



A GUIDE FOR  
PARENTS

# EDUCATION AND NEW MEDIA



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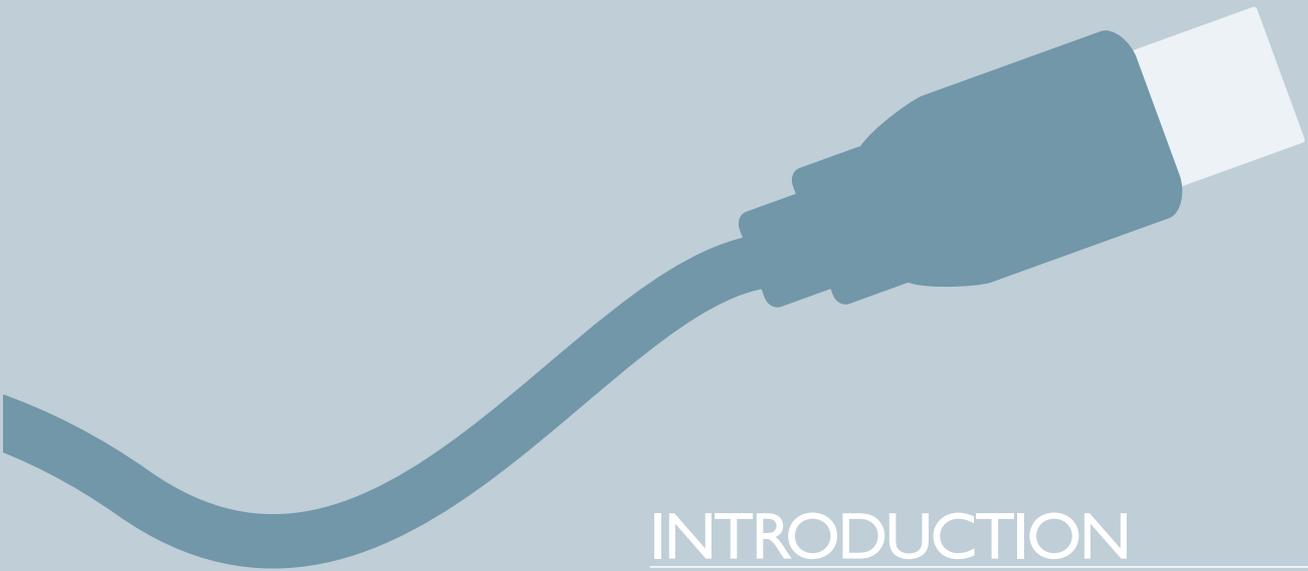
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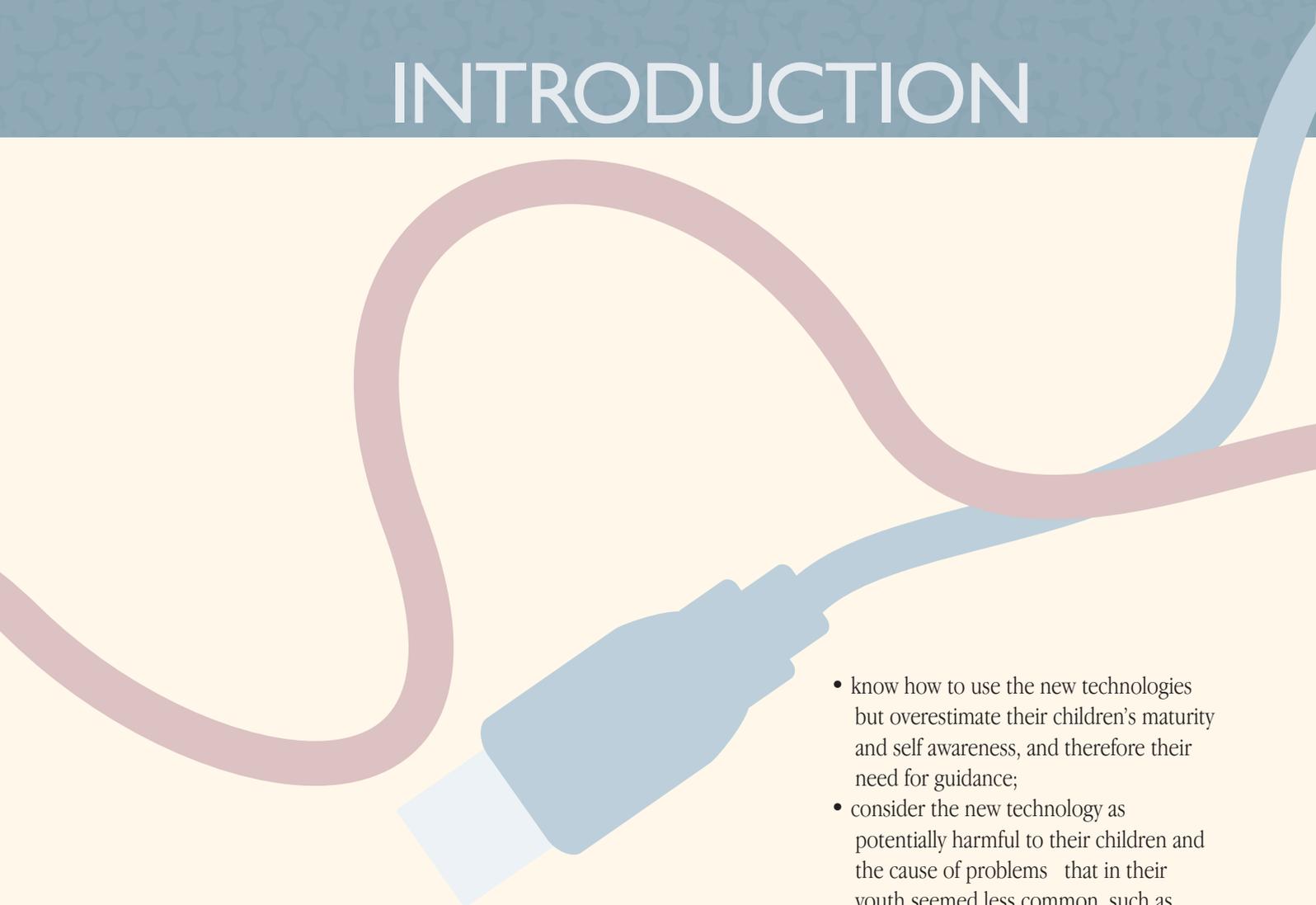
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# INTRODUCTION



## **OUR AIM**

This guide recognises the need to appreciate and promote the full potential of new technology in the lives of our children while not underestimating the risks involved. It is intended as not just a simple technical advice kit, but above all, an educational guide from which parents can gain a clearer sense of the importance of their role.

## **WHO WE ARE ADDRESSING**

The guide is aimed at parents who:

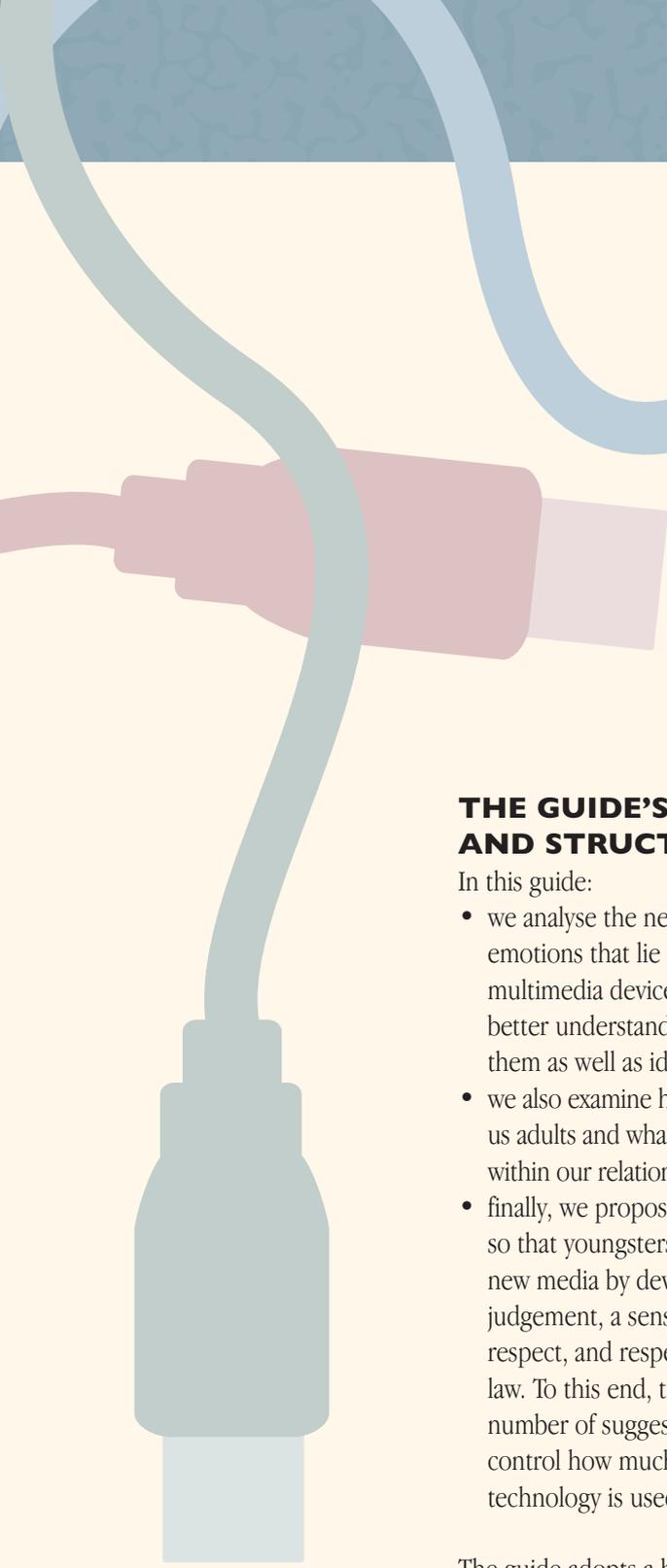
- want a better understanding of why their children spend so much time on the Internet or their mobile phones and the role of this technology in their lives;
- are less familiar with the new multimedia technology than their children and restrict their role as educators to prohibiting or limiting the use of such technology;

- know how to use the new technologies but overestimate their children's maturity and self awareness, and therefore their need for guidance;
- consider the new technology as potentially harmful to their children and the cause of problems that in their youth seemed less common, such as isolation and addiction.

## **OUR EXPERIENCE**

Through close contact with youngsters, parents and teachers over a number of years, we have learnt that children and teenagers are very active consumers of technology rather than simply passive recipients. Yet although they have considerable technical expertise, youngsters remain 'fragile' from an emotional point of view. And it is precisely for this reason that they need educational guidance from someone close to them. Parents have an important role to play in encouraging their children to gain independence and a sense of responsibility by helping them deal with emotional issues and develop their own values and critical faculties.

As new technologies become an ever increasing part of our lives and those of our children, families together with schools and other educational agencies can no longer refrain from exerting their essential educational role.



## THE GUIDE'S CONTENTS AND STRUCTURE

In this guide:

- we analyse the needs, motivations and emotions that lie behind the use of multimedia devices by youngsters to better understand why and how they use them as well as identify potential risks;
- we also examine how such tools relate to us adults and what place they occupy within our relationships with our children;
- finally, we propose an educational model, so that youngsters can make safe use of new media by developing critical judgement, a sense of responsibility, self-respect, and respect for others and the law. To this end, the guide offers a number of suggestions to help parents control how much and in what way the technology is used.

The guide adopts a broad definition of new media including television and video games as well as more recent technology such as the Internet and mobile phones. This is because we believe that many of the education issues are the same and the various types of media are anyway becoming increasingly interconnected.

The guide is divided into chapters on each of the four main types of technology:

## 1 MOBILE PHONES 2 THE INTERNET 3 VIDEO GAMES 4 TV

Each of these chapters includes the following sections:

- a brief *case study* involving a parent and child in the face of new media usage;
- an *interpretation* of the situation portrayed in the case study focusing on the roles of those involved, the dynamics of the relationship and the problems that emerge;
- an exploration of the ways a parent can intervene from an educational point of view, which we call *Educational Paths*;
- a media glossary that clearly explains the technical terms, brand names and communication functions inherent in the particular situation being explored.

The guide ends with some conclusions and final reflections on the main educational themes regarding safe and responsible use of new media technology.



# PREFACE

By Mario Russo and  
Adele Rita Medici

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Genitori Democratici)

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Is the widespread use of new communication technologies an obstacle to youngsters' self expression in terms of their imagination and creativity? Or do such technologies simply expand opportunities for sharing and communicating that self expression? Opinions on this matter vary greatly.

With this guide, we are not attempting to address these questions from the standpoint of ethical or non-ethical behavioural patterns or to establish whether any particular kind of behaviour is praiseworthy or deserving disapproval, instructive or morally harmful. Instead, we offer a range of educational paths that help parents steer children and adolescents towards more responsible kinds of behaviour when using new media. This is because, as parents, we cannot shirk from educating our children to deal with both their "real" and "virtual" lives, especially as the two become increasingly intertwined.

As educators, we cannot ignore the fine line between the current situation and one that may develop. An understanding of this is essential in order to help our children to deal effectively with external stimuli such as habits, customs, traditions, and different types of languages and knowledge.

In this sense, choosing whether or not to buy a mobile phone for our son or daughter, or establishing how to regulate his or her television viewing or the length of time spent on chat lines with friends, are all important decisions for us as educators. Aside from having practical and economic consequences, our decisions will help determine whether our children develop an autonomous capacity to distinguish between opportunities and risks, discriminate between people and experiences, and make choices in a responsible fashion.

