

## Taking Action Against Cyberbullying – A Training Manual

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### Abstract

*Education faces new challenges, as a result of the increased use of information technology among young people. Cyberbullying, a new form of bullying which involves the use of technological devices, such as e-mail and the Internet, is increasingly regarded as a major problem and a threat for young people health and development. In the context of the EU-funded CyberTraining project<sup>1</sup>, partners from Germany, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, UK, Switzerland, Norway and Bulgaria have developed a training manual on cyberbullying for trainers. This manual is intended to help mainly professionals involved in training young people, parents, and school staff, by providing them with clear guidance, knowledge and resources.*

*The Taking action against cyberbullying training manual, which is available in form of an eBook in English, Portuguese, Spanish, German and Bulgarian (at <http://www.cybertraining-project.org>), was built based on a multi-level research process, that involved a needs assessment conducted with trainers across partner countries and also a qualitative questioning process that aimed at structuring experts' views on the cyberbullying problem. In this paper, after summarising the main findings of research conducted with trainers and experts, we describe the manual structure and content.*

*The eBook consists of seven modules that can be used in a flexible way, according to the specificity of the training target group. The first four modules offer a general introduction into training skills and strategies, ICT and Internet safety, cyberbullying, and European approaches tackling cyberbullying. Further chapters provide guidelines, practical tips and advice for trainers who work with parents, schools, and young people.*

*The cybertraining manual is being adapted as a main resource in the EU-funded project CyberTraining-4-Parents, currently under development, that aims to provide face-to-face, as well as moderated and self-directed online courses on cyberbullying for parents. This paper also offers a short overview of this project.*

### 1. Introduction

The development of new information and communication technologies (ICT), and the simultaneous growth of its use by the younger generations, have been raising new questions and challenges to education. These challenges are related to the new opportunities and forms of communication provided by new media. Along with the many benefits that new media offer, there are also some risks that nowadays constitute an educational concern. One example of those risks is the phenomenon of cyberbullying.

The research on this subject is still incipient in many countries, and there is still a lack of practical guidance and resources, to help preventing and reducing cyberbullying. In the context of the EU-funded CyberTraining project (<http://www.cybertraining-project.org>), partners from eight European countries have developed a training manual on cyberbullying for trainers. This manual is intended to help mainly professionals involved in training young people, parents, and school staff, by providing them with clear guidance, knowledge and resources.

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In this paper, after a general introduction to the topic of cyberbullying, we briefly describe the CyberTraining project and the main conclusions of its initial research-based phase. Subsequently, we present the structure and content of the training manual Taking action against cyberbullying. Finally, we inform about the EU-funded project CyberTraining-4-Parents, currently under development.

## 2. Cyberbullying

The ICT have gained an increasing relevance in contemporary society, and especially in the life of young people. In fact, data published by Eurostat [1] reveals that from 2006 to 2010, the percentage of households with Internet access rose from 49 to 70. The use of Internet for communication is increasingly common, especially among young people aged 16-24. With regard to mobile phones [2], in the second quarter of 2010 the penetration rate of mobile telephone services stood at 123.2 per 100 inhabitants in the EU-27, and in the majority of the Member States there were more subscriptions than inhabitants.

The new ICT have thus been offering several opportunities for communication and social interaction. In this context, the phenomenon of cyberbullying is the focus of growing attention of educational agents, researchers, and even of media. According to Smith and collaborators [3], cyberbullying can be defined as “An aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself”. The impact of cyberbullying is underlined by several authors [4], based on the particular characteristics of this form of bullying. Among those characteristics is the breath of potential audience, reached through ICT, and the repetitive nature of cyberbullying, which may be quantified in terms of the number of times a certain image or video is posted or viewed. Furthermore, cyberbullying can occur anywhere and anytime, making it difficult, for the victims, to escape from it. Cyberbullying involves an imbalance of power, related to the protagonists’ levels of ICT expertise, and also to the anonymity that cyberbullies may find in ICT, which contributes to the victims’ feeling of vulnerability and inability to defend themselves against their attacks.

There is a growing perception of the seriousness of this phenomenon and the recognition that the studies and guidelines for action are still scarce. The CyberTraining project sought to fill some of these gaps, by developing a training manual on cyberbullying for trainers.

## 3. The CyberTraining project

The CyberTraining project is a cooperative project of researchers from Germany, Bulgaria, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the UK, and was co-funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. This project aimed to develop a well-grounded research-based training manual on cyberbullying for trainers.

For this reason, the development of the training manual was built on a multi-level research process, that started with an initial analysis of trainers’ needs and preferences in terms of a training manual, as well as a multi-level qualitative questioning process that aimed at structuring experts’ views on the cyberbullying problem (in which participated 55 trainers and 45 experts, mainly from Europe).

According to the outcomes of the experts’ and trainers’ questioning [5-6], the training manual should include a theoretical part, with a characterization of the phenomenon of cyberbullying and a practice-oriented component, focusing on prevention and intervention strategies, and offering practical tips, and resources.

The development of the training manual sought to take into account the outputs of trainers’ and experts’ questioning, in order to become a useful resource for professionals who provide training on the subject of cyberbullying.

