14). Owing to this structural similarity, media content and messages have tremendous power, ease, and effectiveness in shaping our attitudes, and thus in directing our behaviour.

Who creates media content?

The media content of traditional and new media does not appear just like that - they were created by people, persons who have their own attitudes, beliefs, values, prejudices and specific goals. And the algorithms through which information comes to us have also been made by humans. These can be journalists who create and share media content to inform us about important events. Also, they can be influencers on social networks, podcast authors, bloggers, and others. But which events are really important? And this is assessed by some people or groups of people. Choosing or selecting the



topics discussed is also an important part of journalistic and editorial work and the first step of media representation of reality. Sometimes this information helps us make decisions, sometimes it entertains us, and sometimes - whether we're aware of it or not - it convinces us of something, whether it's buying a new anti-dandruff shampoo, using a particular gaming platform or voting in an upcoming election.

Media such as information portals, television and newspapers, but also people on social networks are the most important mediators of information. Basically all of us search for information on the Internet every day, but few have been trained in how to evaluate and use that information. We learn on the go and through experience, but is that enough for us to be reliable '**digital mentors**' to children and young people of whom we often think as of '**digital natives**'? Although they often underestimate the digital skills of parents, children and young people have actually performed worse than them in assessing the accuracy and critical evaluation of media content.

Based on the information we are exposed to, we make decisions about our lives: how to take care of our health, the environment, whom to vote, etc. **If the information on which we base our decisions is not accurate, then, in fact, our decisions do not have to be in our interest either.**



Media literacy is based on the ability to critically analyse media content that we will not only passively absorb and recklessly share, but will "dive" beneath their surface, designed to attract our attention and direct and shape our attitudes, worldviews and behaviours in the desired direction.

How to decode media content in a fast and smart way?

Imagine driving a car and you need to make a quick decision to switch from one lane to another on the highway. This decision-making process will take a few seconds: you will check the mirrors, look back, give the turn signal and switch to another lane. Similarly, in this chapter we will offer a number of quick ways to check the content that you can include in everyday life and conversation with your family.



WHAT IT MEANS: Opinion – influences decision making and the way you live your life. Your child may think that it should stay awake after midnight and eat chips for every meal, but you as an adult may think differently and have a completely different opinion. In the news, it is important to understand whether you are reading someone's opinion about an event or factual news that will inform you so that you can form your own opinion on a topic. (15)

Checking information

New media have brought new technologies and new forms that are largely created by new '**media professionals**' - people who live from the production of media content, but who are not bound by the professional and ethical standards of the journalistic profession. This is one of the reasons why the **increase in the availability and diversity of information has not led to better and higher quality information.**

In order to adequately receive, understand and critically evaluate the media message, which is **always a construct**, often a commodity and unfortunately - relatively rarely formulated with full respect for professional and ethical postulates, we can use many different methods to create media content. One of them is offered by Media LitKit.



1. Who is the **source** of the message? Which medium places the message and who is behind it? **AUTHORSHIP:** Who wrote the text or recorded the video/show? What is the type of media in which the content is published? Are you familiar with the medium in which the content was published and does it deserve your trust? When and how was the text/video/show created? Is it also in other media and is its content the same? If it differs, how do you choose which media and content to trust or dismiss as unreliable and fake news? How did you form an attitude about the (un) reliability of the media? How can you check what kind of medium it is? Do you believe in the accuracy of the information and on what do you base such an attitude? What is the fact in the message and what is the opinion?

2. What **techniques** did the medium use to get my attention? **Why was this information appealing to me** and some others were not?

FORMAT: How is a media message constructed? What do you notice? What colours, shapes, sounds, silence? What is the composition, lighting, position of the camera (which suggests the position of the observer)? What persuasive techniques were used in creating the media message? What does the title of the text/video tell you? What feeling/emotion does the text/video evoke? Why? Does provoking strong emotions make you suspect that something is wrong with the content?

3. Why and how do other people understand this message differently than I do? **Which audience does the message "target"?**

AUDITORIUM: Whom is this text/video intended? Whom can it affect and what consequences can it cause? Does anything bother you in the way of expression, communication, the language used in the text/video/show, and how does it affect you? How does this affect other people?

4. **What values and ideas are promoted** in this message? **Has something been left out and what?** What is the **"background"** of the topic that is presented in it?

CONTENT: What message does the text/video/show send? What values, attitudes and ideas does the media message promote? Do you recognize any political, economic or ideological aspects of the media message? Who are we invited to identify with? Which and what view of the world does this message belong to? What ideas or perspectives have been left out?

5. What is the **purpose** of this message? What **effects** does it want to achieve?

PURPOSE: Who controls the creation and dissemination of the message? Who benefits from the message, and who can be harmed? Who paid for this message? Who benefits from its creation and dissemination: the public, private interests, individuals or institutions? Do you suspect that someone paid to publish certain content? What could be the reasons and who could make money from it? Do you think something is missing in this message? Should the information be supplemented by a statement from another interlocutor, some new information or the opening of a different angle of the story?

Before you share some media content on social media, be it a photo, text, video or mime, think about the authenticity of the content and check your emotions and always use them **as a reminder to check the information.**



WHAT IT MEANS: The **source** is the beginning or the origin. In the media publication, the source is a journalist who wrote the story, and who uses his/her own sources of information (interlocutors). For example, at school it could be the person who first started the rumour circulating that day or week. It is important to check the source of the story so that you can decide whether it is true and based on facts or just someone's opinion. (16)



Check the information or claim you suspect by trying to find the original source of the information. Analyse also whether the information mentions the sources at all, whether they are correctly stated and clearly identified with the reference, as well as how credible they are for the story. Anonymous sources, lack of credible sources or the use of citations “according to our sources”, as well as the use of statistics, data, documents, recordings without stating where they come from, should turn on the red light to be careful in assessing the veracity of information.



WHAT IT MEANS: Verification is checking where some information or person is coming from. In real life, this may mean that a police officer, postman or craftsman will show you some identification so that you can determine if they really are the people they claim to be. On social networks, you can see a blue badge with a check mark, which lets people know that the account has been verified, i.e. that it is authentic.

It is also necessary to check how the news is reported by other sources and media, and whether there are any links related to the content, which can be an additional way to check the information.

If you can't find a reliable source of information and your search becomes complicated, start again, try different words and search locations. If you come to a dead end again, it will be a clear warning not to share the content further or to share it with a critical review/note/question.

Media manipulation / Information disorder

Never in the history of the media have media manipulations of various kinds been produced and spread more powerfully and faster than in the age of digital or new mass media. As numerous studies (17) show, fake news and rumours spread much faster than true news - an analysis by a research team that researched the 'cascade of rumours' on Twitter from 2006 to 2017 found that the truth takes six times longer than lies to reach 1500 people. (18) However, just as they have allowed media manipulation to flourish, new technologies have also given us tools to establish the authenticity of published information.

There are several types of media manipulation, but we can generally divide them into three groups (19): misinformation, disinformation and malinformation:

- ✓ **Misinformation** – Inaccurate information that is exchanged without intent to cause harm. Types of inaccurate information are inaccurate or false links and misleading content. A fake link is a type of information disorder in which the titles, visual content or captions below the photos do not support the content of the text itself. Deceptive content, such as satire or parody, may not be intended to deceive, but some people may take it literally, which can mislead them.
- ✓ **Disinformation** – Inaccurate information that is created and exchanged with the intent to cause harm. This type of information disorder involves manipulated content that involves creating a false narrative from real or edited elements; pseudo-content or content from false sources; inaccurate or false context that is created when authentic content is placed in the context of false information; and fiction content that contains factually false information and claims. They were created with the intention of presenting a false claim as a fact and causing damage.
- ✓ **Malinformation** – Information (not necessarily inaccurate) that is shared and disseminated with intent to cause harm. Types of malinformation are leaks of information to harm someone; harassment and hate speech.



Example of information disorder:



Photo-forensics

Photo manipulation is nearly as old as photography itself. Today, knowledge and skills are available to everyone, using relatively simple technology. Photo-forensics is a set of techniques based on which we determine whether the photo we have in front of us is authentic, whether it has been attributed a false context, as well as whether it has been retouched or manipulatively cut.



Google reverse image search, <https://images.google.com/>

You have a photo in front of you, but you don't know its origin or you can't figure out if it's photo shopped? In your search can get help from Google's "reverse" image search system, which works by clicking on the camera icon in the search box, dragging a photo from your computer, phone, or from a site, and Google lists the sites where that photo has already been used, as well as photographs similar to that one. You have the option to paste the URL of the image you are interested in, which you think is manipulative, incorrectly signed, manipulative, cropped, photo shopped, or enter an image from your computer or phone.



Yandex, <https://yandex.com/images/>

If Google's "reverse search" system is not useful to you (and sometimes its scope is limited, primarily due to copyright protection) and if it does not offer you the answer you were looking



for, you can search for the origin of photography on a similar system through the Russian site “Yandex”. Click on the camera icon, drag the image from your computer or a website and “Yandex” will solve the mystery in many cases.



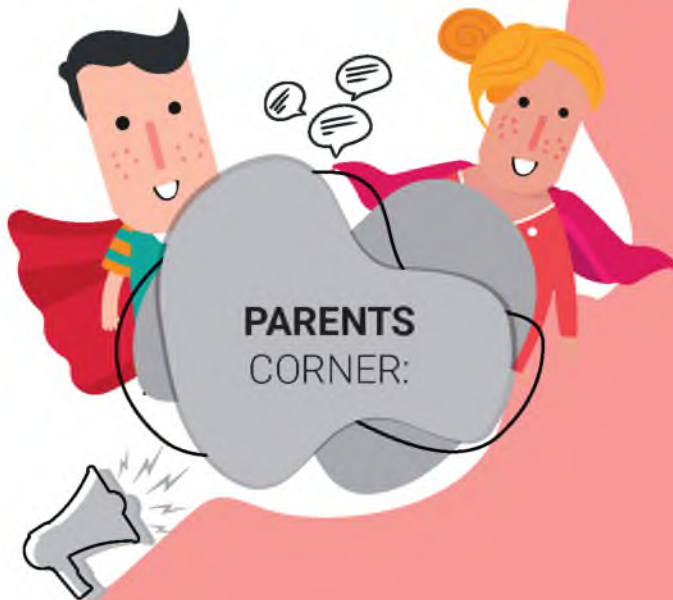
SLIDE: Tineye, <https://www.tineye.com/>

For a more detailed search of the history of one photo, as well as the history of its changes, you can rely on the “Tineye” service. It basically performs the same task as Google and “Yandex”, but it also gives you additional information that you would not easily find on the two mentioned search engines. “Tineye” is especially important if it is important for you to find out where a specific photo first appeared.



Deep fake programs

We can search for images only if they have been previously published somewhere. If they are not published, then search engines have nothing to compare them with. There are a number of deep fake programs, such as, for example, website <https://thispersondoesnotexist.com/>. How does this site work? By showing you a picture of people who don't exist! The software combines images of people into photos that look very authentic. The person you see on the screen did not appear to anyone until you opened the site. This software can make billions of photos, more than there are people on earth, and if someone decided to check the authenticity of the photo, they would not succeed because there is nothing to compare it with.



The most important way we can stimulate the interest, curiosity and need of minors to constantly review media content is to **frequently ask questions and conduct critical conversations between parents/guardians and children**. This activity should not be presented to children as an obligation nor should they be forced to analyse the contents, but such conversations can be directed in a motivating direction with inventive names such as e.g. “wisdom games” or “detective games”, and perform them in an interesting, insightful and relaxing way. The initial impulse is certainly to arouse curiosity, and it is important for parents to establish the practice of occasional joint monitoring and analysis of media content with their children. Their mutual relations should not take on the relationship of control and demonstration of pressure on children, but critical discussions and conversations should have the outlines of play and solving puzzles, that is joint search for answers to various questions.