Of course, as soon as we begin to act as an intermediary between our children and the

outside cultural world, the values, traditions and knowledge we transmit are inevitably mediated by our individual personalities. In the same way, our children will also internalize and elaborate on our actions according to their own personalities. Therefore, each educational context will be different from the next since the people involved will differ. Although the experiences of others will undoubtedly serve as a useful source of inspiration and means of determining rules, in every individual case it will be up to us to decide what is best and take responsibility for the choices we make.

## WHY PATHS?

We employ the term 'path' to denote the educational reflections contained in this guide because the term implies a route that can only be followed by reconstructing the marks and footprints left behind by someone else. The path does not necessarily represent the best route, but the vestiges of one or more sets of experiences, which requires our individual interpretation to become our own path. We have to question the signals presented along the way and take responsibility for any risks related to the understandings we have reached and the choices we have made.

How then can these educational paths be best used? Perhaps the best way is through the creation of a "dialogue" carried out with other parents, by sharing ideas and experiences or else by trying to re-examine the Paths ourselves as ideas that require reflection, doubt and curiosity, without providing a single definitive answer.



# MOBILE PHONES

The mobile phone has become very widespread<sup>1</sup> and often considered indispensable. It has changed our habits, the way we manage our contacts and organise our lives. As parents we appreciate its advantages but are also aware of its potential disadvantages such as violation of privacy, cost and addiction.

<sup>1</sup>There are now more mobile phone subscriptions in the European Union than there are inhabitants (122 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in 2008) with many people owning more than one subscription. Source: Eurostat (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tin00060&plugin=1>)

Your children take mobile phones for granted as a tool that performs a substantial number of functions and not just the one of communication. Those functions may include keeping in touch with friends, sharing thoughts and feelings, feeling part of a group or sharing particular moments in one's life with others. Yet mobile phone use can also generate a series of problems such as interference by friends and relatives, inappropriate and, at times, excessive use, the risks posed by bullying, costs, and the influence of advertising and commercialism.

These problems require educational intervention from parents. We must recognise that although we may still see mobile phones as relative novelties, for our children they now represent a normal tool of communication and relationship building.



# DAD, WILL YOU BUY ME A MOBILE PHONE?!

## A CASE STUDY

*“Dad, will you buy me a mobile phone?!... Come on, Dad, you promised!”*

For the hundredth time your **11-year-old** son, Tom, makes this request, and you just can't take it any more so you snap angrily: *“But what phone are you talking about? I never promised anything! It's too expensive!”*

Tom does not give up, the matter is too important as far as he is concerned: *“But all my friends have one, I'm the only one left without one!”*

But you are also stubborn: *“... so how do you think I managed when I was your age? I didn't have a mobile phone, and I managed very well, thank you, so you can do the same! You're still too young. End of story!”*

Without a mobile phone, Tom can do no more than scrounge a few calls or an SMS off his friends and ask himself: *“When will I be old enough to get a mobile phone?”*

## HOW TO INTERPRET THESE SITUATIONS

Since most parents are unlikely to have had a mobile when they were a child or teenager, many of us will be surprised when our child asks for one. As parents, we may be tempted to remind our children that: *“In my days there were no mobile phones and yet we got along just fine”*. But you must certainly have asked your parents for other things at that age and perhaps the urgency involved was not that different.

For example, until not long ago, the socializing and communication functions now carried out by the mobile phone were carried out by the **normal telephone** and as children, many of us will have felt the need to stay for hours on that telephone! Ask yourself what the mobile phone represents for your child today? What kind of use will he or she make of it? And what will the implications be? Why is he or she asking for one? Has the time really come to buy one or would it be better to wait until he or she is more grown up?

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

The **choices** underlying the purchase and use of mobile phones have profound **educational implications**. It is therefore important to reflect on when and how to acquire the phone and above all how best to regulate its use. You will need to assess your child's degree of maturity and what is actually behind the use of **conformism** as a justification for your child's requests? Is it that something must be had because “all my other schoolmates have one” or perhaps to be able to do something because “all the others are doing it...”? We may have used such conformism justifications ourselves. However, we know that it may not always be reasonable to make a particular decision simply because it coincides with the majority decision.

The request for a mobile phone can be an opportunity for you to share with your child the notion that having convictions and being guided by them is the best way to get on with others without feeling inferior. Try to remember what it was like when you were young, the requests you made to your parents, how they behaved towards you, and how you felt as a result. This will certainly help you avoid underestimating your child's motivations and open a dialogue that brings to the fore his or her real needs. Maybe he or she wants a mobile phone just like the ones his friends have or one that's even “cooler” so that he or she will be accepted by a group or be able to stand out within the group... Or perhaps in order to impress a particular person... Or maybe to feel like a grown up. Use the opportunity to hear your children out, to come to know their needs, and create a climate conducive to dialogue – one that will become a precious resource when they become adolescents.

What is important is to show that it only makes sense to have a mobile phone if it serves a purpose. Just now, what purpose would it have? Which exact needs would it fulfil? By reasoning in this way you may be able to understand (and explain) that some of these needs do not justify such a purchase or that they could be met in another way.

Finally, imagine what your child might feel when you do not **keep** a **promise** you have made to him or her. It's not always a bad thing to change one's mind, especially on issues about which you may not foresee possible consequences. For this reason it is always important to explain to your children the motives that at times can prevent us from keeping a specific promise.

## THE FIRST COMMUNION PRESENT

### CASE STUDY





### HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

The mobile phone has become a popular gift on special occasions such as Holy Communion and Confirmation, birthdays, and passing exams. Sometimes it is a present from uncles and aunts or grandparents and, given the expense of some mobile phones, such a gift can certainly represent a financial plus. Yet, in their desire to find the most winning gift, friends and relatives often go ahead without consulting the parents and without taking into account their educational choices.

A further problem lies in a lack of **understanding of information technology** and **the risks** involved. Relatives often give mobile phones with multi-media functions, without considering whether some of these functions are appropriate for youngsters of a certain age. For example, the **iPhone** can be used not just to communicate, but can also shoot photos and films as well as connect to the Internet. As a parent, you may also feel ill at ease when faced by a thick instructions booklet and embarrassed to discover that your child has learnt to use all the phone's functions long before you.

### EDUCATIONAL PATHS

When the gift of a mobile phone to a child is being considered, it is important to ask the right questions. Are they old enough and mature enough to manage the phone? Do they have the technical competence required? What rules will need to be laid down about periods of usage, costs and types of contacts that can be made? What knowledge do you have of the phone to guide your children in its use, to understand its implications, and to avoid risks?

In the case of an unexpected gift, you might want to **speak with the relatives concerned**, and let them know your views on the matter to avoid feeling put on the spot in the future. You could also speak with your child and point out how, at different times in life, one can be faced by a **range of different opinions**. Rather than lessening the affection and solidarity of those closest to you, confronting the situation may well cause the people involved to reflect and adopt a more critical approach.

At the same time, it is a question of coming to terms with **consumerism**. How important is receiving an expensive gift to you? Does it seem to "have more value" if others are spending a lot on you? What are your criteria for judging people and by which you, in turn, would like to be judged?

### MEDIA GLOSSARY

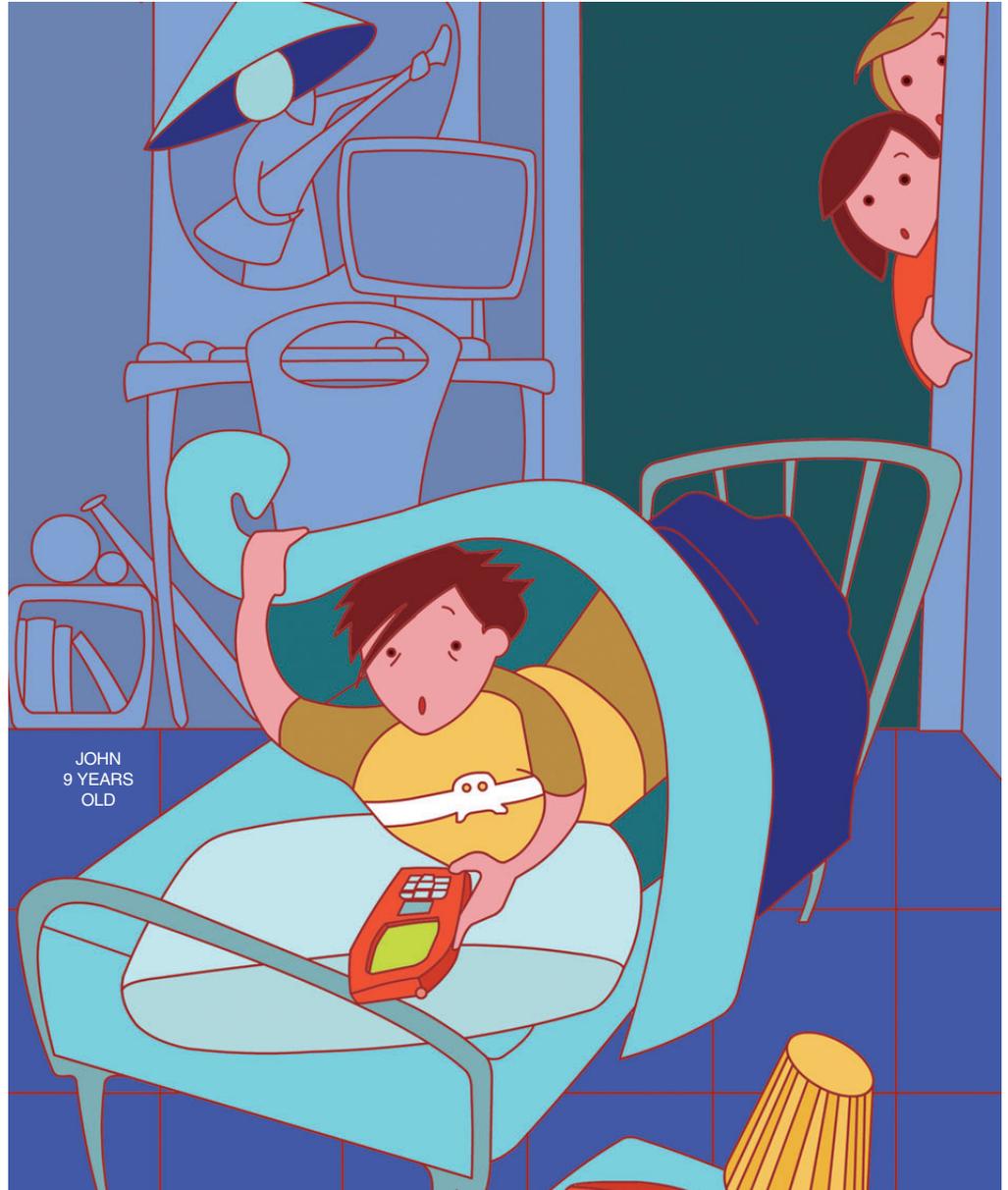
**iPhone:** a multi-media mobile phone designed by Apple, the company that manufactures Macintosh personal computers and the iPod. It is internet-enabled (allowing high speed surfing), connects to email, and has camera and video capability. Instead of a normal keyboard, the iPhone has a touch screen, allowing use of the

phone by simply touching the screen with one's bare fingers.

**Smartphone:** a mobile phone offering advanced capabilities such as management of personal data and the possibility of installing other programmes that enhance the phone's capabilities.

# ALWAYS SWITCHED ON

## CASE STUDY



JOHN  
9 YEARS  
OLD

## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

A common source of discussions between youngsters and their parents is that of **excessive** mobile phone use. Many children leave their phones on at school and even during the night in the hope of receiving calls, text messages or sympathy rings. Even adults sometimes fail to turn off their mobile phones at the cinema, in the car, or during dinner. However, the tendency is particularly pronounced among teenagers who seem to need to be **always in touch** with friends and “*always switched on*” in order to feel part of their group.

Furthermore, youngsters are known for their **multitasking** abilities. They can use the Internet, mobile phones and the television all at the same time, rather as we used to as adolescents, study while listening to the radio and leafing through a magazine.



## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Mobile phones can accentuate the already strong impact that your children's **peer groups** have on family life: they take up their time, interrupt discussions, and distract them from school work. However, simply taking your child's mobile phone away may not act as a barrier to this invasion.

At 13, one feels more need than ever to find a place within a community of friends, to share news, thoughts and feelings, and the mobile phone makes this easy in spite of physical distances.

At 13 one also has the right to a **social life**, one that should be balanced and age-appropriate. Rather than viewing these new influences with suspicion, perhaps you can explore whether they can somehow widen your child's range of interests and strengthen his or her ability to take on responsibilities.

If you are concerned that your child is not able to establish boundaries between mobile phone use and other aspects of his or her life - like family meals, sleep, study and entertainment - it may be helpful to discuss together what priority mobile phone use should take. For example, the purchase of a new mobile phone could provide an opportunity to agree with one's child on a sort of mobile phone "etiquette", a few small rules that need to be respected in order to prevent it from eliminating boundaries within family life, abusing relations with other family members, or preventing accomplishment of necessary tasks.

### A few words of advice:

- ☛ let's put off making calls that are not urgent;
- ☛ let's put aside a certain part of the day for sending and replying to SMS text messages;
- ☛ let's switch off our phones when we are involved in something together to avoid being disturbed.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**Multitasking:** in technological terms this refers to an operative system that allows the functioning of more than one programme at the same time, as

in a computer. This expression has also come to be used to describe people who are able to do several things at the same time.