## 4. The training manual Taking action against cyberbullying

The training manual Taking action against cyberbullying is available in form of an eBook in English, Portuguese, Spanish, German and Bulgarian (at <http://www.cybertraining-project.org>). Due to the diversity of professionals providing training courses focusing on cyberbullying, it addresses a broad scope of trainers.

The eBook consists of seven modules that can be used in a flexible way, according to trainers’ needs in terms of information and support, and to the characteristics of the group of trainees they are working

with. The first four modules offer a general introduction into training skills and strategies, ICT and Internet safety, cyberbullying, and European approaches tackling cyberbullying. Further modules provide guidelines, practical tips and advice for trainers who work with parents, schools, and young people.

These different modules have a similar structure, comprising a first theoretical part which provides a “summary of current knowledge and thinking”. The second part of each module is more practical-oriented, and includes activities and resources (e.g. narratives, video clips) aimed to deepen the content of the first section. Throughout each module, links to many external resources available online were incorporated, to help illustrating the contents. Each module also provides, in a final section, suggestions of additional materials such as audiovisual resources, references and useful links to institutions, relevant projects and initiatives.

The first module of the eBook, entitled “Introduction to training: principles and strategies”, aims to enhance trainers’ competence in dealing with the topic of cyberbullying. In order to accomplish this goal, the module starts by presenting some basic principles that should guide the planning and development of training activities, followed by some notes on working with different age groups. In “developing training skills” some strategies meant to strengthen trainers’ communication skills are reviewed, as well as some strategies for planning and developing efficient training. Finally, in “Methods and approaches to training”, a few guidelines and practical suggestions on how to use narratives and images in training are offered.

The second module of the eBook entitled “Introduction to ICT and Internet safety”, aims to introduce participants to new media and give them an insight into the impact they have on young people’s lives. The first part of this module offers an introduction to the fundamental principles of the Internet and Web 2.0. The subsequent section provides an overview of the evolution of Internet and its use by young people in Europe. Moreover, the importance of new media for young people is illustrated by different resources. The module concludes with a section devoted to the benefits and risks of new media for young people. Given the diversity of trainers that provide training on cyberbullying (experts in bullying, ICT, etc.), this module should be used according to the specific needs of trainers. Thus, depending on trainers’ level of knowledge and familiarity with the ICT, some parts of this module, in particular those designed to introduce some concepts and principles, may be left aside.

The third module, “Introduction to cyberbullying”, offers an overview of the cyberbullying phenomenon and aims to raise awareness of how cyberbullying can affect young people. This module explains concepts and the terminology related to cyberbullying, and describes the channels through which cyberbullying can occur and the categories in which it may be divided, according to the nature of the abuse perpetrated. Furthermore, it provides some data on the prevalence of this problem. Finally, it presents a reflection on the impact and consequences of cyberbullying.

The manual includes a fourth module entitled “Tackling cyberbullying”. In the first part of this module, some initiatives and strategies that have shown to be effective in preventing and reducing bullying are explained, such as the direct work with bullies and victims, school-based approaches and the work with the whole class. The second part of this module describes current initiatives that have been developed to counteract cyberbullying and promote e-safety, such as government campaigns, initiatives of NGOs and providers, and other guidelines and general measures for preventing and combating cyberbullying. Moreover, this module discusses national policies and legal aspects related to cyberbullying.

The final three modules focus on more practical oriented work with parents, schools and young people. The module “Working with parents” provides information and offers a range of activities that trainers can use to work with parents. Different exercises and resources useful to introduce parents to the different forms of cyberbullying, as well as concepts and related terminology, are suggested. Some activities are designed to help parents realize that their child is being victim of cyberbullying, by promoting a reflection on the signs and symptoms of victimization. Other activities focus on what parents can or should do if they find that their child is being victimized or involved in cyberbullying others.

The module that follows, entitled “Working with schools”, aims to assist members of the school community - such as teachers, other school staff and teacher trainers - in the process of developing skills necessary to approach the problem of cyberbullying, and to make them aware of the importance of their role in helping students developing the ability to deal with cyberbullying. This module proposes two basic lines of action to combat cyberbullying - prevention and intervention - and provides information and guidance on these two different lines of action, and suggests activities that allow students the discussion and exploration of each of them.

The training manual concludes with a module entitled "Working with young people", which provides information and activities to develop with young people, aiming to provide them with knowledge on the subject of cyberbullying, motivate and support them to participate in initiatives to combat cyberbullying, and help them developing empathy for the victims. The proposed activities also invite young people to reflect on the different participant roles involved in situations of cyberbullying, and on the relevance of sanctions or other alternative measures.

## 5. Conclusion

Within the European project CyberTraining, the training manual Taking action against cyberbullying was developed, with the aim of providing trainers with guidance, support and resources, and thus helping them to prevent and combat cyberbullying.

The eBook offers a characterization of the phenomenon of cyberbullying, and describes approaches, initiatives, and examples of good practice in Europe. Apart from this theoretical part, the manual includes a more practical oriented component for trainers who work with parents, school staff and young people and a wide range of activities and resources (e.g. narratives, videos, useful websites). This manual constitutes the main resource that will be used in the context of the project CyberTraining-4-Parents, a project co-funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission, which will be developed by teams from Germany, Bulgaria, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, and Israel, between 2010 and 2012. This project aims to develop face-to-face training courses as well as moderated and self-directed online courses for parents. We intend to inform about the development of this project in future events.

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