Awareness of your media habits: Write how many hours on average you spend each day with: social networks (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), YouTube, music, news, Viber (and other communication platforms), TV, Radio, newspapers, listening to podcasts (feel free to add more categories).



- ✓ **Become aware of your media habits:** Then, add up all the hours. It can happen that you spend more than 24 hours with different media content - this is a phenomenon of multiscreening, a special type of multitasking, which involves the simultaneous use of two or more screens, such as watching a movie, listening to background music and correspondence by phone.
- ✓ **Get to know your children's media habits:** What is their 'multiscreening' sum? Approach their media habits thoughtfully, bearing in mind that bans often have a counter-effect, and that the development of skills for information verification and critical analysis of media content contributes more to their safety and ability to navigate new media.
- ✓ **Encourage healthy scepticism:** Help younger and older children get into the habit of analysing media messages. These can be posts on Instagram, titles of articles and videos, TikTok content. Ask them for the purpose of the words, pictures and videos they see.
- ✓ **Play the game "See the ad":** When you see an ad (whether it is clear that it is an ad, or it is a disguised advertising, sponsored content of an influencer, etc.), ask the children if they understand what the ad is selling. Sometimes it's obvious, but sometimes it's not. Explore together why certain images, sounds and words are used to sell certain products or promote certain ideas.
- ✓ **The Rashomon effect - Explore different sides of the story with the children:** Using examples from everyday life, help the children to see different perspectives on the same event. For example, fights and quarrels between brothers and sisters can be a great example and occasion for conversation. Open controversial topics with them and lead them to represent opinions with which they do not necessarily agree, in order to better understand different points of view.
- ✓ **Play the "Should I share?" game:** Start conversations with children about the content they most often share with their friends. What are those contents (videos, posts from social networks, memes, photos)? What motivates them to share it further? Remind them that strong emotional reactions are a warning sign to check the content, and that terms like: "disturbing", "shocking", "scary", "amazing discovery", "emerging details" usually refer to sensationalism and clickbait. Ask them if they are checking the authenticity of the content before sharing it? Have they ever been in a situation where they shared some content that turned out to be inaccurate, and how did they and their friends react?
- ✓ **Embark on a joint detective adventure:** Talk to children about information and together check out some information that is interesting to children through various sources. The most common indicators that indicate that the content needs to be further checked: The most common indicators that indicate that the content needs to be further checked:

If it seems too good to be true

If it suits your implicit prejudices and attitudes

If it causes extreme positive or negative emotions

- ✓ **What is a fact and what is an opinion:** Make sure they understand the difference between facts and opinions or comments. Facts are information that is supported by evidence, documentation, data, while opinions are an expression of one's views and beliefs. «Mars is a planet» and «It seems that already now it would be possible to live on Mars just like



on Earth» - these sentences are an example of the difference between fact and opinion. Accordingly, it is necessary to distinguish between journalistic genres such as news and report, which are informative and relate to the facts that are reported about an event, while the comments express the views and opinions of their authors.

- ✔ **Is sensationalism hiding there?** If you notice a strong emotional reaction to the news you have read, it is probably sensationalism, because disinformation usually has a sensationalist component. It influences emotions, heats up the lowest passions and impulses of the audience, in order to achieve higher readability, views or the number of clicks, which leads to higher profits. Sensationalist news often intrudes on private life, insults reputation, labels people in the most mundane way, describes the details of accidents and violence. This is indicated by terms that appear primarily in the title, such as “disturbing”, “shocking”, “scary”, “incredible discovery”, “details emerged”, etc.



2.

PRIVACY

and security



Key issues:

- ✓ How to preserve the privacy and security of the child in the Internet era?
- ✓ Do we really need sharenting?
- ✓ What are all the risks while the child is exposed to the so-called new media?
- ✓ How to strike a balance at all?

Key terms:

- ✓ Privacy and security, sharenting, digital trail, online reputation, image and identity, control and media, cyberbullying

No one is safe on the internet.

It is a simple fact, which cannot be denied. We all suffer from the same fears, from the same pain. Still, it is foolish to fall into paranoia. It is wise to try to control the damage. And the first step in any treatment and elimination of the consequences is - establishing a diagnosis.

So: No one is safe on the internet.

As soon as we connect, as soon as we establish "online status", we are exposed to risks and dangers. After all, it's the same with going out on the street. That's why our parents don't even let us on the street alone, at least until they teach us some basic things: the street is crossed at a pedestrian crossing, you look first left, then right, then left again. If there is a traffic light at the other end of the crossing, you are waiting for the green light for pedestrians to come on. Then you look left again, then right, then left again - just in case. Only then do you cross over - the faster the better.

How do parents know this? Well, they tried it themselves and saw it worked. They learned to protect themselves, so it became clear to them how they could pass this skill on to their children.

"We're grown up, for God's sake," you'll say. "We know how to do it right. And it's not just about crossing the street, we teach them a lot of other things that await them out there."

Absolutely true. Why, then, would teaching children about street safety be any different from teaching children about online safety? Well, it is already difficult to give a meaningful explanation if we do not first admit to ourselves: "We're grown up, for God's sake, and we do not know how to do it!" This is often the case. We have already said: the first step in eliminating the consequences is to establish a diagnosis. And here is a bitter and partial consolation for you: we admit that we, the writers of this, do not have the knowledge to that extent. No one does. And some of us have children and we share your torment. The world has never changed faster and all of this is pretty new to all of humanity. Mankind has no idea how exactly and without exception to deal with this challenge. In fact, everything becomes even more complicated when we notice that children learn much more than we do about the possibilities of the Internet very quickly and at an incredibly early age. This may frustrate us, but it will certainly not relieve us of probably the most important obligation we have overall, the obligation of parenting.

Data sharing

So let's start the concrete story of children's privacy and safety on the Internet with the term *sharenting*.





Sharenting was created by merging two English words - “share” and “parent”. It refers to parents who post too many pictures and videos of their children on social media.

Nowadays, most moms, dads or child guardians (but many close and distant relatives often join in) post pictures and recordings of the children they love on social media. This practice of behaviour in the digital environment has been given the already mentioned prominent name – *sharenting*. It is natural that, driven by immense love and pride, parents want to share with their acquaintances, or followers, the latest “feats” or cute performances of their little heroines and heroes. However, one should be aware that *sharenting* creates a *digital trace* of a child who does not yet have the opportunity to decide on it of his/her own free will. Also, in this way, often unknowingly, we create the *online reputation* of children, that is, we construct “on our own” their *image*, their image in the eyes of others; Also, in this way, often unknowingly, we create the online reputation of children, that is, we construct “on our own” their image, impressions on themselves in the minds of others; something that may have a significant impact on the formation of their *identity*, or image of themselves in the years to come.



The digital footprint consists of data that we consciously or unconsciously leave on the Internet after our digital activities.

The question is whether by inadvertently sharing private information we are exposing the child to potential dangers. For example, by publishing data or photos, can we make the locations where the child moves or the areas where they can be found easily recognizable to potential online predators?

When it comes to children of a slightly older age, who have their own profiles on social networks, the importance of parental influence in terms of raising children’s awareness of data privacy protection, as well as adjusting privacy settings, must be emphasized. It is primarily necessary to protect minors *from themselves*, as they are not always aware of the long-term consequences of their actions. A few seconds of a child’s impulsiveness can lead to a click that results in years of remorse. Simply put: everything that is posted on the web stays on it forever. The virtual walls we use cannot be painted over.

Here is something else that should not be forgotten. Digital media users, especially the youngest ones, are often not fully acquainted with the business models behind them. When we use social networks, our every digital step is monitored and analysed by sophisticated *algorithms* (we will often mention this word). They not only collect personal data that we have entered, but also monitor the selection of titles that we “click”, the speed of liking, accurately measure and note the time we spend on a particular page ... This data (collectively) is often sold to large companies, but also to actors from the political and wider social scene, who then use them when creating advertising and PR messages, and even while trying to establish a kind of control over public opinion. This practice of (mis)use of private data in recent years has become the subject of controversy and numerous criticisms in the professional and lay public.



The dangers that lurk

Also, the Internet is an inexhaustible source of serious risks to the safety of minors. Scenes of violence, pornography, hate speech, recruitment to radical groups, normalization of harmful behaviours, dangerous internet challenges ... A big problem is also cyberbullying, i.e. digital violence, which includes various ways of behaving on the Internet in order to inflict harm to another person, such as sending harassing messages, cyber stalking, etc. (more information on different types of cyberbullying can be found in the Glossary). The most dangerous threats are certainly the already mentioned *online* predators. A special category consists of hacking activities - primarily malicious softwares (*malwares*), created by cybercriminals, in order to cause harm or spy and steal confidential information. Spam, "phishing", etc. often serve the same purpose.

And let's conclude. Despite the stated risks, it is not wise to fall into black-and-white thinking, on the principle of "all or nothing". In other words, let's not think in extreme categories:

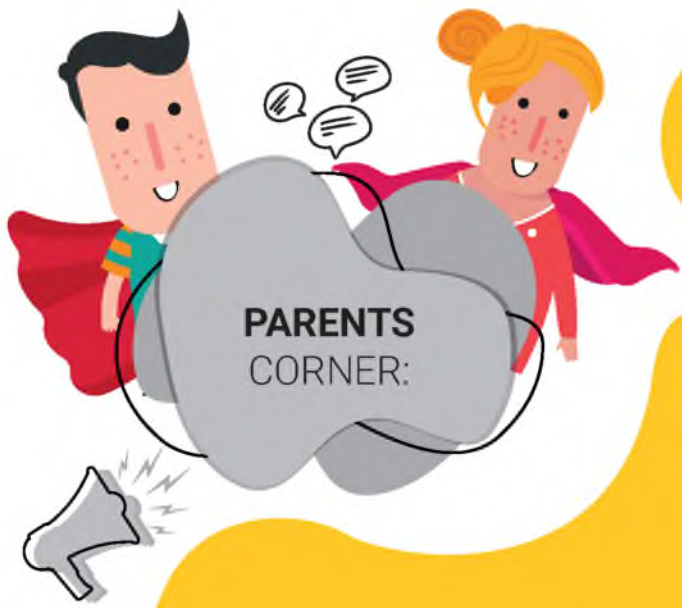
- ✓ "I will post pictures of my child every day!" Or "I will never post any pictures!"
- ✓ "I will forbid the child to use any social networks!" Or "I will let them do whatever they want!"

Of course, a *balance* is needed, in which digital media will not be rigidly banned, but controlled and used responsibly. In this regard, it may be useful to adopt the following perspective when communicating with children on these topics: ***the goal of media literacy is not to control children, but to establish (our joint) control over the media.*** In other words, instead of rigidity and criticism (which often creates a counter-reaction), we should approach the child and explain that we are "in the same team" with him/her, in a team that is able to establish adequate control over media use and realistically assess the risks we face on a daily basis.

Let's hang out with the kids, talk to them, analyse the media content together, play and enjoy those wonderful and useful things that the digital world has to offer - but together.

We are stronger that way. No one is safe on the Internet. Especially not if he/she is there - alone all the time.





How to help children make the most of the Internet and reduce the risks

How can I protect my child's online privacy?

There are two types of privacy: Personal privacy related to online reputation and privacy of a person as a user and consumer related to data collection.