# DON'T EVER SWITCH IT OFF!

## THE SITUATION

You are 13-year-old Sarah's mum, and you are very attached to her and therefore call her often on her mobile to check how she is. You do not entirely trust some of her girlfriends and so you have recently started to steal quick glances at the SMS messages stored on her phone, and you even suspect that Sarah may be skipping classes. So, you have asked her to take her mobile phone with her to school and always keep it on. This way, you can call every so often to make sure that she really is at school.

However, one day you call during her English lesson. The teacher scolds Sarah for letting it ring during class and asks her to immediately switch it off. Embarrassed, Sarah feels she needs to justify herself to her teacher: "*it's not my fault... my mum told me to never switch it off!*"

## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

One of the reasons many parents buy mobile phones for their children is to enable them to better monitor their movements. However, for children a mobile phone allows them to enter the world of adolescence and free themselves, at least partially, from the control of their families.

For some parents, the **anxiety of needing to be in control** is very strong, to the point that losing touch with their child, even if only for a few hours, can become the source of suffering. In some cases this can lead to extreme behaviour such as calling during class times, checking their text messages, the e-mails on their computer or the history of the internet sites they have visited.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Your need to protect your children can be expressed in a number of different ways: through control, trust or by vesting them with responsibility. There is no one guaranteed way, but a first important step involves educating your children to become more **independent and responsible**. That does not mean they should be left on their own when making choices and decisions, as this could potentially increase their passivity and dependence when faced with tasks that are too demanding at their age. Probably, at 13, your child will start sharing his or her motives and concerns with you, depending on the time you take to listen and talk together. This way your child can develop some independence, while knowing that you are nearby if needed.

However, promoting a sense of independence and responsibility does not mean becoming disinterested or **underestimating inappropriate or potentially dangerous behaviour**. You will need to balance your duty to protect your children with the need to encourage them to manage their own lives and choices in an independent way. In this sense, the acquisition of a mobile phone does not magically make your children more grown up nor does it increase or lessen your capacity to control their lives. For example, instead of calling children on their mobile phone to check whether they are attending school, developing a relationship of trust and collaboration with the school teachers may be just as effective.

# A COMPROMISING PHOTO!

## THE SITUATION

You are worried about your 15-year-old daughter Laura. Recently you've noticed she is gloomy and nervous and displaying a silent reserve. During dinner, she receives a message on her phone and checks immediately to see what it is about. Suddenly, she starts sobbing nervously and shuts herself in her room. At this point, you decide to get to the bottom of the matter and speak with her. It turns out that the message was an **MMS** message from Laura's girlfriends letting her know that a "compromising" photograph, taken in a moment of intimacy with her ex-boyfriend Daniel, has been sent to the entire class through **Bluetooth**. In fact, over the previous days, Laura had been nervous because she had been trying to deal with the situation with Daniel, who hadn't taken the break-up well. Despite his hard feelings, she had never expected him to behave in such a way!



### HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

It takes one click on a mobile phone to take a picture or video; a second click to send and share the image with other people via the mobile phone or Internet. For younger generations these are often automatic gestures, yet they can also transform your children into cyberbullies or cyber victims.

The contents shot and sent can end up infringing someone else's **privacy**, damaging their image or portraying tragic situations that upset the feelings of those who receive or are the object of those images.

If there is a conscious intention to harm someone, **cyberbullying** (by mobile phone or the internet) can be seen as nothing more than another form of bullying. **It is not a new phenomenon.** The mobile phone and the computer offer extra options, but the psychological mechanisms at the core of the phenomenon remain the same.

Youngsters often fail to adequately consider the **consequences** that certain actions can have. They take great pleasure in sharing an image but, because filming helps to place a filter between themselves and reality, they are often unable to establish any **emotional contact** with unpleasant situations that they witness such as accidents or acts of abuse.

### EDUCATIONAL PATHS

For you as a parent, countering cyberbullying entails talking with your children, helping them to understand what they are feeling and explaining what respect for oneself and others means. The aim should be to encourage critical and independent thought as well as a sense of responsibility. It is important to get our children to understand that we are all **responsible** for the consequences of our actions. This is especially true when using technologically advanced communications networks where our actions can often have unforeseeable effects. Yet the "mobile phone community" only reproduces and extends a series of opportunities and risks that they will in any case face in the rest of their daily lives.

It is also important to transmit to youngsters a sense of duty about **defending** one's sphere of privacy, one's own personal sense of security as well as that of others. They should be made aware that publicizing the images of other people (on the internet or in other ways) not only breaches the right to **privacy** but is also against the law in most countries, even if the persons involved are minors.

Finally, remember that in the case of cyberbullying the role of the **group of friends** is vital, both in instigating the improper act as well as in giving support to the person who has suffered the affront. During adolescence in particular, what the group feels or says often prevails over what parents and adults in general may say.

### MEDIA GLOSSARY

**MMS:** works in the same way as SMS text messages, but can be used to send multi-media files from mobile phones such as videos, audio and images.

**Bluetooth:** an open wireless system for transferring data between devices over short distances using short length radio waves. Many mobile phones are equipped with it, making it possible to send multi-media files (videos, audio, and images) entirely free of charge to other mobile phones within a range of 10 to 100 meters.

**Cyberbullying:** also referred to as online bullying, is a term that denotes acts of bullying and molestation carried out through electronic means such as e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, mobile phones and websites. Cyberbullying can take on many forms:

- sending violent or vulgar online messages aimed at prompting verbal quarrels within forums (known as "flaming");
- insulting someone by repeatedly sending messages (harassment);

- talking badly about someone in order to damage his or her reputation via e-mail, instant messaging, etc;
- sending or publishing disparaging messages or texts using someone else's identity (impersonation);
- publishing private and/or embarrassing information about someone (exposure);
- gaining someone's trust so as to trick them into publishing or sharing information obtained in confidentiality via electronic instruments (trickery);
- deliberately excluding a person from an online group in order to hurt him or her;
- carrying out repeated and threatening acts of harassment and denigration aimed at provoking fear (cyberstalking).

The European Commission has launched an awareness-raising campaign to combat cyberbullying, specifying that "the term bullying covers all kinds of harassment – verbal, psychological or physical – carried out repeatedly by a person or a group with regards to others. Bullying represents, at all times, a wrong and unacceptable form of behaviour; it must never be

underestimated or ignored". See: <http://www.keepcontrol.eu/?lang=i>

**Privacy:** the right to protect the confidentiality of one's personal data, and matters concerning one's private life.

**Personal data:** art. 2 a of the Data Protection Directive of the European Union (95/46/EC) defines personal data as "any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ("data subject"); an identifiable person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identification number or to one or more factors specific to his physical, physiological, mental, economic, cultural or social identity;"

This definition is meant to be very broad. Data are "personal data" when someone is able to link the information to a person, even if the person holding the data cannot make this link. Examples of personal data are: a person's name and surname, a business or company name, an address, telephone or mobile phone numbers, a taxpayer's code or VAT numbers, an e-mail address, an IP number, or personal photos.

## BUT JUST HOW MUCH ARE YOU COSTING ME?

### CASE STUDY

Since buying her a mobile phone, your 12-year-old daughter Anna, has constantly been running out of credit. The first few times it happened you simply added credit to her phone, but at a certain point you decided to make a new rule: *"I will only credit your phone with 15 euros per month, and not one cent more!"*

So Anna started to ask for money from other relatives, who would every so often provide her with a little pocket money. But the money was never enough and Anna was very resourceful: *"Thank goodness I have a friend like Luca, who is so good at finding all the most amazing ways to get phone credit or SMS rates for free on the Internet..."*



### HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

The costs of running a mobile phone are often high and parents cannot, or do not always want to, cover all the expenses. Yet youngsters are often not aware of the expense involved in using the phone or if they damage or lose it. Some of them have become very good at getting around this obstacle by “scrounging” phone calls, asking grandparents, uncles and aunts to add credit to their phones, or finding special offers on rates and promotional credits. However, by doing this, youngsters often end up exposing themselves to **online fraud** or even greater risks such as being asked by strangers to send personal images in exchange for phone crediting.

### EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Costs relating to the purchase and use of a mobile phone represent both an economic as well as an educational problem. It is important to explain to youngsters that all of us are responsible for not wasting the resources available to us and that one can have respect for money without needing to worship it.

Teaching a **critical approach to spending** entails reasoning and an ability to keep in check the temptations of consumerism that we all occasionally feel. Establishing certain rules regarding costs, usage and maintenance of the phone can help. For example, if you give your children a regular allowance, you could make clear that “phone credit” is included. This way they can learn to make their own choices about how important phone use is to them compared with other things they may want to spend money on.

A few words of advice:

- before purchasing a mobile phone, reach an agreement with your child about when, where, for how long and in what way it is to be used;
- try to speak with other family members and relatives about curbing their habit of giving “gifts of credit”;
- if you do not usually give an allowance, it may also be a good idea to agree on a maximum budget for phone credits according to the age of the child involved.

# THE PACKET OF CRISPS

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## CASE STUDY

When you pick up your five-year-old daughter Sarah from nursery school, she always asks you to stop at a nearby shop to “buy something”. The shop has a beautiful display stand filled with packets of different types of crisps.

Sarah’s favourites are those that include little “accessory” gifts. Today, Sarah has been really lucky: inside the packet she has found a mobile phone case with a picture in relief of the fairy Lycia – her absolute favourite.

*“What do you want a mobile phone case for, Sarah, if you don’t even have a phone...” you try to point out to her.*

*“I do have one. Grandpa gave it to me for Christmas, it’s an Iphone!”*

## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

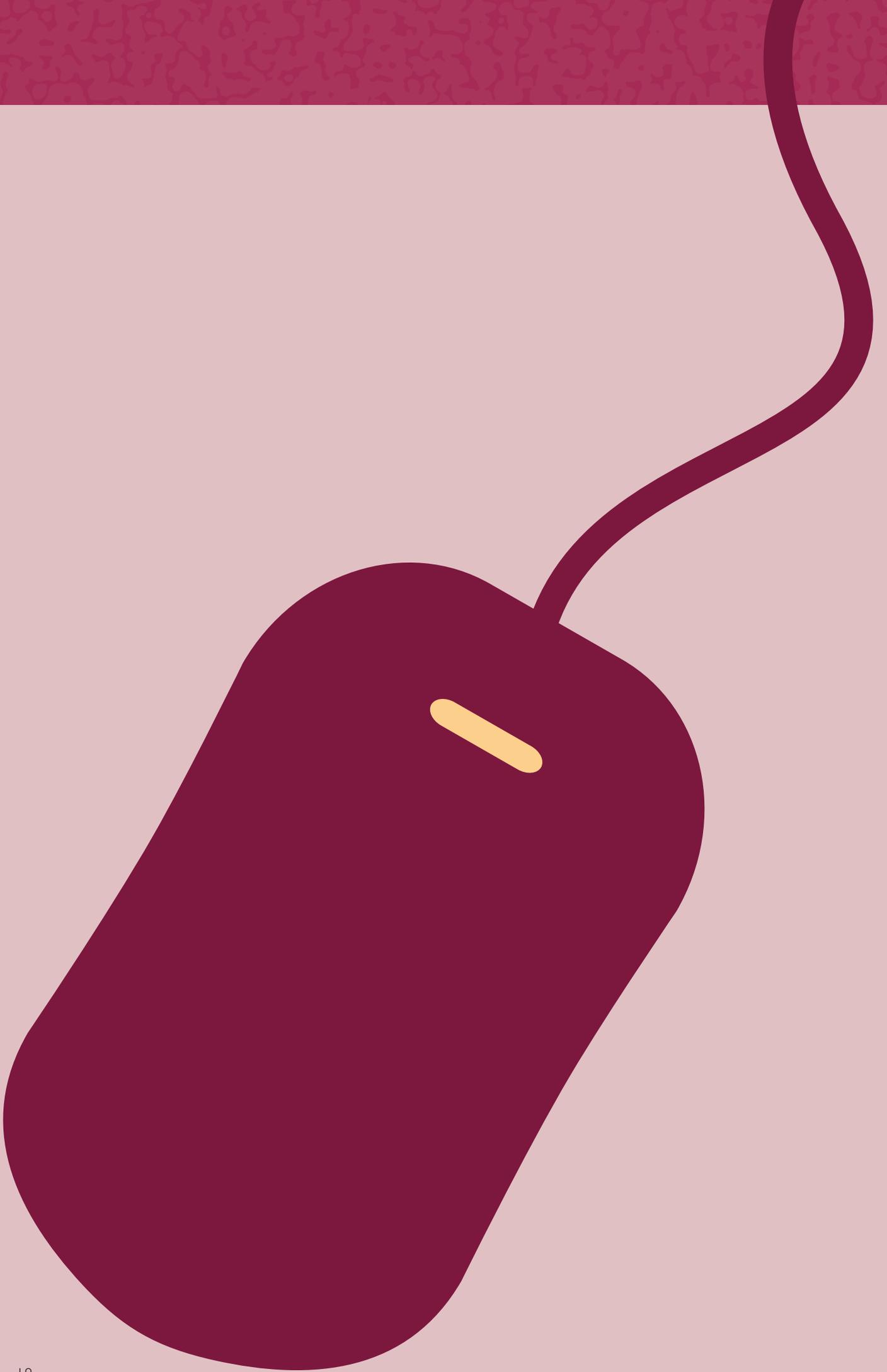
Perhaps you also like to personalize your mobile phone and enjoy frequently changing your ring-tone. This might help you understand just how much mobile phones have become extremely **personal** objects and extensions of our personalities, well beyond their technical function.

Like other objects and accessories, the mobile phone is commercially exploited on a vast scale. Furthermore, gadgets, pendants, mobile phone bags, toy phones and appealing ring-tones are often specifically designed to appeal to a young, if not infantile, public.

As a parent and educator, you should not forget that the companies that produce these items are not trying to foster the healthy psycho-physical development of children and adolescents, but simply to increase **financial profits**. Over time, such purchases may become ever more expensive and may encourage your child to accept commercial pressures uncritically and conform to prevailing consumerism.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

So when faced with requests from your child for these kinds of purchases, try always to convey the idea that **financial resources** are not limitless. It is not always easy for very small children to understand the concept of salary or the need to work to earn money but you can point out how some products can have advantages over others. For example, show them that packets of crisps without gadgets inside actually contain a lot more crisps!



# THE INTERNET

Generally speaking, adults use the internet mainly to find information and to keep in touch by e-mail. They tend to use it less frequently for downloading films and music, phoning or registering with a social network like Facebook. Due to work and family commitments, the internet is also less likely to assume such a central role in the lives of adults than it is for teenagers and even children. In fact, for many youngsters the internet has become an integral part of their social and personal identities.

It offers them the opportunity to stay in touch with friends, make new ones and share interests with others, even on the other side of the world. In their use of the internet, youngsters can experiment by taking on multiple identities and learn about current and past topics at a speed that no encyclopaedia could ever match.

Unfortunately, some aspects of internet use are more problematic and require particular parental attention. Youngsters can become isolated from the real world, they can encounter false information and hoaxes, or be influenced by inappropriate or harmful values and behaviour. Additionally, there is the risk of cyberbullying or being deceived by potentially abusive adults. However, parents should not become so anxious and worried that they limit any dialogue with their child and rely solely on sanctions and punishment. As always, better understanding of the phenomena and consideration of alternative educational paths are essential to effective parenting.

# PUNISHMENT

## CASE STUDY



## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

Without meaning to, parents themselves sometimes encourage use of the computer or watching television as a sort of **babysitter** to keep their children away from the perceived dangers of the street.

Nevertheless, children's internet surfing often leads to family **quarrels**, for a variety of reasons:

- the time spent and activities pursued by youngsters on the internet are not under parents' **control** and this can lead to serious worries;
- time spent surfing the internet sometimes **distracts** youngsters from their studies and other commitments;
- it can sometimes seem that surfing the net is distancing children from **real life**;
- it is often hard to understand how children manage to spend **so much time** online and, above all, why they do it.

Many parents, particularly those who are not convinced of its “usefulness”, can be tempted to control access to the internet as a means of persuasion or punishment. This is similar to the old “carrot and stick” system that was used to control telephone use, permission to go out in the evening, the watching of certain TV programmes or banning use of a moped. However, by employing a bit of realism, one can easily understand that:

- a) holding back the spread of internet use among youngsters is practically impossible;
- b) the internet now forms an integral part of most youngster’s social identity: youngsters who have been deprived of an internet connection at home as a punishment may feel that their rights have been infringed because: *“If you are not connected, you are cut off”*.

Finally, when a child is not doing so well at school or is not dedicated enough, it may not just be **the internet’s fault**. Poor achievement at school could be a warning signal that should make you think about other possible causes than just the internet.

## ----- EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Regardless of your views on **punishment** in general, it is worth reflecting on what it means to use the internet as an instrument of punishment. Parents may want to consider the following:

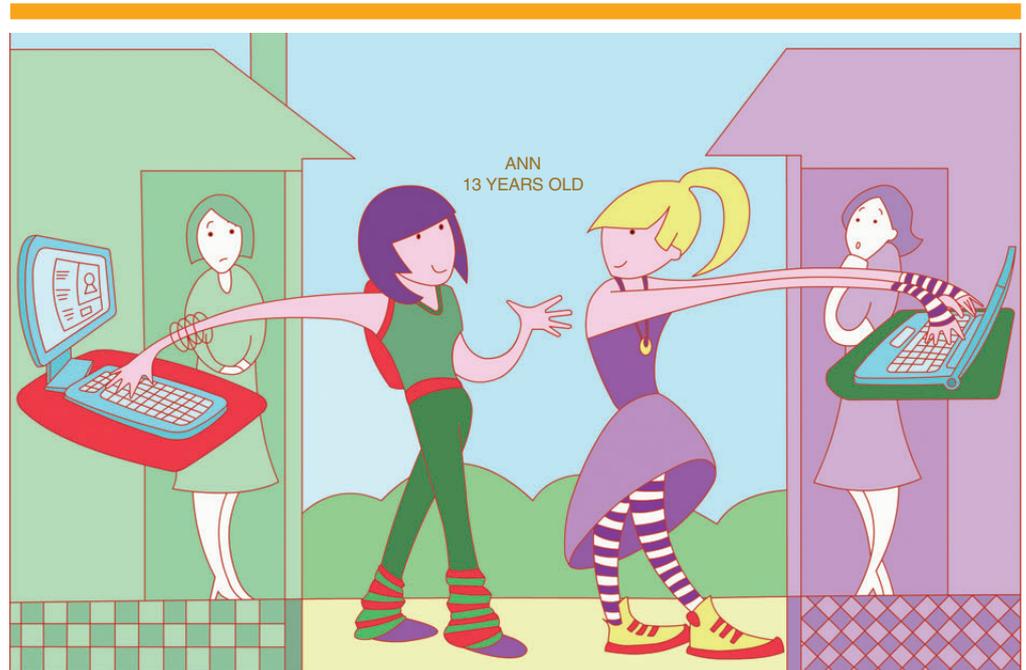
- a) there are many **useful** things on the internet that can benefit your children’s growth; disconnecting it may be depriving them of these possibilities;
- b) keep in mind that if you, as a parent, **go back** on your initial decisions and deny internet access, this decision can be seen as unjust;
- c) if you take the computer or the ADSL connection away while all your children’s friends are still using the internet, your children could find **alternative ways** – far from your sight and supervision- to continue surfing. In such cases, the context of “*secrecy*” could encourage risky types of behaviour.

### **A few words of advice:**

- ☛ establish right **from the start** that using the net requires a level of **maturity**. If your child uses the internet inappropriately, you may need to set some restrictions for its use;
- ☛ try **helping your child** with his/her homework by also using the computer to do research on the internet;
- ☛ do not forget that the computer can be used as a resource to encourage youngsters to take schoolwork more seriously.

# AND HOW MANY CONTACTS DO YOU HAVE?

## CASE STUDY



## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

**Social networking** provides a new context for young people to use the internet. The social networks created on the internet represent an extension of their real social lives and provide youngsters with the possibility of:

- staying in touch with friends, even on a daily basis;
- making new friends, based also on common interests;
- maintain friendships over time;
- getting attention and fighting loneliness.

Social networks are very popular from pre-adolescence onwards and, **as children get older** and acquire new interests, the tools and systems of social networking they use also change. One of the reasons for the tool's **huge success** is that it provides a new way for teenagers to build up their own network of friends, school mates and peers as well as develop their own **personal identities** separate from that of their families. It increases their **capacity to create relationships** and the number of their acquaintances. This is important as outdoor meeting places become fewer and children spend more time at home, especially during pre-adolescence when their autonomy is still quite limited.

The internet also offers the possibility to **share interests** and join up with others in the same way as joining an association or signing up for courses used to do. Furthermore, the internet allows this to be done instantly and sometimes with people on the other side of the globe.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

For an adult, it can be difficult to understand the need of youngsters to be always in touch with friends and to build up such a large number of **contacts or online friends**.

**A few words of advice:**

- ☛ as always, **good communication** between parents and children is the key to avoiding the risks inherent in internet use;
- ☛ rather than worrying and feeling inadequate, it is a good idea for parents to find out as much as possible about how the new technology works. For example, you could ask your child **to teach you** something about social networking;

- ☛ why not join and use a social network yourself? You would then gain a better understanding of how the system works, what it feels like and what sorts of needs these tools satisfy;
- ☛ **getting to know your children's friends**, perhaps by inviting them to meet up at your home, can also help you judge whether they are a positive influence on your child's development.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**Social network:** sites that allow groups of persons to connect via the internet. Whoever registers can make contact with anyone else on the same site and groups are formed based on casual acquaintances, work relations, family bonds or shared interests. Once contact has been established, people use the site to chat and share photos, videos, thoughts and other things. Some of the most popular platforms are: Facebook, LinkedIn, Bebo, MySpace and Netlog. Since registering requires a lot

of personal data, the protection of privacy is sometimes a problem as are issues affecting minors.

**Contact:** the person who is added to the list of friends of a specific profile. In practice, this is done by using the relevant function 'Accept as a friend' or 'Add to contacts'. As soon as the other person has accepted, he or she is added to the list. Youngsters often compete with each other over who has the most contacts.

# MY PROFILE CAN SURE BE STRESSFUL!

## CASE STUDY

For a long time your **15-year-old** son Alexander has been stuck in front of his computer, and you wonder what he is up to...:

*"What have you been doing all this time on the computer? It's been a while since you last went to the cinema with your friends."*

*"There's no need any more since I've joined a virtual film community. I've become known as Spielberg and I'm learning loads."*

*"Well, you could at least play a bit of football every once in a while."*

*"But I'm having a great time playing football online with people all over the world...I can finally be Maradona!"*

*"Why don't you get out a bit and see some friends?"*

*"But what for, here in my room I can be with loads of people all at the same time: I have friends on Habbo, others on Netlog, and others on MySpace..."*

*"Well then, at least try to get to bed a bit earlier."*

*"But at night I have to update Alex, Ale94, Alexander, Alexander the Great..."*

*"And who are all these people?"*

*"They're my profiles! If I didn't keep them up-to-date every night I wouldn't have so many online friends!"*

*"But wasn't it all a lot simpler when you were just plain Alexander?"*

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**HOW TO  
INTERPRET THIS  
SITUATION**

Profiles are an important part of social networking sites. A **profile** is like a web page that each individual develops to reflect his or her own identity by posting images, videos and texts, describing interests, thoughts and opinions.

We parents may be surprised at how much time our children spend on their internet profiles. However, it is often simply a way to develop their own individual personalities, similar to our own experimentation with multiple personalities when we were teenagers. Rather than worry about the time your children are spending on their profile, try to focus on the possible motivations. For example, are your children trying to regain an **emotional dimension** and a sense of belonging that they are perhaps missing in real life? If your children use the internet as an extension of relationships with friends they actually see and meet, they are still keeping ties with reality. However, if their relationships only exist on the net, they may be at risk of isolating themselves from the real world and encasing themselves in a **media bubble**.

Other problems associated with excessive attention to internet profiles can also crop up:

- a very real psychological **stress** can develop if youngsters come to see each moment and situation in their lives as having value only in relation to how it may enrich their internet profiles;
- **identity theft** is also a risk in that a person's profile can be modified or even stolen by a third party (i.e. used by someone else). This may be a case of cyberbullying or simply thoughtlessness by friends.

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**EDUCATIONAL  
PATHS**

Even as adults, we ourselves often need to create some **space in life** to enjoy leisure and hobbies and create a different “profile” for ourselves away from the strain of everyday life. This temptation is particularly strong when we face personal problems or painful situations that we cannot resolve. We should also understand how exciting it can be for our children to be able to enrich their own personalities through adopting different identities in the **virtual world**. However, it is important to remind them that they always need to **come back** to the “real world” and that actions in the virtual world can affect their state of mind, aside from causing them or others harm.

Try to focus on the roots of the behaviour rather than intervening in the use of the tool itself. In other words, you should ask yourself: is my child's use of the internet *supplementing or substituting* **real relationships**? If you get the feeling that your children are **losing touch** with reality, encourage them to frequent people their own age, take more interest in school life and make it easier for them to do sports and share interests and hobbies. Ask yourself whether you have inadvertently excluded them because of work or other engagements. A good way forward could be to find a **common interest** to share together at least once a week.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**Profile:** to join a social network one must register by inserting some personal information on the page provided. This information (age, sex, name or nickname, address, school, pictures and videos) make up the profile and can be viewed by all the others within a particular social network or only by a selected group, if you decide to keep your profile private. On this point it is extremely important to consider carefully which of your personal data you want to make public.

**Identity theft:** a slight misnomer as an identity per se cannot be removed. What takes place is more like the substitution of a person, or that a person pretends to be another in order to gain something – usually of a financial nature. When it comes to adolescents, thefts most commonly take place through acts of

cyberbullying. Impersonation is punishable under most countries laws but getting proof can sometimes be difficult and the victim could end up being accused of having committed criminal acts.

**Phishing:** a criminal activity that takes place on the net, which is aimed at acquiring sensitive information (user names, passwords, credit card details) by pretending to be a trustworthy entity or friend. It consists mainly of e-mails often from bogus banks or payment agencies requesting confidential information. informazioni sensibili (nome utente, password, dettagli della carta di credito) fingendosi entità o persone affidabili. Viene attuata per lo più via e-mail, fingendosi, per esempio, una banca o un'agenzia di pagamento via web che richiede informazioni.

# A STRANGE COINCIDENCE OF NAMES

## CASE STUDY 1

Your 11-year-old son Mark comes home from school with some discouraging news.