The basic things are:

- Explain to the child that we are not allowed to share personal data: name and surname (one's own, but also those of parents, relatives, friends), address, passwords, personal identification numbers, etc.
- Create strong passwords with your child and teach him/her not to give it to anyone
- Lock social media profiles just for friends, and draw children's attention not to accept people they don't know
- Encourage children to talk to you when they have a problem, dilemma or question. Even if you don't know the answer, you can look for it together.
- Support children to protect the privacy of others: not to insult, share other people's photos without permission, or share personal information of others (such as phone number, address, passwords, and other)



3.

ADVERTISEMENT



Key questions:

- ✔ What is advertising and what actually it is not?
- ✔ Does proper media literacy help identify covert advertising and even more covert PR content?
- ✔ Why are children especially vulnerable when it comes to the impact of marketing communications?
- ✔ Are we aware of the importance of the so-called monetization in the field of digital marketing?

Key terms:

- ✔ Advertising, public relations, marketing communications, surreptitious advertising, fraudulent health advertising, monetization, clickbaits.

Today, it's all about money.

Whenever you ask people if this statement is true, you will hear conflicting opinions. When you let them contradict each other's arguments, one of the following two things will most likely happen:

1. they will fight to the death;
2. they will realize that both of them are right.

So, it is true and it is not true.

When it comes to the media, usually everyone says the money is in the advertising. This also: it is true and it is not true.

Advertising and (or) marketing communications

Advertising can in principle be defined as a paid form of persuasive communication that uses mass and interactive media to reach a wide audience, with the aim of reaching out to customers, informing about products, and interpreting product characteristics in terms of consumer needs and desires. (20)

However, advertising must be placed in a broader context. That context has a cumbersome name that reads like this: *integrated marketing communications*. We already know that many things can be hidden behind a cumbersome name. So, what's the catch?

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is the practice of unifying all the tools used in marketing communications in order to send a consistent and convincing message that will promote the goals of a company or organization (21). IMCs are a complex activity, however, their two pillars are known as *advertising* and *public relations* (PR).

It is very important to develop media literacy also regarding the perception of these contents and activities. Unlike advertising, which is an official and open paid promotion, PR often takes latent, covert forms. For example, a company's press release may have the formal structure and style of an impartial journalistic report, although it conceals propaganda messages in a wrapped form. An adequate level of knowledge of media literacy is necessary so that the audience can distinguish PR content from any type of objective media reporting. Where, then, is it easier to hide a catch in this case?



Of course, nothing here is either naive or harmless.

Marketing communications and children

Today, we are exposed to a variety of promotional content to an extent greater than ever before in history. Therefore, this is a very important area for media literacy, especially when it comes to children, who still do not have a developed ability to critically consider advertising messages. Since their intellectual development has not reached the stage of clearly distinguishing between reality and imagination, younger children are a group that is especially susceptible to propaganda manipulations. For example, if a child sees an advertisement in which his/her favourite superhero uses a certain product to then gain superhuman strength and power to fly from great heights without any consequences, there is a possibility that he/she will not be aware of the imaginary nature presented in a way that somewhat more mature children or adults will understand. It is clear that the consequences of this can be terrible... The horrors caused by such, often even more dangerous media content (it is not, of course, only the sphere of marketing communications that is responsible here), unfortunately, are part of everyday reality...



Covert product placement is a practice in which products or services are presented as an integral part of other media content, such as a movie or video game.

In addition to the awareness of the creative-hyperbolic character of advertisements, children and their parents need to keep in mind the *business model* of the media that display the advertisements, especially in the field of *digital marketing* (especially considering the fact that new generations are sort of *digital natives*). The type of advertising known as “pay per click” is the most popular way to *monetize* sites: the higher the number of “clicks”, the more money the media will receive from the advertiser. In the context of such a business model, the mass phenomenon of the so-called clickbaits, i.e. sensationalist and misleading titles whose only goal is to bring as much readability as possible, regardless of whether they announce the content in an inappropriate or untrue way.

Also, the question arises as to how advertisements affect the building of value systems among younger viewers, whose worldview is still in the process of being shaped. Does advertising promote a consumerist or materialistic attitude, linking one’s value to the value of the material products one possesses (toys, clothing, telephone, etc.)? Are stereotypes towards different groups encouraged? Are unrealistic ideals of physical appearance being imposed? Does the advertisement promote unhealthy products or risky behaviours: unhealthy diet, alcohol consumption, betting...?



Fraudulent health advertising is a particularly dangerous phenomenon of offering unproven or potentially dangerous quackery products whose use can have harmful consequences, especially if they are used to replace the therapy prescribed by professional doctors.

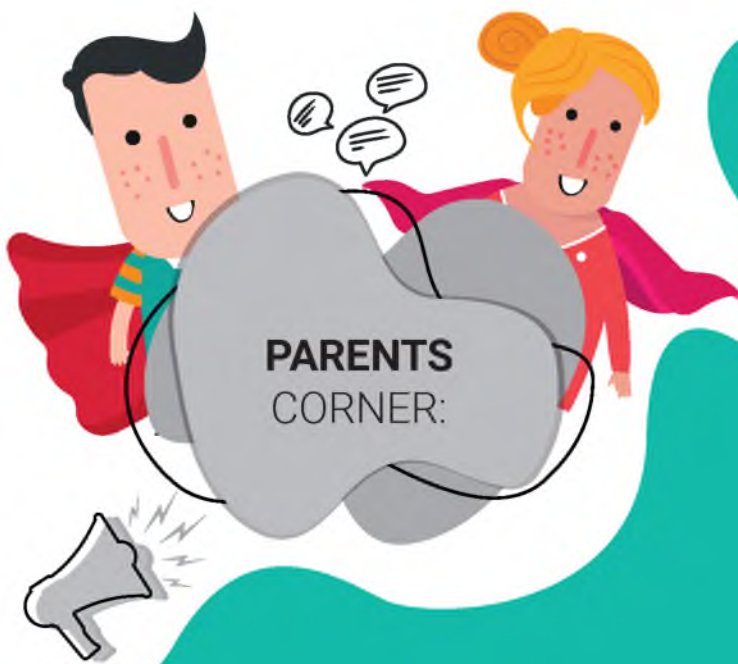


Caution and comfort

Unlike traditional media, which mostly placed their content on a relatively undifferentiated mass level, digital media brought new opportunities for audience segmentation, targeting and creating media niches. Digital platforms select advertisements that they place on us through algorithmic analysis of someone's online activities. It is necessary to pay special attention to this sphere, since ubiquitous algorithmic calculations are becoming more and more powerful when it comes to the intention to influence the mind and behaviour of users.

For consolation, and after all, it may not be true that all is about the money. Much still remains in the persistent and careful nurturing of traditional values, and in developing skill to balance between unreserved belief and extreme scepticism when it comes to perceiving not only content related to marketing communications, but also media content in general - and life circumstances in general.

Well, in the end, ours should be the last one. When we say "ours", it is clear that we mean both parents and children alike. We are in this mess together, so it is appropriate for our decisions to have equal weight. Always.



✓ Advertisers know very well that the age of children is important - the earlier children learn about a certain brand, the more likely they or their parents are to buy the product later. For younger children, marketing is dominant on television or on streaming platforms such as YouTube. This is confirmed by a survey conducted in Montenegro: 62% of children say that they asked their parents to buy them something they saw advertised on TV, and 65% something advertised online (22).

✓ For children older than 12, the number of platforms on which advertisements are placed is also increasing: in addition to television, there are also applications, games, social networks, gaming platforms, etc. Advertisers are aware of the marketing importance of this target group - talk to children about the different techniques used to attract them to buy certain products:

✓ **Child insecurity as an opportunity for advertising:** Brands take advantage of the desires and needs of teenagers to be accepted and to fit into society. Advertisers offer them what children see as "cool" and acceptable, because they know that teenage boys and girls are very susceptible to the influence of society and messages concerning image and appearance, and this is one of the ways to identify with one's peer group (23).





Exploiting the need for emotional connection: I have to have this (eg. sneakers, phone, game)! Children are not always rational and do not have sufficiently developed self-control, and advertisers use emotions to incite children to identify with the product. Use their desires for a particular product to talk to them about why they want it (for example – is it maybe an influencer who talks about that product?) Introduce also an economic perspective to encourage development of empathy - is the product expensive and what happens with those kids who can't afford it? Is it fair for children to be sometimes excluded from a group of friends if they do not have a certain brand on them?



4.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

and algorithms



Key topic:

- ✓ What are *algorithms* and what is their impact on the behaviour of social network users?
- ✓ What is the *economic business model* of social networks based on?
- ✓ What are *filter bubbles*?

Key terms:

- ✓ Algorithms, business models of social networks, filter bubbles, rabbit holes, internet addiction.

We are not mentioning *algorithms* for the first time. This is intentional.

The behaviour of people on the Internet is constantly monitored and directed, while, at the same time, they are offered the illusion that they have unlimited choices. That is why we have decided to assign, in these Recommendations, algorithms – whose purpose is to make it easier to follow our habits and our behaviour, and then to be able to offer us (based on what has been noticed) the contents that we will most easily “swallow” - a classic (with no restraints – and somewhat infantile) status of the bogeyman on call. Here they are, then, again.

Social networks have become an integral and everyday part of the lives of new generations. They have brought many benefits, but also a number of new threats and challenges.

Business models of social networks

If we dive a little deeper, we will notice at first glance the usually invisible mechanisms that stand behind the interface of social networks. When we find ourselves on the home page of our favourite social network, we will notice, namely, that the options that are served to us and the commercial messages that are shown to us are not randomly selected and are not the same for everyone. They have been created exactly with the help of the mentioned and very sophisticated algorithms. The technological specifics of digital platforms are not mere instruments in the service of the spontaneous flow of information, but have a deep and qualitative impact on the creation of social dynamics.

The basic characteristic of the economic model of social media business is, in fact, very simple - the interest of their creators is to “nail” us to the screens for as long as possible, in order to achieve the highest possible number of views and interactions, as on it depends the amount of money that those platforms will receive from advertisers and other “stakeholders” somewhat close to them. In order to achieve these lucrative goals, social networks collect data on users’ online activities, so that based on them, algorithms automatically suggest content that is in line with the already existing interests and preferences of those same users.

Algorithms used by YouTube, for example, generate viewing recommendations based on:

- ✓ what you’ve watched so far (History)
- ✓ currently popular videos (Trending)
- ✓ other information that YouTube has about you (such as geolocation).



How open are we to different points of view?

Unfortunately, in this way, algorithms also inevitably *narrow our view of the world*. For example, if a user is recognized as someone who believes in conspiracy theories about climate change, he/she will be offered more and more texts and videos on that subject every day. The contents will be of the same type and will try to attract as many viewers of similar interests with sensationalist and manipulative theses for their own financial gain. Thus, we insensibly and inevitably surround ourselves only with like-minded people in that sense, and much more often with people with whom we share misconceptions, than with those with whom we could have a common value system.

If, more precisely, someone who has significantly different or opposite attitudes enters the “online space” created in this way, there is a much higher chance that the “intruder” will be “thrown out of the circle of friends”, “unfollowed” or “blocked” (depending on the platform) - than, possibly and simply, *heard*. Thus, private censorship comes into force instead of openness to diverse points of view with a willingness for honest dialogue. Over time, this kind of isolation increasingly radicalizes the members of the group created in this way, because they are constantly “fed” with one-sided information. This phenomenon of intellectual isolation and ideological polarization is called the *filter bubble*. It is a space of digital one-mindedness, which gives a distorted and one-sided view of the world, and in which other parties are perceived as “abnormal”, “hostile” or “treacherous”. Paradoxically, social networks, which were created and promoted under the ideals of openness, global connectivity and exchange of ideas, in practice can often lead to deepening the gap between people who group into different “packs”. Media literacy means increasing awareness of other digital phenomena, such as the so-called *rabbit holes*, which involve the successive discovery of new online content related to a particular common topic, usually through hyperlinks or searches. Although rabbit holes can be a harmless form of entertainment or learning, they often lead to excessive time spent online, especially among young people.