*“Mum, the teacher gave me a 4 out of 10 in Art History!”*

*“Didn't you prepare for the test?”*

*“Yes I did Mum, I spent an entire afternoon on the internet researching Michelangelo, but she said that it was on Caravaggio instead.”*

*“Excuse me, but what had you written in your homework diary?”*

*“Research Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.”*

*“And what did you do?”*

*“I keyed Michelangelo on Google...the whole name was too long!”*

*“If you had asked me I would have told you immediately that these were two different artists!”*

# A CLICK OF THE MOUSE THAT CHANGES YOUR LIFE

## CASE STUDY 2

While at home on the internet you accidentally click on a site that your browser shows as a frequently visited site. It offers unreliable and dangerous advice about how to lose weight quickly and enter a contest to become a model.

The site immediately brings to mind your 14-year-old daughter Michela's recent eating requests. Lately she has been eating only apples and pasta without sauce, with the excuse that she has been having stomach aches.

On the site you find numerous photographs of frighteningly thin girls and other information that makes it clear they are suffering from serious eating disorders. Until now you had never realised what a direct impact these so called pro-ana sites could have on your family.

## HOW TO INTERPRET THESE SITUATIONS

The internet undoubtedly represents an enormous source of **knowledge** and **information**. Even among young people, statistics show that carrying out searches are one of the main reasons for first using the internet a practice also encouraged by schools.

Even for an adult, it is not always easy to distinguish between truthful and unreliable information. Yet if youngsters fail to develop a critical approach to the information found on the internet and the source of that information, they can be especially vulnerable to sham and **false contents**. Similarly, while schools now accept the internet as an important source of information, teachers do not always pay enough attention to how their pupils obtain and critically analyse that information.

Youngsters often turn to the internet to satisfy their personal curiosity about intimate subjects, such as love, sexuality, and health. However, the sites they consult sometimes offer inaccurate information or information that is divorced from their real lives in emotional terms. At the same time, the typical **reserve** of teenagers, who are often reluctant to discuss issues with their parents, makes them particularly vulnerable, especially if they do not have a friend in whom they can confide.

Like television, the internet also creates values and models of behaviour. These can sometimes be violent, racist, discriminatory or in other ways harmful, as in the case of the eating habits encouraged by pro-anorexia sites, which are visited ever more frequently by adolescents.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

**Curiosity** is always a **positive** thing. Perhaps when you were younger you used to look up in the dictionary the definitions of words that were not allowed at home. Yet as adults we are aware that the internet can sometimes offer contradictory or even dangerous and harmful advice.

It is therefore important to help your child not to **passively accept** information. The key is to decode the messages that come from advertising, television, newspapers or the internet, and compare them with one's own opinions and values.

### A few words of advice:

- ☛ try to assist your child when he or she surfs the internet, for example by searching together for the answer to a question that you both have;
- ☛ try to get across that even the internet can and should be questioned, and that contents should be re-worked in a personalized way;
- ☛ having shared this experience, it will help you to trust your children's critical abilities and give you the extra push you need to let them go ahead on their own. You will, in any case, always be a guide they can turn to when necessary;
- ☛ be aware of subject matter that often brings out a reciprocal shyness between you and your child such as the first signs of interest in members of the opposite sex, sexuality and falling in love;
- ☛ ask yourself what level of communication and dialogue your children have with you as parents or with other close adults like aunts and uncles, grandparents or teachers. These figures should be made the most of since they can often express themselves more freely than parents in certain situations.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

### CASE STUDY

**Pro-ana or pro anorexia sites:** web sites, chat rooms and online forums that exalt being thin and supply advice on how to lose weight without being found out. The "pro-ana" phenomenon began in the USA and largely involves girls aged

12 and up, but is also becoming popular among boys. This dangerous phenomenon has serious social repercussions with younger teenagers who see it as a kind of fashion to follow in order to lose weight.

## MINORS NOT ALLOWED

### HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

"Hi Bruno. It's been ages since I last saw you!"

"Hi Laura, How are you doing? And how's your son? How old is he now?"

"He's almost 14."

"That's incredible, it seems like it was just yesterday when he was at nursery school..."

"Ah yes, time really does fly..."

"Before you know it, he'll even be bringing a girl home with him!"

"I don't think so, he doesn't seem to be very interested in girls..."

"Come on, you must be joking... my son is the same age as yours. The other day, out of curiosity, I looked at the last week's site history on his computer and I won't even say what I found.... all sorts and more! Doesn't your son use the internet?"

"Yes, but..."

"You should have a look at his site history... and then let me know!"

"Oh dear... site history... how do you see that?"

Current statistics show that 90% of male adolescents look at **pornography** on the internet and even among girls it is becoming more common. Generally, youngsters regard viewing pornography on the internet **as not being a problem** or carrying any particular risks. In fact, it satisfies a youngsters' natural curiosity about sex, which has always existed even if in the past such information was only found in specialized magazines, films and stories told by peers.

The negative effects of pornographic material increase in proportion to the level of perversion shown, the frequency and intensity of exposure, as well as the age and maturity of the viewer. Pornography furnishes limited **information** on sexuality and love, and it can be particularly disturbing for younger children because of their lack of sexual experience and maturity. More mature adolescents who have benefited from an adequate sex education may gradually become less interested in internet pornography as they engage with real people in their first concrete sexual experiences.

### EDUCATIONAL PATHS

It is not always easy for parents to strike the right balance between the need to allow children autonomy in developing their own sexuality and the duty to protect them from excessive exposure to incorrect and misleading influences. Furthermore, there tends to be little dialogue on sexuality between parents and children, with the generation gap becoming increasingly apparent.

#### **A few words of advice:**

- ☛ it may be somewhat embarrassing to deal with, but do not deny the existence of your children's sexual urges and allow them to ask questions and receive an adequate sex education;
- ☛ if your young son or daughter comes across pornographic images, try to explain, using words and images that are appropriate to his or her age, that:
  - the pictures portray a way of being together that has to do with adults;
  - between children there are other ways of showing and receiving affection such as kisses, words, gestures and hugs;
- ☛ avoid lingering on "technical" explanations so as not to further overrun your child's mind with what are often perverse kinds of sexual behaviour;
- ☛ explain that what really matters, in sexuality, is respect for the other person and reciprocal consent. For example, even a simple kiss, if not desired, can represent a form of aggression.

# I HAVE A RIGHT TO SURF TOO!

## CASE STUDY



### HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

Although, many parents are understandably concerned about allowing young children to surf the net unsupervised, they cannot always be physically present. One possible solution is to install a filter on your home PC, which can help select and control the content viewed. Unfortunately, finding out the best way to install and use a filter is not always easy for parents and children obviously have no interest whatsoever in informing their own parents about how to install one. When it comes to choosing and using filters, parents can also display excessive anxiety to control. For example, there are some filters that use SMS messages to inform parents remotely what words their children are keying in, or even allowing them to see what their children are writing on the computer.

Although filters are definitely useful for younger children, bear in mind they can also become a **cause for conflict**.

- older children may feel they are being **penalised**, controlled and treated “like children”;
- an **overly strict** filter can deny teenagers the opportunity to satisfy needs typical of their age such developing their independence, breaking the rules, and sharing “secret intimacies”;
- filters that exclude access to an excessive number of sites can also push older children to **remove the filter**, or look for “**alternative ways**” to access the content such as going to an internet cafe or surfing the net at friends’ houses;
- parents are often more protective and restrictive in the case of girls, but do not forget that boys can also become victims of inappropriate content or abuse on the internet.

The online contents that your children view should be **appropriate to their particular stage of development**. Your parental role should not be **delegated to a filter**. Since there is no precise age when it becomes completely safe to use new media, it is up to you to assess your child’s critical faculties, independent judgement, level of responsibility and technical ability.

### EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Keep in mind that youngsters **are not just passive victims** of the net, especially when they get older. As active users with independent resources, they are capable of deciphering external signals and activating appropriate kinds of defensive behaviour. These skills should be built on.

#### A few words of advice:

- ☛ in the case of younger children, it may make sense to rule out any unsupervised internet use;
- ☛ when choosing and installing a filter, openly discuss your reasons, how the filter will function, its advantages and the restrictions. This will help reduce any potential conflicts;
- ☛ adapt the filter to suit your children’s age and level of maturity. If you have children of different ages, don’t over-penalize the older ones, but regulate the filter according to the age of each member of the family instead;
- ☛ remember that even after installing a filter you will need to manage and update it as your children get older;
- ☛ explain to older brothers or sisters that even their younger siblings will be able to use the internet on their own when they have reached the appropriate age.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**Content filters:** software that restricts the content available on a single computer or network. There are a number of types. Walled garden restricts access to a limited number of sites. White list - the opposite of black list - identifies a list of sites to which access is given, while automatically blocking any site not included in the list, unless you have the password. Parental control is a computer software system through which one can select which web pages can be viewed, based on specific criteria.

Such systems operate in two ways:

1. software can be directly installed on the home computer to scan the page opened and assess, according to criteria established by the user; whether to display the page or not;
2. the Internet Service Provider (ISP) that supplies the connection can also be used to block pages considered to be inappropriate based on a black list of sites.

# ALL ALONE BUT NOT REALLY!

## CASE STUDY

Your **13-year-old** son, Alex, has always been fascinated by technology. When he was at primary school, he was already taking apart and putting back together all his toys. These days, as soon as he gets home he sits down in front of the PC and rarely goes out... He tells you he has just joined a group of online friends with whom he can finally exchange material on his favourite rock group, which is not well known. You are worried because it seems that lately Alex has been spending more time on the Internet than with his usual friends, but he tries to reassure you: "But I know loads of people on the Internet... and I like them more than I do my classmates! I've even met a few of them in person!"  
*"But how? Where? When? You didn't say anything to us about it!"*

## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

The **boundary** between virtual and real friends is in fact an increasingly blurred one in the lives of many youngsters:

- many of the friends your children are in contact with through the internet may be actual friends they have left just five minutes earlier, at school;
- people met online can also later be met in real life and friendships established with them;
- behind online exchanges of feelings, experiences and opinions, there are, in any case, real people.

Youngsters are increasingly inclined to set up **appointments** to meet "contacts" made on the web in person. However, in some cases, **idealisation** of the other person can create an irresistible urge to meet up and this can sometimes lead to **disillusionment**, if the real person fails to match up to what had been imagined.

The possibility of children making direct contact with people they meet online often worries parents. However, are such meetings really that much riskier than going to a party on a Saturday night or on an educational holiday? How should parents behave?

### EDUCATIONAL PATHS

As always, it is important to find a balance between recognising your children's autonomy and the need to protect them according to their age and level of maturity. If your children want to meet up with strangers they have met online, it is worth reflecting on a few key aspects of the situation:

- a) firstly, **avoid dramatising** the situation since it is possible that a new and worthwhile friendship will be established;
- b) parents' anxieties should not influence the behaviour and choices made by their children;
- c) your anxiety may be governed by different factors, including the youngster's age and level of maturity;
- d) above all, your anxiety will depend on the type of relationship you have with your children and how much you trust them: the more open your communication with your children, the easier it will be for you to assess the risks involved;
- e) finally, it can often help to explain your anxieties to your children.

After hearing your opinions, if your child still wants to meet up with an online contact, you should discuss certain precautions:

- ☛ they should always let you know about any meeting beforehand;
- ☛ for younger children, you could go along with them to their first meeting or, if they are older, ask them who they would like to accompany them;
- ☛ advise them to suggest meeting in a public place and never in someone's home;
- ☛ always make sure you are given the address and timing of any appointments beforehand.

Finally, it is important to discuss issues of personal online privacy such as the types of information appropriate to share online and how to avoid giving out information without realising it. Furthermore, bear in mind that if youngsters are highly emotionally involved it will be more difficult for them to assess the risks lucidly.

## A LEAP IN THE DARK

### CASE STUDY

Lately, your 13-year-old daughter Martha has been very quiet yet agitated and always whispering to her girlfriends. Despite agreed rules limiting the time spent on the computer, she stays logged on until late in the evening.

One day, when you get home early, Martha suddenly switches off the computer as if she has something to hide. You ask her what's going on and, although embarrassed at first, she admits that she is having a flirtation with someone she has met online, an alleged 18-year-old who has been pushing for days now to meet her in person.

### HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

Fear that one's children can be lured by potentially abusive adults via the internet or mobile phone is very common among parents. Pre-adolescents aged between 11 and 14 are most at risk because physical changes and sexual desires are beginning to emerge, although they still lack physical and psychological maturity.

Adults who are sexually interested in minors use a variety of tools to make contact with boys and girls such as internet chat-rooms, social networks and mobile phones. There also exists a technique of psychological manipulation, known as grooming, to establish intimate or sexualised relationships with children.

This technique consists of three distinct phases:

- a) after establishing contact through a chat-room or social networking site, the potential abuser finds out what level of “privacy” the minor enjoys (i.e. where the computer is situated and whether his/her parents are present);
- b) the potential abuser then tries to gain the child’s trust by, for example, sharing common interests like music, favourite film stars or hobbies. The aim is to establish a familiarity that becomes increasingly private and intimate. In this phase, pictures may be exchanged, but not necessarily of a sexual type;
- c) when the adult is sure there is no chance of being found out, he or she tries to establish exclusivity, making the relationship impenetrable by outsiders. It is during this phase that the exchange of pictures of an explicitly sexual nature and the request for an offline encounter may take place. Paedo-pornographic material can often be sent by the adult to normalise the sexualised relationship. Sometimes the minor is also urged to send pictures, videos or text of a sexual nature. These can in turn be used to blackmail the minor if he or she later refuses to continue the online relationship or to start up a real and actual sexual relationship. Parents should also be aware that boys and girls themselves often use the internet for inappropriate purposes or to obtain information and requests of a sexual nature.

Furthermore, boys often feeling disoriented in terms of forming their own personal identities and sexual orientation, can also be vulnerable to contact with potentially abusive adults. Above all, making sure your children receive an adequate sex education is vital to help prevent sexual abuse via the internet.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

From an early age, your children may be exposed to a variety of sexual behaviour, whether images on TV, prostitutes and their clients in the street, or signs of affection between couples in a park.

It is therefore important for them to receive information appropriate to their age and to be listened to on the subject of sexuality.

### **A few words of advice:**

- ☛ help your children to recognise and express their feelings so they can manage online contacts in an appropriate way and avoid allurements;
- ☛ try to explain, through the use of age-appropriate words and images, that the sexual act is based on reciprocal respect;
- ☛ try to watch over, attentively and discreetly, how your children spend their time online, what they do, who they meet, what is currently their main interest;
- ☛ starting from an early age, it is important to let children know they can always count on you, no matter what they have done online. You can remind them that you too have made mistakes which you have regretted and have been afraid to tell your parents;
- ☛ although trusting others is an important value, it is worth reminding your children that not everyone may deserve their trust.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**Peer to peer (P2P):** Normally, data shared online goes through a central computer, called a server. In a P2P network, the "peers" are computer systems which are connected to each other via the internet. Files can be shared directly between individual computers on the network without the need of a central server. File-sharing networks like eMule,

eDonkey, and Gnutella are typical examples of P2P networks. They are often used for sharing music, video and software files although this is illegal if it violates copyright laws.

**Download:** the act of receiving or taking a file from the internet and transferring it onto the computer's hard disk.

## THE GOOD EXAMPLE

### CASE STUDY

"Boys and girls, can one of you download some cartoons from the internet for me? They're so expensive and my daughter is always asking for new ones..."

In response to the maths teacher's request, at least half the students in the class raise their hands and offer their assistance...

"Teacher... how many do you want? I'll sit down at the computer this evening with my father and bring all the cartoons made in the last 10 years to you tomorrow!"

### HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

The use of programmes to download films, music, cartoons, video games and other material from the internet is very common among young people and even adults. It is a way to find products that are no longer for sale and it can also **save money**.

Many children have frequently seen their own parents downloading music or films from the internet and so a **tolerant attitude** to such behaviour is passed on. However, remember that this practice has implications of an ethical and even juridical nature, if it breaches copyright laws. Certainly, a wide-ranging debate exists between those defending freedom of internet use and those opposing the theft of products and services.

### EDUCATIONAL PATHS

As a parent, it is important to question the example you may be setting your children if you download content from the internet or ask them to get hold of films, especially if the download concerned is illegal.

How can you get your children to respect rules when it may be easier to ignore them? How can you give meaning to bans that may seem abstract? Does the fact that you are downloading a film or a song produced by a powerful multinational company justify the illegal **download**? This is not the place to reflect on all the ethical aspects of internet regulation. However, it is worth considering that behind every film or song, there are actors, technicians, musicians and others who have the right to earn a living from their work and art. It is also important to explain to youngsters the reasons why laws exist and that, whether one agrees with them or not, they must be respected.

Furthermore, aside from these ethical and educational concerns, there are other issues to consider when downloading material:

- ☛ the names of files are sometimes incorrect and one can end up with pornographic or paedophile images instead. If you happen to download paedophile material, remember that it is illegal material and you can report it on the site [www.inbope.org](http://www.inbope.org) or directly to the police;
- ☛ an anti-virus scan should be run on each downloaded file before opening it to avoid viruses that allow other users to control your computer;
- ☛ and finally, it's important not to share all your hard disk on a P2P network, and especially not sensitive folders or personal files, to avoid others having complete access to all your information.



# VIDEO GAMES

Some parents are unfamiliar with video games and others are suspicious of them because of the amount of their children's time they occupy. However, as always, much depends on how they are used and the role they play in youngsters' lives.

Children are starting to play video games at an ever younger age because they have increasingly come to satisfy needs that in the past were met by other activities. Today's video games allow youngsters to experience the thrill of taking risks and of challenging themselves and others. They help fight off boredom, give a sense of equality with others and are a way of socializing. The increasing use of handheld devices and sophisticated multimedia technology, as well as the social pressure to buy a console because "everyone else has one", has increased the risk of dependency.

Meanwhile, the spread of online games has raised internet safety issues such as protection of privacy and the risk of contact with abusive people. Since the growing popularity of video games risks widening the technological gap between parents and children, only by reflecting on their use parents can fulfil their responsibilities as educators.

# HE'S NOT OLD ENOUGH

## CASE STUDY

You are in the pediatrician's waiting room with your six-year-old son Andrea. He is completely absorbed in watching two other boys, an 8-year-old and a 12-year-old, playing handheld video games. Noticing your curiosity, the mother of the 8-year-old starts to chat:

*"Well, he asked for a Nintendo DS for his birthday and we just couldn't say no, seeing as they all have one!"*

You try to reply: *"It's a bit too early for my son, he's only 6."*

She continues: *"Well, mine started even younger. Usually, they start at 5 with **Game Boy**, then go on to **Nintendo DS** and then end up with that, the **PSP** – pointing to the 12-year-old boy – when they get a bit older!"*

Looking at your son who is now all excited, you ask yourself: *"... am I going to have to buy him one too?"*

## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

The technology in video games is often easy for young children to learn. The games stimulate their eye-hand coordination and foster a certain type of reasoning. In the case of online video games, which allow contact with other players, they allow children to socialize with others. As with mobile phones, friends and relatives sometimes give video games as presents without first asking for your **consent**. Yet these games can have a **significant impact** on your children's lives, raising a series of issues: the amount of time spent playing, the risk of dependency and isolation, exposure to harmful and inappropriate content, and the possibility of making contact with potentially dangerous people.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

It is important to gain an understanding of video games and handheld consoles since, if they are not already, your children will soon want to play them. As with other technology, attitudes to video games differ among parents. Some may allow their children to use consoles to avoid them becoming "dependent" on their computers while others may prefer that their children engage in sports or outdoor activities. However, in both cases parents should remain open to dialogue and pay close attention to their children's educational needs and the risks they are taking. For example, even if your child plays outdoors, it is still important to know what he or she is doing and with whom. In the same way, playing a video game without any breaks can also be counter-productive for your child's development.

When it comes to **choosing** a video game, try to focus on the youngsters' real interests and level of maturity. For example, asking for *"Mario Kart"* can spring from a strong passion for cars... or *"Pro evolution soccer"* because of a passion for football... It is important to assess the risks and whether the game is appropriate, but do not forget it can also be fun and a good learning experience.

Finally, there is the aspect of conformism when your child asks for a particular video game or console *"because everyone else has it"*. In this case, make clear that what is important to you is his or her well being, needs and maturity, not just what *"everyone else"* is doing.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**Nintendo DS:** a handheld game console released by Nintendo in 2004. The DS has two LCD screens inside – one of which being a touch screen. It also features a built-in microphone and the possibility of wireless internet connection, thanks to the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection service. It is currently the most popular console among children.

**Game Boy:** the first handheld console in Nintendo's Game Boy line and was released in Europe in 1990. It has a small integrated screen displaying four

shades of grey on a green ground. The games are on easily transportable and removable cartridges.

**PSP (PlayStation Portable):** a handheld game console released in Europe in 2005 by Sony. It allows users to play games, watch videos, listen to music and view pictures, as well as the possibility of using an incorporated internet browser in the more recent firmware version. The built-in Wi-Fi connectivity allows up to 32 players to participate simultaneously in some games.

# THE CHRISTMAS PRESENT

## CASE STUDY

This year, you know exactly what to buy your 8-year-old son Nicole for Christmas; the 'in' gift is obviously the Wii. When it comes to opening the presents beneath the tree, you just can't wait for him to unwrap it!

*"That's great! Just what I wanted!"* exclaims Nicole.

You let out a sigh of relief and reply with a smile: *"It's just what I wanted too! Come on, let's set it up straight away so we can play on it together!"*

## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

Particularly if you are a young parent, you may already be **familiar with video games** and it is possible that your child's passion for such games will reignite a past interest of your own. You may be attracted by the new special effects, increased interactivity, and opportunities to meet new people or even of getting some physical exercise. Your familiarity with video games can allow you to share a common interest and do something together which in turn can create a greater understanding between you and your child. But at what point does your entertainment end and your role as responsible adult begin?

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

It's not easy to choose presents. As in the case of the mobile phone, you should ask yourself what is the **appropriate age** for your child to start playing video games and you should choose one that suits his or her interests, level of maturity, and capabilities. For example, is the latest model console you have chosen suitable for your child or would something simpler that can be used by him or herself have been better? Are your children really as interested in the video game that you like so much?

It is also important to regulate the time your children spend playing video games to avoid **dependency** and ensure enough time for their studies, friends, and other interests. If you are already familiar with video games, use your experience to **transmit** some key guidelines such as the ability to lose in a game and to respect time limits. Your children may eventually learn to use the **console** more skilfully than you, but in the beginning your role should be to accompany and guide them without taking their place in the game.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**Wii:** a video game console from Nintendo that uses a wireless sensing controller similar to a TV remote. The Wiimote allows up to four players to simulate real movements in the way they would in a three-dimensional context. The console also uses Wi-Fi technology to exchange data, so that specific online games can be played via the internet with players around the world.

**Video game consoles:** electronic devices designed for playing video games. Early models used cartridges storing a limited number of video games. Now the console has become a veritable computer that plays video games available on CDs or DVDs.

# THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

## CASE STUDY



## HOW TO INTERPRET THE SITUATION

You have no doubt seen children or adolescents playing so intently on their handheld consoles that they are practically **unaware of their surroundings**. Or perhaps you have seen **little groups** of youngsters watching a friend playing a handheld video game and impatiently waiting their turn. Despite the perplexity of adults, these have by now become common ways for youngsters to spend time together, even when they could easily play in other more creative and sociable ways.

For many children and teenagers, **handheld video games** have become an object to show off, that makes them feel like the others and helps them be fully accepted as a friend. Nevertheless,



we should not underestimate how the excessive use of handheld video games can cause **alienation** among youngsters. You may become aware of this when you call your children and they seem unaware of your presence or when they miss their stop on the bus because they were busy playing. Ask yourself how you feel if your child wants to bring along a video game when you go out. Perhaps you feel that by doing so, your child is being anti-social and excluding whoever is not able to participate.

### EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Before giving your child a handheld video game, be aware of the **autonomy** he or she will have, such as being able to use it at any time and far from your supervision. Such autonomy, if badly managed, may lead to a lack of appreciation of the times and places when it is more **appropriate** to socialize relate to others or take part in group games and activities.

Apart from establishing times and rules for playing video games, why not discuss with your children their need to feel equal to others, the types of behaviour that are really worthwhile imitating and which sorts of games can be more fun when played in groups. It may also be worthwhile discussing with other parents the habit of youngsters of taking their video games around with them and deciding on some **common rules** on the use of video games “in society”.

#### A few words of advice:

- agree with your child the length of time to be allowed when using the console;
- agree on certain protected time slots: for example, playing video games in bed in the evening or before going to sleep can lead to disturbed sleep;
- finally, stress the importance of taking occasional breaks or pauses when playing to give the eyes and brain a rest, and - in some extreme cases – to avoid serious problems like epileptic fits.

### MEDIA GLOSSARY

Handheld game consoles: small, lightweight and portable electronic devices with a built-in screen, games controls and speakers. They can be played anywhere and at any time.

Unlike video game consoles, the controls, screen and speakers are all part of a single unit. (Source: Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/> )

# IT'S JUST A GAME

## CASE STUDY

You often get home late from work and do not always have the time and energy to play with your **7 and 9-year-old** sons, Lucas and Andrew. After a lot of nagging from them, you have bought them the latest video game console but under one condition: *“When it’s time to study, turn off the play station!”*

Although Lucas and Andrew become increasingly engrossed in their new video games, in the beginning they seem to respect the rule. However, one day you get home earlier than usual and find the boys busy with a video game. You happen to see on the screen the picture of a bloody naked body! When you demand an explanation, the boys try to defend themselves: *“But Mum, they’re not real, it’s just a game!”*

## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

Video games are based on a variety of themes including adventure, sports, films, television series or cartoons. Some games include **violent images** that are not appropriate for minors. This causes great concern among many parents, especially since children usually play video games by themselves, unlike watching television. Of course, many traditional children’s stories contain disturbing and even violent situations. However, what makes them psychologically appropriate for children is that they contain a sense of irony, a clear distinction between the “good guys” and the “bad guys”, and above all an acceptance that what is portrayed is not real.

There is certainly a lot of debate on the relationship between the exposure to violent contents in video games and the growth of violent behaviour in real life. However, what seems clear is that extended exposure to violent content increases the risk that violence becomes **normalized** and *“taken for granted”*. The risk is that youngsters end up imitating the violent behaviour seen in video games and reproduce it in real life.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Parents should recognise that even in childhood there exists a degree of natural **aggressiveness** and it is important to offer socially acceptable forms of channelling this aggressiveness. Games and even some age-appropriate violence on television or video may serve this purpose. However, it is vital that children are given sufficient opportunity to reflect on and share their emotions and thoughts after exposure to such violence.

Beyond concentration and quick reflexes, the use of video games, like other multi-media, requires a degree of emotional **maturity** and capacity to **process the contents**. Parents should help their children in this process by being by their sides, to assess their degree of maturity and to pick up on their reactions.