Internet addiction

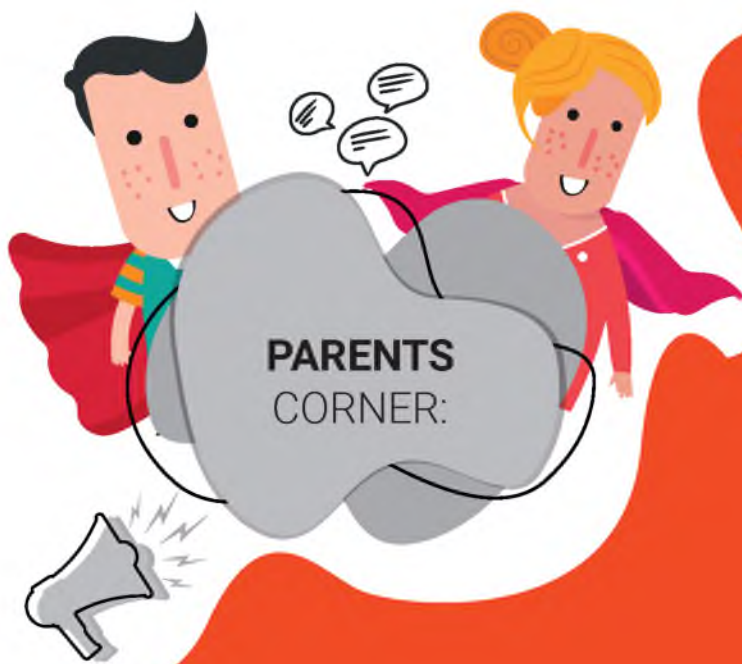
Digital platforms use various psychological mechanisms to make us spend as much time on them as possible - it could be said without exaggeration that they are waging a ruthless war to win their most precious resource - *our attention*. Unfortunately, the outcome of this war is a dizzying increase in *Internet addiction disorders* among young people. The Internet is a good servant, but also a bad master. Algorithms - which monitor our habits and behaviour, and which then, based on what was observed, offer us the content that we will most easily “swallow” – that is precisely why, as we have already said, we have assigned this (in children’s language) status of the bogeyman on call, who lives in the very centre of the digital media world.

That is why, in a way, even the modest goal of this text can be reduced to something that we will simply characterize as a tool that could serve us as a metaphorical car alarm. If the alarm is set up properly, it may not stop the thief from stealing our car, but it will certainly make his job significantly more difficult. First of all: it will make him think twice whether it’s worth at all even trying to do it. An important difference in this analogy lies in the following aggravating circumstance: the thief we are talking about in the context of media literacy is hiding - *in ourselves*.





“Increasing your level of media literacy gives you more power to control media exposure and its possible effects on you. At lower levels of media literacy, it is understood that the media controls you, i.e. uses you to achieve their own goals. The mass media is made up of jobs that are very sophisticated in finding out how to get your attention and conditions you for re-exposing. There are times when the business goals of the media and your personal goals coincide, creating a situation of mutual victory both for the media and for you. But there are also many times when your personal goals differ from those of the media; when this happens, you need to make a decision on whether to follow the habits instilled in you by the media or get rid of them in order to pursue your own goals. We often do not see that there is a decision to be made, because we are so firmly rooted in the habits that the media has instilled in us. A media literacy perspective will help you recognize that you have a choice (...).” (24).



✔ **Do you know how information comes to us?** Ask the kids if they know how YouTube recommends videos to them, or how their TikTok News feed is created? Explain to them that we cannot fully control how news and other announcements come to us through news feed on social networks. The information we see has passed through an algorithm filter. Based on our likes, the links we click on, the locations we tag, the algorithms personalize the content we see by selecting the content they have identified that is most relevant to us. Ask: Is content appropriate just because it is popular? Are headlines clickbait and target your emotions to click and view content? Why did YouTube or another social network suggest that particular content to watch?

- ✔ **Digital Scouts:** If you're searching for information on buying a new car, don't be surprised if your newsfeed is suddenly full of ads about car loans, car dealerships and car sales ads. Try an experiment with your children, search for some terms such as a new bike, and then follow how the ads will start to be placed on the digital platforms you follow.
- ✔ **Positive and negative sides of algorithms:** Start a conversation about the positive and negative sides of algorithms. Be aware that the information you are exposed to is often determined by your personal interests and preferences. Examine yourself and consciously look for different information, and talk to the children about whether it's due to the influence of the algorithm that we are missing information that is different from our views, and which can inform, teach and inspire us. Look for channels on social networks that offer different perspectives from yours, and in that way can contribute to diversity in thinking.



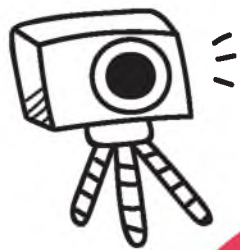
- ✓ Encourage children to talk to you when they come across content that frightens or upsets them, such as physical violence and other forms of violence, uncultured and rude behaviour, and the use of inappropriate language (such as swearing, insults, or disparagement). In collaboration with the child, set content filters:
 - ✓ Turn off Auto Play on YouTube: Recommended videos to watch will be shown, but will not start automatically.
 - ✓ Sometimes you delete the History: in this way, you will delete the data on the basis of which the algorithm makes assumptions about your interests and preferences.
 - ✓ Use Restricted mode: this way, the display of inappropriate video content will be significantly reduced.
- ✓ Use the YouTube Kids platform, where the algorithm already largely filters and extracts content suitable for adults, and offers a lot of quality content for children.



5.

INFLUENCERS ON SOCIAL *networks*

*"Where everyone thinks the same, no one thinks much."
Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi*



Key topics:

- ✓ Who are influencers?
- ✓ What is the purpose of the videos they make?
- ✓ What impact can their videos have?
- ✓ How are products marketed through influencers?
- ✓ Positive and negative messages.
- ✓ How to choose which influencers to watch and whose videos to watch?

Key terms:

influencer, TikToker, YouTuber, product placement, TikTok challenge, hashtag, internet meme, emotional well-being, viral content, algorithm

Children aged 12 to 17 spend about 8 hours a day in front of a screen, according to a study conducted by UNICEF in Montenegro (25). Most often, these are screen media, i.e. phones and tablets. More than half of the surveyed children, 57% of them, say that they imitate their heroes from the media, wear similar hairstyles, clothes, and do similar things. 65% of them asked their parents to buy them something that is advertised online. These data indicate the importance that electronic media and the content that children consume through them have in the formation of attitudes in children. This impact can be both beneficial and dangerous.

Who are influencers?

Influencers are not a new phenomenon. The word comes from the English word *influence*. Throughout history, different people have had an impact on other people.



Influencers on social networks are people who have followers on social networks. They differ in the platforms on which they publish their content (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram), in the number of their followers and in the type of content they publish. The number of their companions can be very large - for example, music or movie stars - or smaller - for example, when it comes to people who are focused on an area, such as gaming, cosmetics, travel, fashion, dance, etc.

YouTube and TikTok are the two dominant platforms used by children and young people, on which most parents are not so active, or use them differently. That is why it may be a challenge to understand why influencers are so attractive to children. Children and young people often see influencers as credible people they trust, either because of their way of life, expertise in a field, way of dressing, sense of humour, activism, etc. Although influencers are not a new phenomenon, in the past those were celebrities, often movie stars, and today the situation has changed a lot.

Celebrities and “stars” often have to act according to the strategies of their PR services instead of at their own discretion, which makes it very difficult for people to identify with them. It is sometimes difficult for people to determine where is the line which divides the image that a person reveals carefully created by the PR service and where the real person begins.

Unlike such an approach, TikTok and You Tube influencers are often approachable and build more intimate relationships with their followers. They are often not afraid to show more of their sides,



so they can be silly, funny, weird and talk about sensitive and personal topics, such as sex, divorce, violence or racism. According to some studies, 40% of people subscribed to YouTube channels say that YouTubers understand them better than their friends, and the same study showed that 70% of teenagers can connect more with YouTube influencers than with traditional “stars” such as celebrities. (26)



Influencers on TikTok

TikTok is a modern social network that allows users to watch, create and share videos, most often by adding audio recordings that already exist – and all using the phone. Thanks to its advanced video editing add-ons, making exciting videos has never been easier. Although it causes a lot of controversy because of the sometimes dangerous “challenges” that appear here and then spread quickly, such as the challenge to stop breathing, which in some cases ended in death, TikTok can be fun because it creatively involves parents and teenagers, when done safely and responsibly.

Even though TikTok is harmless entertainment for the most part, there are also justified major concerns when it comes to children using this social medium. It happens that children upload videos compulsively and without additional review or editing, that is why it is important to be aware of the options that exist for setting privacy on TikTok that can be controlled by parents. TikTok also offers different rules for different ages:

- ✔ Users under the age of 13 cannot post videos or comments and the content is tailored to a younger audience.
- ✔ For children aged 13 to 15, accounts are set to be private, and only friends can see and comment on their videos.
- ✔ Only users over the age of 16 can have live recordings and use instant messaging.
- ✔ Only Users over the age of 18 can receive, buy and send virtual gifts.

There are also additional safety measures such as the ability to limit how much time a child will spend on TikTok, or creating a family account usage regime to have full insight into how children use the app.

One should be aware that TikTok, as well as other social media such as Snapchat and Facebook, has also incorporated product placement. Big brands do this by hiring influencers to design a new challenge or present their product in a creative way, which they often do in combination with existing challenges. This type of promotion is often marked with a hashtag (symbol # after which they write the title of the challenge), which allows users to watch all other videos on the topic. Other users, by following the trend set by influencers, create the same videos or variations on the theme, so that in the final sum a huge number of people watch videos with the same hashtag. In this way, a large audience is introduced to the brand and it strengthens its position in the marketplace.

Although TikTok offers various options to be a safe place for children, such as managing the time one can be on the app, or through its option to restrict and block content that is inappropriate for children, as well as through the mode for the parents to be able to completely monitor what the children are doing, the security trap is in emotional well-being. Emotional well-being can be understood just as our ability to effectively manage challenges and adapt to change through awareness, acceptance and understanding of our feelings.



Many children want to become famous like some other TickTokers who have succeeded in this regard. However, it is not always about pure happiness, but rather about a certain strategy and way of life, which should be presented to children in this way. There are whole strategies on how to make the video viral and the teams of people behind some famous influencers, and even behind “TikTok house” where young creators live and create videos and thus earn a lot of money through sponsorships and recommendations they receive due to their influence on to that social medium.

Obsession with this type of presence in the world is not healthy from the point of view of mental health and can affect children in a negative way. Therefore, the role of parents is to encourage and model safe behaviour by respecting children’s real needs and setting mature and reasonable boundaries.

It is noticeable that TikTok can also be seen as the development of an internet mime. Many users do not actually create content on TikTok but only consume it. Internet mime is viral content that spreads from user to user via the Internet. It is mainly based on a single template, or concept that the user changes and passes on at his or her own discretion. Before the advent of TikTok, mimes were two-dimensional, and with the advent of TikTok they got music, audio and video material with many more options and much more content that naturally leaves an even stronger impression on the user. The specificity of the mime is that it can convey any message, ironic or sarcastic, sometimes parody, sometimes political criticism, sometimes some educational material. Thanks to this feature, tens of thousands of variations can be created on one TickTok recording.



It’s possible that as parents you’ve never heard of half the people your kids talk about non-stop and they have seen them on YouTube. YouTubers, as we call the influencers of this network have a large number of views and have a lot of influence on children. YouTube also has its own version adapted for children - YouTube Kids, which is largely child-friendly in its content. However, older children often want access to ordinary YouTube, which is much harder to tame because anyone can open a channel and offer content that is quickly starting to be among thousands and thousands of newly uploaded videos. When it comes to younger children, you can open a joint account that makes it easier to keep track of which videos your child is watching, you can view by viewing “history” or based on “recommended” videos to watch. Another way you can ensure a higher degree of control is by choosing the people you want to follow and whose channels you want to subscribe to.

YouTube also has its own algorithm on the basis of which it determines the following videos to recommend to you. You can influence these videos by indicating that you don’t like them by clicking the three dots next to the video title and checking the “you’re not interested” option. YouTube ads can be very boring and tiring and it seems that their number is increasing every day. Owing to advanced algorithms and artificial intelligence that gathers information about people based on the interests we search for on the Internet, these advertisements are often very personalized. Children need help to understand what advertising is and what video content is. YouTube also has its own Premium option that is paid for, but there are no ads on the videos.

YouTube is technically intended only for teenagers over the age of 13, but what this site deems appropriate for that age may not reflect your value system. In the settings of the site and mobile application, you can find options for restricting sensitive content, as well as a reminder of the time spent watching videos.

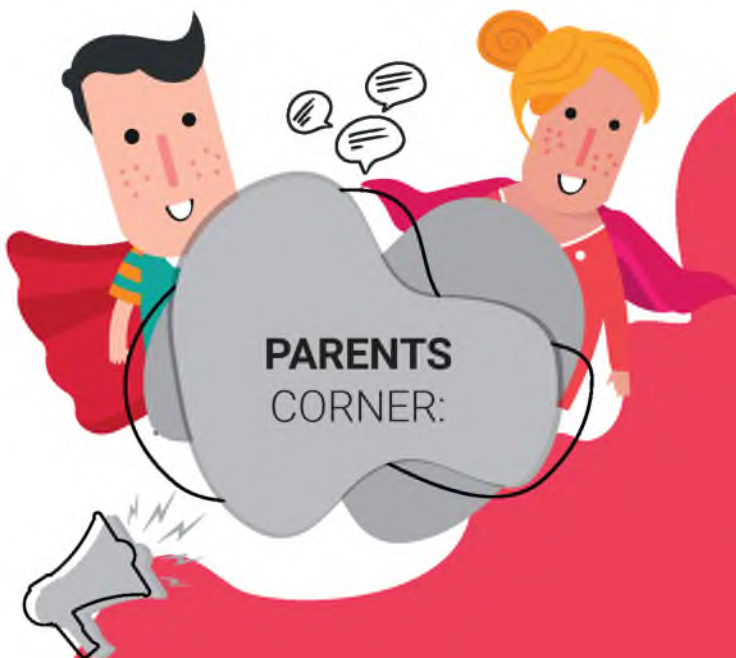


Positive and negative effects of the influencers

Influencers can have a positive impact on their companions by encouraging and motivating socially desirable behaviour and healthy lifestyles by their example. However, they can also be an example of smoking, drinking or even criminal acts. The content placed by the influencers can affect psychological and emotional well-being as well as the image people have of themselves.

In some other cases, the positive effects of influencers are reflected in raising awareness of important social issues. Influencers often have their own narrow niches in line with their interests within which they work to raise awareness from general physical health, over environmental and all the way to topics related to social justice. The positive impact is reflected in some cases also in the establishment of entire online communities that sometimes grow into real-life communities, helping people find their like-minded people and thus reduce loneliness. Unlike world-famous “stars” who are often “untouchable,” influencers often leave space within which they communicate with their followers, as part of their “live” engagements, sometimes organizing time to hang out live, sometimes just responding to comments below their videos or posts, thus showing that “they are one of them”.

The downside is that so much power that influencers have can be abused in creating new trends and decisions that can be made by their followers. In their sensitive years, children and young people can turn to social networks in order to find social norms, compare their behaviour with the behaviour of others and discover how it can make them feel like they belong somewhere. If influencers set unrealistic and unsustainable trends in terms of physical appearance or lifestyle, it can have a bad effect on the people who follow them and trigger reduced satisfaction with their appearance, greater negative mood, insecurity and anxiety.



✔ It is completely appropriate for children to see idols in media personalities and to be dedicated to them. However, it is necessary to help children find and follow positive role models, and the first step is to realize that YouTubers and TikTokers offer children something that is important to them, interesting, significant and in a format that is intended for them. Even if you are not particularly impressed by the content that influencers create, stay involved, ask questions about topics and what they mean to your children, and thus nurture an open relationship of openness and two-way communication.

✔ From the age of 12, children are “alive” on social networks, and this is the period when influencers become more interesting to children, which is confirmed by a research in Montenegro which shows that *younger children would miss television to a much greater extent, while for older children time with mobile phone is still more valuable* (27). Although in this pre-teen and teenage age they are slowly becoming less willing to share information



with parents, we encourage you to use convenient situations to talk to children about specific content they watch: What is most interesting to you on (TikTok, Instagram) channel/account are you following? Show me your favourite TikTokers/YouTubers. What do you think he/she wanted to say with this post? Do you have an idea whom I could follow?

- ✔ Explore with children the most popular domestic and foreign influencers in the following areas: travel influencers, gamers, makeup influencers, fashion influencers, fitness and training influencers, food influencers, etc. Discuss the differences and similarities in the posts, and how their posts are different from the posts your child and his/her friends post (28).
- ✔ Compare your favourite YouTubers channel on YouTube and Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and talk to your child about how you notice that they differ? What information does this influencer publish on one social media and what on the other one. What can you conclude from that?



6.

MENTAL HEALTH

and well-being

"The greatest torment of human beings is how to organize those hours of life they spend in the waking world."

Eric Bern, psychiatrist and psychotherapist



Key topics:

- ✓ Understanding the idea of mental health
- ✓ Trends and research on the use of Internet
- ✓ Positive and negative effects of the Internet on mental health
- ✓ Usage of the Internet as a symptom
- ✓ Using the Internet as a transaction of «I and YOU» relationship

Key terms:

Mental health, communication of needs, time structuring, functional and non-functional use of the Internet, frame of reference, dramatic triangle, internet addiction, Saviour, Victim, persecutor, psychological games, closeness

Research conducted in Montenegro with children aged 12 to 18 shows that they spend about 8 hours a day in front of a screen. The same study found that although children aged 12-17 say they spend about 8 hours a day in front of a screen, *“most parents think their children have a good balance between time in front of a screen and time for other activities”* (29).

This data is important for understanding children’s mental health. Parents need to make sure that children use digital devices in a positive way, however, they often “disappear” when they use them, and then it is difficult to assess whether there is cause for concern or not.

The last two years have been particularly challenging; the spread of the highly contagious Covid 19 virus, school closures, restricted or even completely banned interactions with other people, quarantine, as well as the economic consequences that many families have felt.

Tips on how to protect yourself from the virus were shared on the Internet, as well as frightening news about the consequences; disinformation has flooded social networks, but social networks have also empowered and enabled people to get involved in various activities; it was also a way to connect with friends, family, and to work, while on the other hand physical contacts were limited.



Mental health is a key component of health. The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely as the absence of disease.

In this regard, it is important to understand that mental health is much more than the absence of mental disorders. Mental health is a state of well-being in which a person:

- ✓ realizes his/her abilities
- ✓ can cope with the normal stresses of life
- ✓ can be productive
- ✓ can contribute to the community.



Mental health is perhaps easiest to imagine as one line with two extremes. At one extreme are mental illnesses and personality disorders, while at the other are mental health and well-being. Every day, each of us, by his/her behaviour, directly and indirectly moves on that line towards one of these two ends. In order to bring ourselves closer to the end where health and well-being are, it is important to be aware of how we structure our time and how we communicate our needs.



What does the trend show?

Studies and everyday experience show that the Internet is ubiquitous in the daily lives of children in Montenegro. As many as 91% of children aged 9 to 17 use the Internet, and the majority - 87% of them use the Internet every day. It is evident that as children grow, so does the use of the Internet, so 97% of children aged 15 to 17 use the Internet every day, while 71% of them use the Internet several times a day. The study shows that children understand the various possibilities that the Internet offers, however the Internet is most often used for entertainment, maintaining social relationships and on social networks. For example, 65% of children say they visit social media multiple times each day, while only one-third of respondents say they use the Internet to discover something new every day using an internet search. One in four children said they use the internet every day because of school. Studies conducted in Montenegro show that children aged 12 to 17 spend 8 hours each day using a screen (30).

To understand why this is so, it is important to understand some of the basic insights into how we function as human beings.

Positive and negative aspects of the Internet use

Functional use of the Internet and exchange of messages between friends can contribute to the development of friendships. There is also a whole language within the language that develops in each generation and serves, at the same time, as a way to facilitate communication and at the same time protect its privacy. Communication over the Internet is often very personal, casual and informal, so a lot of slang has been formed over time, often to save time and space, these are abbreviations. Some of these terms do not make sense at all outside the context provided by the Internet. For example, we find:

BRB - Be Right Back
LMK - Let Me Know
BTW - By The Way
FYI - for your information
LOL - Laughing out Loud
NOYB - None of your business
R8 - right
TY - thank you
THX - thanks
SU - shut up
STFU – shut the fu** up
W8 - Wait
AWK - Away from keyboard
XOXO - Hugs and Kisses

These are examples when it comes to the use of English words, however, the use of local modifications of English words and expressions is becoming more common. So we can find the typing of English abbreviations in Cyrillic or Latin:

BDV, or БДВ, or БТЪ – from English: by the way
bmk or бmk – boli me k***c (translation of local slang swearing: I don't give a sh**)
bwe – from our "bre", (quite common letter replacement)
fb, tw – Facebook, Twitter
forvarduša – forwarded message, chain mail
Lp – lijep pozdrav/Kind regards
nzn – ne znam/ I don't know
poz, or поз, or pozzz – pozdrav/buy
the – alternate typing for our "let's" ("...the se vidimo sjutra...")/("...let's meet tomorrow...")
tnx or thx – from English "thanks"
ЪТФ – Cyrillic version of the English WTF (from What the fuck)
škk – vulgar from "šta koji k***c" (local version similar in meaning to "what the fuck")

There are many more such examples, so it may seem to many parents that today children speak some unfamiliar language. We encourage you to master this new language and get closer to the frame of reference used by your children to better understand each other, and **it can be interesting and important for children that they can teach you something new.**

In short: the positive impact of the Internet is reflected in the fact that it provides a lot of information, the ability to easily find online like-minded people and online support groups, which can lead to a reduction in feelings of loneliness.

Mental health applications as well as other online tools can encourage users to develop healthy habits and supportive ways to take care of themselves. However, it is important to point out that although the Internet can make it easier, it cannot replace the psychotherapist, doctor or live contact we have with people. Excessive use of the Internet can lead to increased irritability resulting in lack of sleep, irregular meals, reduced physical activity, all of which can result in the development of symptoms of anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and reduced contact with friends and family.





Internet addiction

Internet addiction is generally defined as the problematic, compulsive use of the Internet that results in some damage or deterioration in a person's individual functioning in various areas of his or her life for an extended period of time. Some internet addicts also suffer from the symptoms of poor sleep, because they stay awake until late at night, scrolling through social networks or conquering new levels in video games. Although this topic has not yet been examined in the population of Montenegro, it is present in research dealing with the preservation of mental health and well-being.