A valuable aid for parents is the **PEGI Code**, a classification system of video games based on age (3+, 7+, 12+ 16+ and 18+) developed by various video game producers to meet Europe-wide needs. Even so, it is a good idea to verify the appropriateness of the game by playing it with them the first time and, in the case of younger children, continuing to supervise them.

### A few words of advice:

- ☛ if you realise that a video game is not appropriate, explain to your children why;
- ☛ even if a game is suitable, discuss the time limits and conditions for its use, such as breaks, sufficient lighting and periods of use;
- ☛ some video games are targeted at children as young as three years old, often inspired by familiar cartoon characters. However, time limits will still need to be set and it is important to play them with your children to check that they are really suitable.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**PlayStation:** a video game console first released by Sony in December 1994. The console became so popular that youngsters of the 1990s were dubbed the PlayStation Generation;

**Xbox:** the sixth generation video game console produced by Microsoft, released in 2002 in Europe. In 2010 the latest version on the market was the Xbox 360.

**PEGI:** the acronym for “Pan European Game Information”, a video game content rating system introduced in 2003 and valid throughout the European region, except for the UK. The rating system classifies video game content according to 5 age categories: 3+, 7+, 12+, 16+ and 18+. Seven content descriptors are also displayed as pictograms: obscene language, discrimination, drugs, fear, sex, violence and gambling (<http://www.pegi.info>).

## THOMAS, COME TO THE TABLE!

### CASE STUDY

Before dinner you sent your **12-year-old son** Thomas to his room to play on his computer to give you some time to cook and set the table.

Now dinner has been ready for 10 minutes but Thomas is too taken up by his game to answer your call to table:

*“Thomas, come to the table!!! I’ll ask you one more time and then I’ll switch off the power!”*

*“No, please don’t! You can’t interrupt the online World Cup finals! I’m playing with 10 players on the other side of the world!”*

*“But don’t these guys have families? Isn’t it their dinner time too?”*

*“But Mum! In Japan or New Zealand it’s another time zone! If I quit the team now, they will never forgive me!”*

### HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

Many parents encourage the use of video games to keep their children occupied whilst they are busy or to keep them from going outdoors, where it is difficult to keep an eye on them and the streets may be dangerous. However, **online video games** carry their own risks and differences between them need to be understood. While many online games are played alone or with others by your side, online multiplayer games are played on the internet with other “virtual” players. This means the player can interact with **unknown people** who share the same interests. Sometimes, if the game is very well known, youngsters form **interest groups** that meet up online in theme-based forums for socializing and exchanging new versions of games. The type of game is also important. Online **gambling** is a spreading phenomenon, particularly in Northern European countries, with youngsters at first attracted by apparently harmless online games and then drawn into the world of betting.

### EDUCATIONAL PATHS

As is the case with other technological tools, the **type of relationship** your children have with video games is key. Do they use of them to have fun and meet others their own age, or are they at risk of becoming isolated, addicted or over-exposed?

Online video games give rise to some specific problems:

- a) first of all, the **knowledge gap** between youngsters and adults is accentuated, making it difficult for parents to play their educational role;
- b) with solitary online games there is a greater risk of isolation than multiplayer games because the player has no contact even with other “virtual” players;
- c) online multiplayer games make it difficult to manage personal and family time because other players continue the game even if you stop, creating the feeling of being left behind.

**A few words of advice:**

- ☛ your warnings may sound contradictory, if you were the one who first proposed the video game;
- ☛ consider the emotions experienced in online games as well as the rules you have established for their use. In this way, exceptions to rules can be made when faced with particular events, like an online world cup football final;
- ☛ make sure your children safeguard their privacy and inform you of their “virtual” relationships;
- ☛ use the online PEGI Code, to help you determine which games are suitable for your children..

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**Online video games:** according to the definition provided by the PEGI Online web site, “an online game is defined as a digital game that needs a live network connection in order to be played. This includes not only games played on the Internet, but also those played online through consoles, across mobile phones or via peer-to-peer networks.”

**PEGI online:** supplements the PEGI system and aims to improve protection of minors from inappropriate content and to educate parents on how to ensure safety in the online gaming environment. See the PEGI Online web site at <http://www.pegionline.eu/en/index/> for information regarding the PEGI rating system, particularly with respect to online video games.



# TELEVISION

There is already a large body of literature on the social and educational role of television, which may make it appear an odd choice for inclusion in a new media guide. However, it is included because TV remains a central element of our lives and is now being transformed by newer technology.

First of all, television is still very much a presence in the lives of youngsters and for parents, who grew up with a “TV babysitter”, which makes it difficult to determine a possible educational role aside from that of television viewer. Secondly, new media technology is transforming television to such an extent that it has come to mean something quite different in the minds of today’s youngsters compared with our own experience as children.

In order understand the opportunities and educational challenges that television offers, one must be able to grasp the transformations taking place and the possible consequences for your children and your family.

# ALL ALONE BUT NOT ALL THAT MUCH!

## CASE STUDY



## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

For us adults, television is a very familiar medium. Almost all homes have one and many have several with a switched on TV set now part of the normal **background** of home life.

What does the television **represent** for you and your family?

Television is often used to relax, especially by children after a day at school. For many parents it is also a **babysitter**, when they are too tired or busy to pay full attention to their children. Nowadays, TV is **taken for granted** rather than something to be feared as may be the case with new media and, above all, the internet. TV is seen as a traditional means of communication because it is not interactive and therefore does not involve the risk of meeting others. However, television can easily be **used excessively** and limit family communication, as in the case of adults watching television during dinner time or children having one in their bedroom creating the risk of isolation, sleep problems and watching programmes without parental supervision.

Many parents underestimate the presence of **inappropriate contents** or risks of **dependency** and addiction inherent in prolonged viewing and this **innocuous** view of television is shared by youngsters.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Television can be entertaining and informative but it can also become a veritable “organizer” of families’ schedules as well as a way of behaving and relating to each other.

Remember that when we get **back home**, television is not the only thing that exists. In particular, the time period **before dinner** can be an occasion to devote more attention to your children:

- a) even simply **watching them play** can help you understand what fascinates them, what they fear and which of the day's events they play out in their games;
- b) you could **ask** your children what they did at school or during the afternoon, have them draw a game or characters that particularly amused them, or the scene on TV that impressed them the most.

**After dinner**, while tidying up the kitchen, you could decide together what to watch. You could suggest a suitable programme or a DVD, or watch something on television that interests your children. Depending on the age of your children, **shared television viewing** can be fun and also help you in your educational role. You will be able to learn what they prefer to watch and to be present if something frightens them as well as provide interpretations when it comes to difficult contents.

**A few words of advice:**

- ☛ try to regulate, even with the babysitter, the quantity and the quality of the programmes your children watch, and set aside time for other activities like meals, homework and a proper night's sleep;
- ☛ when your children get older, dinnertime may be the **only moment** in the day when the whole family is together. However, if a television is switched on in the background it can kill conversation and the exchange of views and feelings;
- ☛ to avoid the risk of isolation, the viewing of inappropriate content and insomnia, do not place a television set in the **children's room**.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**Analogue television:** the traditional form of TV, which transforms

analogue signals received through an antenna into audio and video signals.



# A CUSTOM-MADE TV!

## THE SITUATION

Since you got your subscription for digital TV, your **5-year-old** son Ben can hardly believe how many of his favourite characters he can now watch on the numerous children's TV channels. Although a bit worried about the amount of time little Ben is spending in front of the TV, you feel quite reassured because your subscription allows you to pre-select the children's programmes that Ben is able to watch.

However, one day little Ben gets a big bump on his head by leaping off his bunk bed and you find yourself caught off guard by his explanation: *"I wanted to do what my superhero does... but in the cartoon they've never ever shown any of his bumps!"*

## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

The traditional generalist TV network is increasingly being **challenged** by new media. In fact, in the future, watching programmes is likely to become just one of a range of pastimes, within an array of computerized options combining digital and satellite TV with other internet services. Satellite channels already offer a far larger number of programmes for children and teenagers than were available on generalist TV networks, and they are available 24 hours a day.

While some parents appreciate the greater variety of specialised programmes and channels available on satellite and digital TV, others are concerned that youngsters are already sufficiently subjected to **media bombardment**.

In reality, many of the risks are the same for the new and traditional forms of television:

- a) many parents tend to **lower their guard** when faced with channels specialized in programming for children or adolescents, thinking that their supervision is no longer necessary;
- b) some children's programmes display an advisory symbol or legal **stamp** that indicates whether it is suitable for children, but it is still best to check the programme for yourself;
- c) advertising is another problem, because children's TV programming often includes **commercials** aimed at "child customers" and their families.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Maybe you too, when you were a child, thought that **you could fly** just like Peter Pan.

Just as your parents did with you, make clear to your children that images and situations portrayed on TV are often just **special effects**. This is especially important given that your children increasingly explore and discover the world through the new means of communication and games rather than **direct experiences**.

Be aware that when your children are sitting in front of the TV screen they could be absorbing values, world views and cultural models that are harmful to their development, such as gender and body stereotypes or bad eating habits. Given the prevalence of these "coded" messages, parents must remember that they, and not the television channels, are responsible for what children watch on TV. Television can certainly offer opportunities to learn, have fun or play, but it cannot replace our educational role.

Another problem is that posed by the **amount of TV viewing**, since **digital TV** and satellite channels have vastly increased what television now offers. Parents should supervise both the **quantity** as well as the quality of the programming their children watch. Finally, as we already noted in the preceding entry, it is vital to be **by your children's side** when they watch programmes. For example, watching an advertisement together can allow you to explain any underlying consumer messages and thereby reduce their influence on your children's spending habits.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**Digital television:** Digital TV transforms moving images and sound, at their source, into digital signals that are then translated once more by the decoder into images and sound (the same signal used by computers). This allows the transmission of more channels with higher sound and video quality, and for interaction with the television. The principal interactive services provided are:

- teletext, which provides access to textual and semi-graphic contents;
- pay per view, which enables one to view a particular TV programme by paying individually for it;
- video on demand, which allows users to view a TV programme at whatever time they choose.

Digital television can be viewed via a cable, satellite or terrestrial connection.

**Digital terrestrial television:** uses traditional airwaves and antenna

transmissions. All that is needed is a digital TV or an old analogue TV with a separate digital decoder. Digital satellite television requires the installation of a satellite dish to receive the signal.

**Digital cable television:** involves the transmission of the signal to your TV set via a cable, as with your landline telephone.

**Television via the internet** (known internationally as IPTV): allows viewing of TV content through a broadband internet connection cable. A decoder or computer is necessary and the quality of the transmission will depend on the capacity of the internet connection.

**Pay TV:** a subscription-based television service where payment is made to a television channel or platform, or the provider that supplies the service.



# LIVE IN ACTION

## CASE STUDY

One of your favourite programmes is “Live in action”, a series shown at dinnertime featuring true stories filmed by ordinary people, which viewers can vote on. Fortunately, Simon and Noemi, your 8 and 11-year-old children, also like the programme so you can watch the programme together. However, every so often, car accidents or other dangerous situations are shown and occasionally there are even fleeting images of dead people.

## HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

Unlike on the internet, we often come across **unexpected violent images** on television whether during a daytime news bulletin or when we are only half paying attention to a programme. The degree of emotional and **psychological impact** of these images will vary depending on age. Younger children are the most affected because they lack the experience to interpret the content and grasp the difference between fact and fiction.

The impact on children can be **mitigated** by the presence and explanation of an adult, especially if the images appear suddenly and unexpectedly. However, if programmes are watched on a **regular** basis but without the appropriate explanations and comments, there is a risk that violent, or otherwise harmful, images will simply be accepted by youngsters as normal.

## EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Being a parent often entails having to **give up** something. Programmes you like may not be suited to your child’s age or level of maturity and it may be necessary to tape the programme and watch it later.

However, even during family viewing times, programmes may include sexual images and lewd behaviour, so it is equally important for you to be on hand to answer questions and offer explanations in a way that is appropriate to the age and maturity of your children. Later in the evening, the **underlying sexual content** of certain programmes and advertisements for films, chat-lines, sex shops or pornographic material may be particularly alarming. In this case, it may become necessary to regulate your children’s access to TV viewing and stop them having a TV set in their bedroom.

A coherent approach to regulation is also vital to ensure the right balance between the autonomy and protection of your children, since media is increasingly **interconnected** with some TV programmes also available on the internet. Finally, remember that most countries have a legal **system for safeguarding** minors when it comes to TV programming, which can help in your educational role. Knowing what is against the law, or what commitments the television networks have made with regard to minors, enables you to report to the relevant watchdogs any violations of these rules. It also enables you to show your children just how important their protection is to you and how you value a certain level of quality in television contents.

## MEDIA GLOSSARY

**The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD):** European directive that covers all EU audiovisual media services (including on-demand services). The directive offers a flexible regulation, which all European countries needed to transpose in national law by the end of 2009. The AVMS Directive's contains specific rules to protect minors (art. 12 and art. 27). The less control a viewer has and the more harmful a specific content could be the more restrictions apply. Furthermore, these rules are supplemented by the **1998** and **2006** European Recommendations on the protection of minors and human dignity. Programmes which "might seriously impair" the development of minors are prohibited (i.e. pornography or gratuitous violence). Those which might simply be "harmful" to minors can only be transmitted when it is ensured - by selecting the time of the

broadcast or by any technical measure (e.g. encryption) - that minors will not normally hear or see them. In addition to that, when such programmes are not encrypted, they must be preceded by an acoustic warning or made clearly identifiable throughout their duration by means of a visual symbol. As all European countries are bound by the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, they will need to take the necessary steps at national level to ensure that children are not put in contact with potential harmful content. However, as the AVMSD is a quite flexible regulation, countries are quite free in filling in these rules as they see best fit. If you have a complaint or wish to have more information about content regulation in a country in the European Union, go to the website <http://www.international-television.org/regulation.html> to find the media regulator of a given country.