Although they mostly communicate with friends they know, adolescents also use the Internet to meet new people, in most of the cases through social networks, but also blogs and forums. In their quest for autonomy and identity, teens are attracted to establishing contact and relationships in cyberspace, which provides a wide range of opportunities outside of family, school, and community. Through these connections, young people explore key adolescent issues, such as sexuality, challenges in parenting and peer relationships, examining different attitudes and values, all in contexts that allow them to remain anonymous, which on a subjective level gives them the impression that they are less threatening than such real-world relationships. Interactions with strangers via the Internet are also an important source of support for some young people (31). For example, socially anxious young people can more easily engage in communication over and the Internet to reduce their loneliness and at the same time practice and improve their social skills. Teenagers who suffer from depression, eating disorders and other problems thus access online forums or groups on social networks, where participants provide each other with mutual help and support, including a sense of acceptance and belonging to the group.

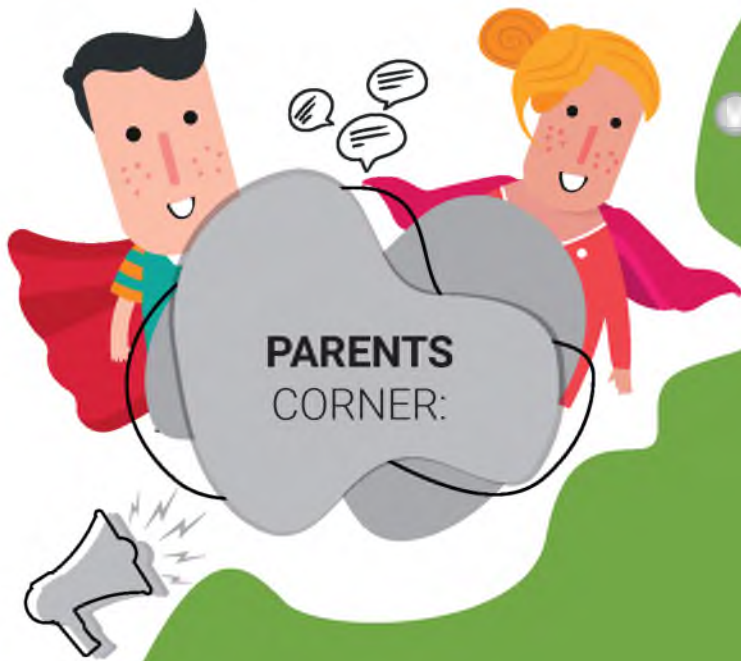
However, communication over the Internet also brings many dangers. In online spaces that are not so well monitored by parents when it comes to young children or by people who publish content and those who regulate and control that content, teenagers also encounter degrading racial and ethnic prejudice, slander and sexually harassing content. A survey of American Internet users aged 10 to 17 found that 14% of them said they had close internet friendships or romances (32). Although some better-adjusted adolescents made such connections, it was mostly young people who also reported frequent conflicts with their parents, peer victimization, depression and delinquency, and who spent more time online. They were more often asked by friends from the Internet to meet face to face, and they attended such meetings without informing their parents. In other words, there is a great connection between close friendships made via the Internet with parent-child conflicts, delinquency and frequent use of the Internet.

Young people who exhibit problematic behaviour and use the Internet to communicate in order to reduce feelings of isolation and rejection are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Adolescents who do not have protection in the form of family and friends with whom they discuss such encounters online and about functional and dysfunctional behaviours may over-believe and experience deception and harassment in these particularly painful relationships. In such conditions, these relationships can further aggravate their problems.

Today, parents bear most of the responsibility for regulating their children's exposure to inappropriate media content. When we talk about the Internet, we can see it as a great potential source of confirmation at different levels of our existence: from those activities we conduct to satisfy our curiosity over the Internet, to those we conduct to regulate our emotional charge (which occurs in the form of closing and limiting thoughts, which provoke negative emotions), satisfy our relational needs or simply "kill boredom".



However, algorithms woven into the internet play dirty and “understand” well our psychological and biological needs well, offering to meet them. This can become very dangerous, because we are mostly unaware that algorithms use our knowledge of our biology and psychology to direct our attention and manage our time spent online.



✔ How does the internet want to take the place of a parent and how do you regain your power?

How can we understand the phenomenon of such a large presence of the Internet and all other forms of electronic media in our lives and the lives of our children? Families function as systems, which means that it is not just the sum of individual members, but an organism that grows and develops over time. Within the family, everyone has their own relational needs that they strive to satisfy. It is the basis for love, closeness, stability, security and within it we learn about values and desirable behaviour. We need to feel safe, to be affirmed and validated, to be accepted by someone who is older and

smarter than us, to have someone understand our experiences and confirm them, to define ourselves, to make an impact, to have someone else take the initiative sometimes and the need to express our love. If we cannot satisfy our relational needs within the family system, the Internet with its numerous possibilities can appear as a replacement. **Excessive use of the Internet and other electronic media can be seen as a symptom that something within our family system needs to change.** We can always go back to our basic relational needs and think about how we are currently meeting them and what the other ways we could do that are.

✔ Some of the ways to think further is that children’s behaviour is understood as an exchange of transactions within the “I and You relationship” and some kind of message that is sent by such behaviour and which can be characterized as psychological manipulative play: *“If you are not good to me parent, I have a replacement for you”*.

✔ In order to avoid the inconvenience of boredom, people are looking for something to fill their time with. This is where the use of the Internet comes into play. All parents are familiar with children’s questions that arose from their boredom: “Mom, what should I do now?” Or you may have noticed that you are thinking, “What could we do for the weekend?” You may have heard people say that their days at work go faster and better when they have something to do instead of when there is not much work to do. One of the biggest psychological benefits of why people get involved in playing psychological manipulative games is because they structure time and reduce boredom. However, they do it in the constantly same and repetitive ways that make the participants of the game feel bad after



the game is over. How many times it happened that you knew exactly what the scenario of an argument with your child would look like, which would end with the slamming of the door, or your outburst of anger that would later be accompanied by remorse for feeling powerless to do anything? However, the power is in your hands to do something different next time. Your role is to confront manipulative behaviour by setting an example for your child how to behave and by creating a space where the child can feel safe, accepted and loved, in order to be ready to hear you and understand you.

It is a known fact that each of us has attitudes, but people are less familiar with the fact that attitudes have three components:

- ✔ emotional/affective,
- ✔ cognitive,
- ✔ behavioural.

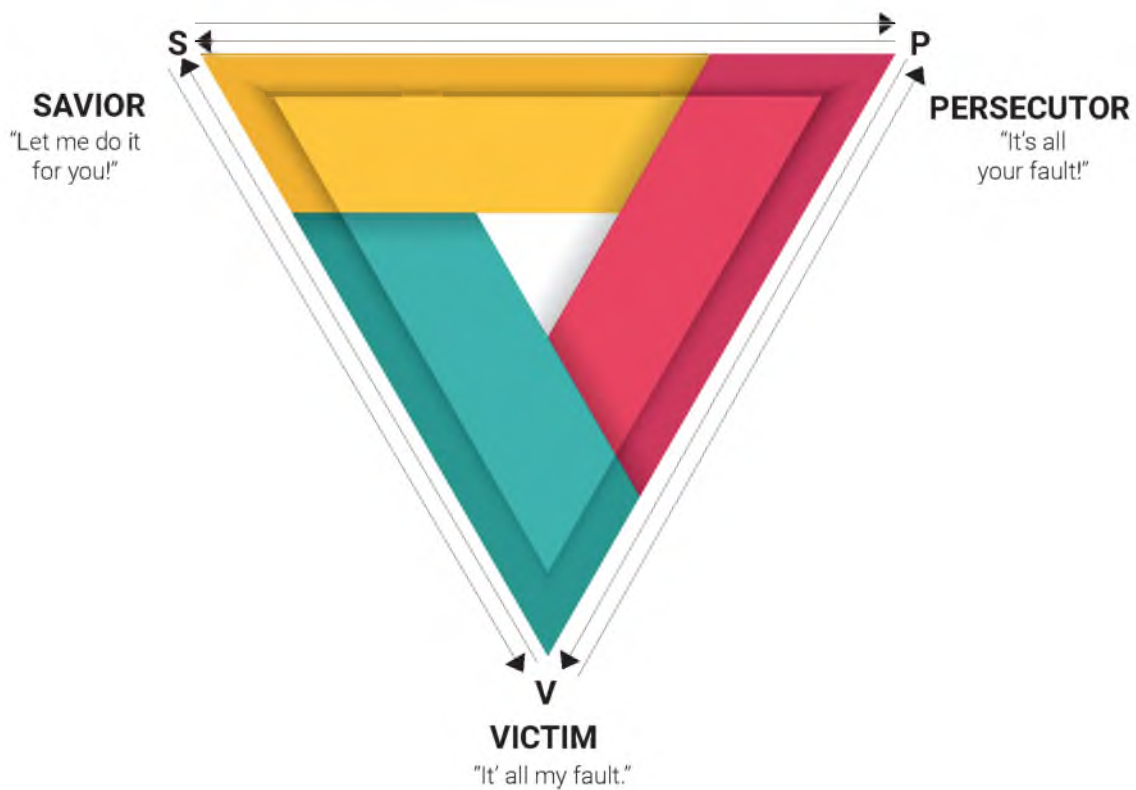
Successful confrontations address the problem at all three levels. It is the easiest to start with behaviour, then provide arguments with meaningful reasons why we have an objection to the behaviour, taking into account the emotional atmosphere during the whole time.

You will recognize this psychological game or its variations on the theme by noticing that the same scenarios are constantly repeating and you have the experience that you are in the same emotional carousel and that you are just switching from one role to another. Those roles are Saviour, Persecutor, and Victim. They are common in all games. Here's how to recognize them:

- ✔ You have taken on the role of Saviour when you act by offering help from a superior position, caring for others who could take care of themselves, solving other people's problems, preventing others from making their own decisions or finding their own way. "Come on, I'll do it for you, don't worry, I'll help you" are just some of the sentences we use when we're in this role.
- ✔ You enter into the role of Persecutor when you criticize, judge, preach, and punish, believing that other people are «below you» and that they deserve such behaviour; when you command, whine and control while being sarcastic and belittling others. "It's all your fault, I'm in charge here, my word is last" are some of the sentences we use in this role.
- ✔ You are in the role of a Victim when you act as if you are not capable of making decisions on your own, you feel inferior by allowing others to decide for you, you allow others to lead your life and take care of you. "I can't, poor me, what can I do, it's all my fault", are just some of the sentences we use when we are in the role of the Victim.

If we start playing a game from one of these roles, we will very likely change each role, which we illustrate with the Drama Triangle.





From the role of the Saviour, we move to the role of the Persecutor or vice versa, depending on how we view the Victim: if they seem helpless to us - We save them, and if they seem rebellious - We persecute them.

In a situation where you view your child as a Victim of the Internet, and you have narrowed down your choice to either try to Save them or start Persecuting them. When you set out to Save your children, you may get bored of it, so you may move into a more aggressive role of Persecutor, after which you will be exhausted and end up as a Victim. Imagine that your high school student is not doing well in school and is constantly on the phone. What would be your approach?



In order to avoid Saving or Persecution and react either by caring for another or by defending our limits, as is best at the moment, we need to give up playing manipulative psychological games. Each of us is called to find in ourselves a core of well-being from which we could recognize it in the other as well. The best way to do that is to decide to act differently at this point: to choose to love ourselves and take care of ourselves and at the same time to love others and take care of them. In other words, let us not Save, Persecute and be Victims.

Insight into our behaviour and the roles we play can be very helpful when talking to children. We can explain to our child that we can use the Internet in a functional and non-functional way.

For example, it is ok that while our friend is in the hospital we exchange a lot of messages with him/her over the internet and in that way we communicate with him/her our love that we feel. However, when a friend recovers and leaves the hospital, and when we sit with that friend instead of hanging out and being involved, we spend time interacting with the phone or people who are not in the room at the time, it is important to recognize that it is no longer in the function of exchanging intimacy, but that it has turned into a psychological game - we have begun to satisfy our needs in a way that is harmful to us.



Again, we can look at cell phone use as a symptom of relationship quality and analyse what phone use in a particular example means and why someone who is not in the room would be more important than the person across from us, whom we met to socialize and share something.

The best way not to structure time through games is to be aware of the options that lie ahead of us. These options are always part of our reality. When we blame others, save them, look for the culprit, strike back, provoke or try to get away from the situation, we show the other person that we do not respect him/her and send a strong message that something is wrong with him/her. In such communications with others, we cannot expect understanding or any exchange that could lead to a change in behaviour. As human beings, we learn and develop all our lives, we can learn how to be assertive, we can learn problem-solving skills, to listen and hear others, be aware of ourselves and our relational needs. With these skills, instead of Persecution, we become assertive, instead of Saving, we care for others, and instead of being helpless Victims, we know how to show our sensitive side. In this way, day by day, by our actions and thoughts on the line of mental health, we ensure our approach to mental well-being and living our full potential.

Practical things you can do to regulate the use of television and computers, mobile phones, tablets:

Strategy	Explanation
Structure TV viewing and Internet usage.	Provide clear rules that limit what children and adolescents can watch on TV and work on a computer, tablet and mobile phone. Avoid using the TV, computer, tablet or mobile phone as a nanny for children. Do not put a TV or computer in the children's room; this significantly increases their use and makes it more difficult to monitor children's activities.
Avoid using TV and computers, tablets and mobile phones as a reward.	When access to TV or computer, tablet and mobile phone is used as a reward or denied as punishment, children are increasingly attracted to them.
Encourage appropriate media experiences for children.	Children who engage in TV and computer activities that are educational, social and age-appropriate make progress in cognitive and social skills.
Whenever possible, watch TV with children and use the Internet with them.	When adults ask questions about what is happening on TV or what they see on the Internet, express their disapproval or encourage discussion, they help children to understand and value content on TV or the Internet.
Connect what children see on the internet or TV with the everyday learning experience.	Encourage children to be active in their environment, for example some content about animals can encourage a trip to nature, a visit to a bookstore to find books about animals, or start thinking about all the ways to help animals in the immediate environment.
Be a model for good use of TV and the Internet.	Parental media behaviour, i.e. avoiding excessive use of TV and the Internet, as well as limiting exposure to harmful content, directly affects children's media behaviour.
Explain how Internet technology works and how school children and adolescents can protect themselves.	Children and adolescents who view the Internet as a system of networks are more likely to understand its social risks. With this information, they benefit because they understand the biggest security risks: disclosing personal information and meeting people they have "met" online.
Be authoritative in your upbringing.	Children of warm, involved parents who have reasonable demands with mature behaviour prefer media experiences with educational and pro-social content and are less likely to use TV or the Internet as a means of escape.



7.

STEREOTYPES

and prejudice

"All nations have their own traditions, and gender stereotypes are part of that. But it is good to remember that people create them and that people can reform them."
Tarja Halonen, former President of the Republic of Finland



Key topics:

- ✓ What are stereotypes and prejudices and how do they arise
- ✓ How they affect our attitudes, thoughts and actions
- ✓ In what way can they be harmful
- ✓ The path from stereotypes and prejudices to hate speech and violence

“Behave like a man.” “You’re crying like a little girl.” “Gipsy stuff”. How many times have you heard and maybe said these phrases yourself? Maybe you laughed from the bottom of your heart at the joke about Montenegrins, Bosnians or Serbs?

The media influences the formation of public opinion. They attach public importance to certain topics on which the audience’s attention is directed and shape the content of what is talked about in public. The enormous power of the media lies in the overlap of two, sometimes difficult to distinguish, levels - the factual (cognitive aspect of media content) and that of value (moral and aesthetic aspects of content). That is why it is very important that we understand how the media helps (or makes it more difficult) in understanding, judging, evaluating, orienting and acting in a modern world full of opportunities but also risks.



Media representation, representation and characterization of otherness play a very important role not only in the way we perceive, but also in the way we treat different social groups, especially the vulnerable or marginalized ones, whether it's related to gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, class affiliation, ideology, politics, ability, age or similar.

The media often uses stereotypes in communication with their audiences. They often choose “representative” actors when reporting on certain issues and events. This can be dangerous because it blinds us and prevents us from truly seeing someone, and frequent use of stereotypes can lead to discrimination and violence.



Stereotypes - General assumptions about a certain group of people. Rough generalizations by which we non-selectively attribute the same characteristics to all members of a certain group. The problem with stereotypes arises when they start to dehumanize people, and instead of seeing a person, we only see an example of a member of a certain group about which we have a certain opinion.

Prejudices - Judgements that we have formed without prior reasoning. Attitudes that lack factual justification and/or logical basis, and are accompanied by strong emotions and resistant to change. Most often, these are negative attitudes based on stereotypes. Prejudice is the basis for discrimination against a person or group. Discrimination is in fact prejudice “in action” (33).

Hate speech - Created on attitudes built on the basis of stereotypes and prejudices. It encompasses all forms of expression that spread, incite or

justify hatred based on race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, origin, ideological or political views. This form of expression is not protected by the right to freedom of thought and speech and constitutes an abuse of this right.

“No one is born with hatred for another person because of their skin colour, background or religion. People must learn to hate, and if they learn to hate, then they can learn to love as well, because love is more natural to the human heart than its opposite”, Nelson Mandela



WHAT IT MEANS: **Discrimination** is unequal treatment of a person or group on the basis of their or his/her personal characteristics (race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, origin, language, religious or political beliefs, property or health status, marital or family status, age, etc.) which results in inequality in the chances of exercising the rights guaranteed by the constitution and the law. Discrimination also occurs when persons who are in an unequal position are treated in the same (equal) way.

Prejudices and stereotypes are **learned patterns of behaviour**. We are usually not even aware of them, primarily because we unconsciously adopt them, that is, “absorb” them from the environment - family, friends, school, but also the media. They are acquired during life through social learning, most often through model-based learning (34). In a sense, stereotypes are also “a form of establishing ‘order’ in the large amount of complex and incomplete data we receive from the world” (35). Stereotypes are thus a kind of mental shortcuts in the classification and categorization of our knowledge, or rather - the beliefs we have about the world, and by which we are guided in trying to orient ourselves, find our way and act in it. The problem with stereotypes lies in the following - who produces, spreads and empowers them and with what intention does he/she do so - what interests do stereotypes serve?

If we are constantly bombarded with media messages about ‘violent behaviour of dirty immigrants’, ‘immorality of atheists’, ‘Muslim terrorists’ or ‘short-sighted women’, we will begin to look at all members of the group to which they belong through this prism. **The situation is especially sensitive with children who, through entertainment, uncritically adopt a whole set of value connotations related to certain social groups, without being aware of it.**

Gender stereotypes and gender-based violence

Gender stereotypes are particularly important and perhaps the most widespread of all, as they permeate almost all communities of our globally connected world, which is still predominantly patriarchal.

The patriarchal, i.e. traditional understanding of gender roles is based on the unequal power relationship between men and women.

It implies accepting the superior position of men and the subordinate position of women in various areas of life, i.e. attributing traditional jobs, responsibilities, characteristics to men and women, whereby those attributed to men are valued more than those attributed to women and practically turn out to be the norm. A man is understood as reasonable, powerful, strong and free, and a woman as sensitive, gentle, caring and submissive. Of course, not all men are reasonable and strong, nor are all women gentle and submissive, but society often severely sanctions and punishes violations of gender norms or failure to maintain within the framework of the gender



that it had prescribed to us. Gender-based violence is violence based on gender and it rests exactly on the deep-rooted gender stereotypes and expectations based on conservative and rigid gender roles. "Gender-based violence is the most common form of human rights violations in Montenegro, and since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, we have witnessed a 27 percent increase in the number of reported cases of domestic violence." (36).

In a patriarchal society, gender stereotypes are common in which women and men are assigned predetermined characteristics and roles, neglecting their individuality. Stereotypes reinforce sexism as a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, leading to discrimination and violence against women and preventing the empowerment and full advancement of women in the society (37).



Women politicians in Montenegro have repeatedly been victims of sexist and misogynistic comments not only from the public but also from their colleagues, while some politicians are at the forefront of supporting stereotypes and sexism. Caricatures with vulgar content depicting women politicians, sexual objectification of women and online sexist hate speech are some of the ways in which an environment of intimidation, threats and violence against women is created and maintained. Freedom of expression is often used as an excuse for unacceptable and offensive behaviour. In the Parliament of Montenegro and in the media, words can be heard such as: „blabbermouth, chatterbox and blithering“, “a snake that hisses and sticks its tongue”, noting that “her last name is longer than the parliamentary bench.” (38); “Draginja got the vaccine, so that something would sting her too!”, “It looks like she liked it”, “I only hope it’s deep, so it won’t leak out.” (39) Such examples of hatred, humiliation and aversion to women, supported by gender stereotypes, are especially dangerous when they manifest in public discourse and through the media, and result as a consequence in the legitimization of gender-based violence. At the same time, the media do not report on gender-based violence in a gender-sensitive way, but in a sensationalist, by victimizing and stigmatizing victims and reducing or relativizing the perpetrator’s guilt. “In Montenegro, there are no adequate mechanisms for dealing with hate speech, cases are rarely processed, and sanctions are imposed even less often. Institutions, by the lack of reaction to that phenomenon, become passive accomplices”, assessed the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms Siniša Bjeković (40).

With the development of information and communication technologies and the partial migration of our sociability to cyberspace or virtual space, we have brought with us into new spaces of digital sociability our bad old habits as well, such as violence or gender-based violence.

Online gender-based violence is not a completely new type of violence, but gender-based violence in a new medium.

The characteristics of the new media will give specifics to this type of gender-based violence such as the permanence of these unsolicited messages - insults, threats, shame, but also correspondence, pictures or videos published without consent, as well as a large number of witnesses and a large audience of violent acts that intensify and deepen the victimization of those against whom violence was committed. The anonymity of perpetrators of online violence is an additional problem.



Patriarchy restricts both women and men and prevents the full development of their human potential. There is nothing wrong or unnatural about a crying man, nor about a woman in a managerial position. Gender roles are not natural or immutable, they are social constructs that should and can be questioned if we want an equal society in which dignity belongs to all and gender has no value connotation.

The stereotyped view of otherness is not only “politically incorrect” or indecent, it is about the fact that stereotypes are the basis not only of speech, but also of acts of hatred that can have extreme consequences. It may sound exaggerated, but stereotypes in some extreme cases can indeed cause death, injury, or self-harm as the last implications of their reckless use. If I’m stronger then I’m entitled to your sandwich or pocket money, if he’s poor then he’s a lazy idler, if she’s a girl then she doesn’t know how to play football, if he’s a boy then he can’t play ballet, if they cross the border illegally then we have the right to persecute them and hunt them like beasts. These are just some of the stereotypes that we actually encounter every day, these stereotypes often, at the end, fill black chronicles full.

Yet, since they are based on unfounded generalizations and confusions of facts and values, stereotypes are extremely irresistible to the destructive power of logical and critical thinking. Dismantling the magnificent building of stereotypes and prejudices created in us gradually from a young age, is a job but also an endless responsibility.

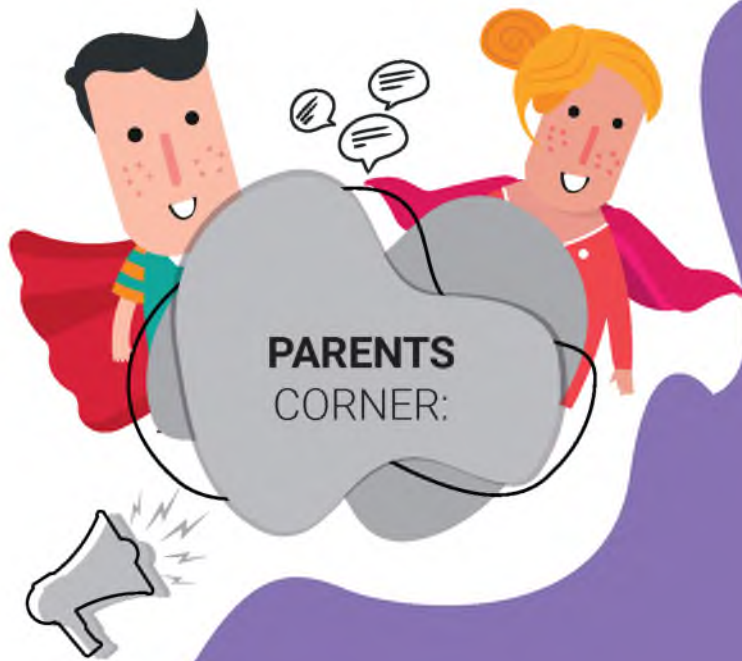
How to protect children from gender stereotypes in the media?

Gender becomes important very early in a child’s life (41). Many studies show that children begin to adopt stereotypes already from the age of two, while some research shows that children are able to notice gender differences at nine or even five months of life. Children learn that their toys and clothes are divided into pink for girls and blue for boys, and that their parents have roles in the household that are typical of “moms” and “dads”. Traditional gender roles from the earliest childhood impose certain behaviours expected of girls and boys, as well as the assumption that male traits, behaviours, and roles are more valuable than female ones. Tough, strong, independent boys and caring, sweet and dependent girls are some of the most important traits that girls and boys need to adopt and adjust to the expectations that society has of them. Through socialization, subtle forms of power and control are used to teach children that they want exactly those things that suit the interests of the dominant group in society. Thus, among other things, girls learn to accept male domination and their subordinate position as appropriate, ‘natural’, even desirable.

The media play a significant role in transmitting and perpetuating gender stereotypes because children consume media content and thus adopt distorted messages, such as those that boys are smarter than girls, or that girls cannot be good mathematicians. Children identify with their role models in the media who emphasize strong, aggressive, authoritative, dominant, successful men and emotional, seductive women whose imperative is perfect looks and beauty, and who are mostly dedicated to family and household. These messages, which are etched deep into their consciousness, the values and patterns of behaviour they adopt and the conclusions they draw, are difficult to change later on. That is why gender stereotypes are extremely harmful and negatively affect the development of children, which later reflects on their lives, careers, relationships, but also on how they will value themselves and other people.

It is clear that gender roles and stereotypes are rooted in the lives of children from an early age, so it is difficult to expect that children will be fully protected from all stereotypes and harmful media influences. Parents cannot control everything their children hear and see, and exposure to explicitly racist, sexist, or xenophobic ideas can affect a child’s view of social norms and values. That is why it is important to start deconstructing stereotypes from an early age in order to raise awareness and minimize their impact.





1. **The importance of parents' influence on children as their role models** – Children develop their sense of the world minute by minute through talking, asking questions, and observing their parents' behaviour. That is why it is necessary to practice non-stereotypical behaviour in parenting - mothers can paint the room, and fathers can cook lunch or vacuum the house. By imitating parents, children should also do the housework in accordance with their age. Children should be encouraged to play with all toys, even those that are common for the opposite sex, and to avoid the division into so-called "female" and "male" colours.

2. **Clearly point out stereotypes and develop empathy** – Instead of ignoring stereotypes and pretending they don't exist, you should recognize them and talk to children about that matter. The best way to reduce stereotypes is to develop empathy for people who are the subject of stereotypes.

By putting people in a position where there are stereotypes, by understanding the situation in which they find themselves, tolerance and respect for differences can be developed.

3. **Avoid stereotypical generalizations in language and expression** – For children, the way we speak is often more important than what we say, some research has shown. The form of a sentence in which certain characteristics, positive or negative, are attributed to the whole group contributes to the understanding and experience of the world through stereotypes (42). The generalization that "women play the piano better and men the guitar" says that one can say what someone is like based only on his/her gender. Therefore, parents should use language carefully to help children learn to view themselves and others as individuals, free to choose their own paths, and not exclusively as members of a group in which everyone has the same characteristics. The child should be helped to develop the habit of constantly challenging, discovering, questioning, instead of supporting stereotypical views in relation to the people around him/her.

Talking to children up to 12 years old

- ✔ Introduce children to the concept of stereotypes from an early age. Explain to them that stereotypes are simplified and one-dimensional representations of persons, based on concepts and generalizations. Point them out the stereotypical (but also non-stereotypical) roles you see in cartoons, children's books and commercials.
- ✔ Show children the **model of non-stereotypical parenting**: Parents who do not want their child to develop stereotypical gender roles should make extra efforts, because the influence of the family on the child's development is crucial. That is why it is important to start from your own example, where dad will also do the housework that is considered traditionally women's, and mom those that are considered men's. Teach children of both sexes from early childhood to do the same household chores, in accordance with their age.

- 👉 Drawing children's attention to media personalities, characters from cartoon or books that do not behave in a stereotypical way, and discussion on this topic can contribute to rethinking gender roles and stereotypes. A crying boy or a girl playing football are great examples for discussion with children. Instead of physical appearance, focus your communication on their characteristics and behaviour as individuals and remove generalizations whenever you can: "It's okay that this boy is sad and crying because his dog is lost. Remember your friend Marko crying when his bike was stolen. Daddy elephant also cried in the cartoon when he didn't know where his baby elephant was."
- 👉 Pointing to examples of people engaged in occupations that are not traditionally women's or men's can trigger a child's mind to reconsider gender roles. A neighbour who often plays with his child, a policewoman from the neighbourhood, a florist from a nearby store, are topics for conversation with children.
- 👉 Give children toys that are typically intended for the opposite sex while re-examining their desires in the context of expected traits and behaviours. "Do you want to play ball even though your grandmother bought you household utensils? You are smart and strong enough to be able to play football or basketball, if you want to."
- 👉 Open space for the child to understand the possibility that despite strong stereotypes, he/she can affect that things may be different from what he/she sees in the media or what most people think or expect. Support her/his choice even though it is not in accordance with the prevailing norms and instill confidence in the child to do the right thing.

Talking to children from 12 to 18 years

- ✔ Teenagers at this age begin to think about love and are very worried about their own appearance. The perfect physical appearance and standards of beauty imposed by different types of media are reflected through the pressure of society that young people should look a certain way in order to deserve attention. Previously, beauty requirements applied mainly to women and girls, while research in recent years indicates that the imperative of good looks is also present in an increasing number of boys and men (43). Children are confronted with stereotypical models of muscular, athletically built men, with aggressive behaviour, with the image of frowning and dangerous guys, and models of sexy, perfectly beautiful and half-naked women who mostly deal only with their appearance. It should be discussed with children, especially teenagers, about the fact that perfect looks and imposed standards of beauty are not a reality and that they were created for the needs of industry and advertisers. They need to be shown that everyone is beautiful in their own way and that differences are good because they make the world around us richer and more beautiful. It is important to build self-confidence in teenagers to love themselves, to have a positive image of themselves, that their success does not depend on appearance and to let them know that they are worthy of love no matter how they look.
- ✔ It is very important to break stereotypes about the characteristics of both sexes that indicate that men are valued more than women. Traditional stereotypes impose that men are expected to be dominant, firm, determined and without showing emotions, and women as inferior to men, to be caring, gentle, emotional and seductive. We should talk to teenagers about whether they know someone from the environment who does not fit these stereotypical traits, point to examples of women from public life who are authoritative, determined leaders and directors of companies, as well as examples of men who show emotions, treat women and vulnerable



groups with respect or participate in charitable and volunteer activities. Talk about women who are good mathematicians, engineers, pilots, as well as about men who are kindergarten teachers or successful cooks.

- ✓ Discuss the harmfulness of generalization as well as the aspiration to achieve equality in a society in which every human being, regardless of their sex, has the right to their own characteristics and to participate equally in social processes. Support friendly relations between people and clearly condemn discrimination and violence against women at every opportunity, as well as in the media. The principle of equality, justice and freedom should often be the focus of conversations with teenagers, citing examples from the environment as well as cases of which we can learn from the media.

CYBERBULLYING: Cyberbullying is digital or electronic violence, i.e. violence committed using digital technologies that are used to intentionally harm people and treat them maliciously and hostilely. It is carried out with the aim of intimidating, angering or embarrassing the people who have been attacked, and endangering their safety and/or reputation. The consequences of digital violence for the attacked person can be fear and concern for their own safety, various types of emotional damage, and even suicide. Frequent victims of digital violence are children, young people and women, but of course it is not limited to them.

Types:

Sexting (compound: sex and texting)

Sending, sharing or posting explicit or suggestive content of a sexual nature.

Flaming

Flammable, hostile communication, often on sensitive topics, which includes insults, swearing, the use of capital letters (which would correspond to shouting in direct communication) and takes place on chats, forums, social networks or the like. Flaming can also occur as a result of misinterpreted message, i.e. misunderstanding of its tone, since online communication is mostly verbal, devoid of its non-verbal (contextual - body posture, gestures, facial expressions, etc.) and paraverbal (colour and tone of voice, speed speech, laughter, etc.) elements.

Happy slapping

It refers to an attack (verbal or physical) on someone, and recording of that attack on a mobile phone. The video can then be shared on various online platforms with the aim of humiliating and embarrassing the attacked person and exposing them to wider and deeper victimization.

Cyber harassment

Constantly, continuously sending hurtful, threatening and intimidating messages with the goal of inflicting fear, pain and harm.

Cyber stalking

Particularly serious and dangerous form of digital violence, which may include threats of physical violence, as well as monitoring the movement and behaviour of the victim not only in the virtual but also in the physical environment.

Masquerading, also known as **Catfishing** (name derived from the American documentary from 2010) or **Sockpuppets**



Creating a fictitious person, fake identity, profile or account on social networks in order to deceive the target person in order to obtain private information from her/him or to lure that person into a love affair with an internet predator - a non-existent, consciously created fake character.

Outing / Doxing

It refers to the intentional disclosure of private, confidential and sensitive information about someone's life, without the consent of that person, which may humiliate or publicly embarrass the person to whom it relates.

Fraping (compound: 'Facebook' and 'rape')

It involves obtaining access data and usurping someone's account on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), and posting mostly inappropriate or offensive content, as well as sharing and deleting content from the account without the consent, permission or knowledge of the real owner.

Dissing or Denigration

Disseminating cruel information about the victim through private messages, public posts or even specially designed websites to damage the person's reputation or relationships with other people.

Exclusion

A common form of digital violence when a person is intentionally and continuously left out, skipped or excluded from the activities of the group to which he or she belongs or thinks/wants to belong.

Encouraging self-harm

One of the most dangerous, if not the most dangerous form of digital violence in which a person, as a rule, is already at risk, is encouraged and incited to harm, injure or even kill himself/herself.



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