## TOMATO MOUNTAIN

### CASE STUDY

Many of the children in your daughter Lisa's second form class are fans of "Tomato Mountain", a TV series set in Florida that recounts the school life and romances of a group of teenagers who love music and like to break the rules. The series is winning over many adolescents all around the world, who form spontaneous viewing groups so they can watch each new episode together. The series is also serving as a model for these youngsters' latest "look".

The problem is that Tomato Mountain is shown on a satellite channel and in your home, due to budget constraints, you have not installed a satellite dish. So, Lisa cannot watch the programme and feels left out especially when it comes to the final television-vote in which viewers express their preferences for particular characters. On the basis of this vote, the screenwriters decide which direction the storyline will take and Lisa is upset not to be able to have her say. What's more, one of the Tomato Mountain fans is Giordano, a classmate who is ever so cute... Lisa has tried to get someone to tape the episodes for her but she is a bit embarrassed to let others know that she is the only one in class without a decoder at home.



### HOW TO INTERPRET THIS SITUATION

In response to the interactive **challenge** of new media, television programming is also offering ever greater audience involvement and participation. For example, during live programmes the audience's opinion is increasingly sought through phone-ins, emails, chat messages or voting via text message. Even though still distant from the **levels of interactivity** that the internet provides, this new kind of television is particularly designed to appeal to youngsters, who expect to interact in real time through all the various means of communication.

Television is also an important **presence** in the lives of children and adolescents because it satisfies their need to be part of a group by sharing an interest in the programmes, stories and characters portrayed. For this reason, satellite channels and some terrestrial television networks broadcast drama series, reality shows and music programmes specifically **to attract** a youth audience. Such programmes generally have a high emotional impact and encourage youngsters to identify with **their TV idols**. Over time, fan clubs, blogs, social communities and other groups spring up around these TV shows and characters. Even watching an episode by themselves at home helps youngsters feel connected with each other and they often follow up by exchanging SMS text messages and discussing the programme at school or with friends. In these programmes, certain values or behaviour patterns are often emphasised and promoted, such as a particular **look, competition** between peers or a fascination for **winning**. Equally the image of the "**loser**", who lacks success, money or friends, is often used to encourage viewers to empathise with his or her "imperfections".

### EDUCATIONAL PATHS

Watching these programmes also influences the **consumer behaviour** of youngsters, encouraging them to buy certain products linked to the image and contents of the programmes in question.

Installing satellite TV or pay TV **entails an expense** and obviously needs careful consideration especially regarding its long-term impact on the family budget. If the family cannot afford it, explain to your children that you, too, often have to **prioritise your choices** when deciding what to buy. Tell them that, when you were young, you also had to make do without certain things and therefore you can understand how unhappy they may feel. At the same time, explain that individual contributions and sacrifices are sometimes necessary for the wider benefit of the whole family and that in any case there are many other things they can share with their friends.

It can also be helpful to talk with your child about his or her favourite programmes and idols. To keep yourself informed about what your children are watching, try to have a quick look at the programmes in question. This will enable you to express yourself about them and get an idea of what sorts of messages are being transmitted. If you **don't agree** with a programme, find out from your child what arouses so much interest in him or her. It is important to understand your children's need to compare themselves with others and imitate them to feel they belong to a group. However, try to offer alternatives, and explain that in certain cases it is not a bad thing to be able to **distinguish** oneself from others and to **distance oneself** a bit from the latest fads. It may also be useful to form an **educational alliance** with other **parents** so that your children are treated the same as their friends and feel less isolated.

## **MEDIA GLOSSARY**

**Satellite TV:** television via satellite depends on signals that are transmitted to an orbiting satellite, amplified and then transmitted back to the satellite dish on your house. This means that satellite TV can receive programmes from other countries and even in mountainous areas or valleys where

terrestrial TV reception is poor. However, unlike terrestrial TV, there can be no obstacle between the dish and the transmitter. One cannot therefore get satellite TV reception by placing the antenna, or dish, inside buildings, as is the case with terrestrial TV.

# CONCLUSIONS

In this final section of the guide, we have grouped together the various educational issues dealt with so far into common themes to provide a final reflection on the safety and responsibility of minors with regard to New Media.

## INTERWOVEN MOTIVATIONS

Behind the use of new media by our children there lies a labyrinth of motivations, which are important to understand if we are to help them in their use of these tools. For example, the capacity of children to treat their personal data discerningly will depend on:

- elements of an emotional nature, such as when youngsters intensely involved in a chat room forget advice about safeguarding their privacy and open themselves to a meeting by revealing their identity;
- elements of a technical nature such as a lack of awareness of the processes through which data can be communicated and what the law says in such cases;
- the amount of respect children give to their own and others' intimacy, especially when data, information or images concerning other people are circulated.

The interweaving of motivations that determine youngsters' use of media can be summarised within three main sets of dynamics:

1. emotional and relationship dynamics involving feelings, motivations, sociability and needs;
2. cognitive dynamics including technical knowledge and competence;
3. value and civic-minded dynamics encompassing moral and ethical values, the ability to take on social responsibilities and a sense of citizenship.

In other words, the ways in which youngsters use new media will depend on a wide variety of factors such as their need to socialize, to communicate and to discover, as well as their technical abilities and the moral values that guide their behaviour. For this reason, parents need to provide a comprehensive education when guiding youngsters in the use of new media.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FEELING PART OF A GROUP AND FINDING ONE'S IDENTITY

By the end of childhood and definitely during preadolescence and adolescence, peer groups become extremely important for youngsters. Comparing themselves to others enables them to establish an identity separate from their family and to gradually gain freedom.

We would therefore like to stress once more the pre-existing relationship between:

- the spread of New Media and the possibility of communicating with others;
- the need of youngsters to be always in touch with their friends and the central role of peer groups in this phase of life.

In conclusion, parents need to recognise and accept their children's physiological urge to grow up, and support them according to their level of maturity. Only by recognising this parents can understand situations like the desire to own a mobile phone as early as possible or to use the internet in total autonomy.

It is important not to forget that a peer group may also influence our children's choices, such as which video games to buy and what sorts of videos to put on YouTube. However, from an educational point of view, the more successful we are in fostering the development of a critical ability in our children; the more capable they will be of managing their own growth and their relationship with us as parents.

Many youngsters certainly use their mobile phones in an excessive manner in order to be always in contact and share feelings with their friends. Nevertheless, being a part of a social network, or having a personal blog, also helps them define their own identity. The number of Live Messenger contacts they have, their personal profile and the interest groups they are a member of, all help define their level of importance among their peers.

We suggest that parents recognise that such tools serve a supportive function in the natural process of growing up. From an educational point of view, parents should also maintain a high degree of attentiveness so that the new media becomes integrated with the older types of socializing such as meeting up outside, group excursions or playing sports.

## RISKS: PAYING ATTENTION TO THE MEANS OF COMMUNICATION RATHER THAN ITS USE

In general, using new media tools per se should cause parents less concern than the way their children use them and what importance they attach to them.

A safe and critical use of the internet, mobile phones, video games and TV means leaving enough space for other aspects of children's daily lives such as hobbies, sports, arts, music and social life. Our children are not always mature enough to manage all these activities in a balanced and integrated way, but it is vital that "real" rather than "virtual" life remains the key arena in which experiences are gained. It is therefore important to make sure that children maintain real friendships and view their family and school as important points of reference. If this does not happen, the new technologies risk becoming their only source of social relations and knowledge.

The parent's educational role is vital because children who use new media in an unbalanced way are particularly vulnerable to a series of risks, such as:

- harassment or ill treatment by peers (cyberbullying);
- excessive use (dependency or addiction);
- exposure to violent, pornographic or racist contents (contents not suited to their age);
- contact with adults who want to establish inappropriate relationships with youngsters (allurement);
- incorrect information on dieting, medicines or drugs (harmful contents);
- incorrect scholastic information or misleading advertising (inaccurate and misleading contents);
- downloading copyright-protected music or films;
- attacks by viruses capable of infecting computers and mobile phones.

In conclusion, it is important that parents introduce New Media to their children in a gradual way that allows it to become integrated with their children's lives. They need to ensure a balanced use of these tools by offering other ways of socializing and pursuing interests in the "real" world. To avoid potential risks, children need to be gradually guided towards an increasingly autonomous use of new media tools until they become able to take the correct actions and decisions on their own.

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTROL AND TRUST: THE AGE-OLD EDUCATIONAL QUESTION OF "AUTHORITY VERSUS FREEDOM"**

To ensure the safety of children, parents have always had to strike a balance between protecting their children from negative experiences and helping them develop into autonomous beings able to cope for themselves. In short, our educational role as parents is to help teach our children to grow up.

To achieve this balance, two different ways of relating to children have emerged: one that focuses on control and the other more on trust. The approach we take will depend on such things as our personal educational style, the situation in question, the age of our children and their personalities.

The same duality of approach can be seen in the way we deal with the internet and mobile phones, since their use involves risks but also significant opportunities for growth. New media can also be used as tools by parents. For example, mobile phones can help keep track of children's whereabouts while TV and video games can be used as a sort of virtual babysitter.

Striking the right balance between control and trust is not always easy and different solutions will be needed depending on the situation and individual involved. However, it is important to remember that you cannot teach your children a critical sense, a

sense of responsibility and an ability to act autonomously without allowing them to train and test themselves. The key is to ensure that this takes place in a context they feel relaxed in and where they will be accepted even if they make mistakes.

### **AGE, MATURITY AND A CRITICAL SENSE**

It is vital to take into account your children's age when making decisions about their use of new media starting with their first mobile phone, video game, or first time surfing the net up until they take on a completely autonomous use of these tools. Even though all individuals are different, it is important to consider which age groups are most suited to certain choices. At the same time, parents should pay attention to the reasons for using a particular technology, our child's level of maturity and his or her sense of responsibility. For example, in the case of a mobile phone, it is worth asking whether it is really our child, or us, who feel the need for it. If our reasons are ones of control, other solutions may be more effective.

We should always question the motivation behind a request for a particular technological tool before agreeing. For example, if a child is only 7 or 8 years old and wants a mobile phone to be like some of his or her friends, we might decide that their need to be part of a peer group could be expressed in other ways. On the other hand, if he or she is a pre-adolescent, who socialises regularly through the media, it may be appropriate to grant the request. It is also worth considering whether the child has a sufficient level of maturity and critical sense to manage all the functions and contents associated with the technology in question.

Once the tool has been purchased, you should agree on a series of rules to ensure a balanced use of the technology, so that full autonomy will gradually replace your initial supervision. For example, in the case of internet filters, make sure they are appropriate for the child's age and that you are not being overly protective or controlling. Above all remember a filter cannot replace an adult's essential educational responsibility to safeguard the wellbeing of their children.

In our educational role as parents, it can be useful to recognise the difference between the two overarching age groups of adolescents and pre-adolescents. Until our children are about 12 years old, the educational role of parents is likely to be one of instruction in how the technology works and protection from any unpleasant or disturbing experiences that may be encountered. Once adolescence is reached (around the ages of 13-14), the role of parents will be to guide their children towards greater autonomy using the appropriate balance between control and trust as well as instilling a sense of responsibility for the consequences of one's own behaviour.

# CONCLUSIONS

## **RULES: TIME, COSTS, CONTACTS, CONTENTS**

As has already been stressed, the key for parents is to focus on how their children use new media technology and the role it plays in their lives. To ensure the right balance with other aspects of children's lives, some regulation of their use of media will be necessary. To do this, talk with your children about their needs and take them into consideration when agreeing on a series of rules. It may be useful to agree on a set of rules and put them up near the computer and similar pacts can be made for the use of mobile phones and video games. Any regulations should ensure a balance with other individual and family commitments such as mealtimes, homework, rest periods and social life. Once rules have been established, it is also vital that you, as a parent, make sure that they are observed, otherwise they will be meaningless and you will lose your authority as an educator.

In the case of portable technology, such as handheld consoles and mobile phones, rules should be established to prevent these tools increasing a child's alienation. For example, they should not be used in contexts where socializing or direct communication are taking place, such as at a party, a meal out with friends, or mealtimes at home. It may well be a good idea to discuss any rules with other parents so that commonly agreed forms of behaviour can be established. In this way, no child will feel left out of their peer group by having to go to a party without the video game everyone else is playing or for not being able to reply to an SMS text message that arrived during dinner.

Rules can also be applied to the contents of TV programmes, video games, and web sites visited. For example, it can be agreed that certain programmes and certain sites are "out of bounds" or can only be seen or visited with you present. Although in the latter case, remember that you will have to find the time to do this. It may also be useful to agree on some rules regarding contacts made online or via SMS, in order to safeguard privacy and regulate any interaction with strangers.

Remember that the use of filters can only be effective if they are appropriate to the age and maturity of your children and if you have previously discussed and agreed their use.

In the case of downloads, online purchases and the risks of commercial fraud, you should check that your children have the necessary technical knowledge to avoid risks and have agreed to respect the relevant laws. It is especially important to agree on the use of credit cards online, making clear the risks and financial implications that any inappropriate use could have on the family budget.

It is important to contain costs, both from a financial and educational point of view. For example, the gift of a mobile phone can provide an opportunity to teach your child financial responsibility. Jointly establishing a budget, or a shared way of

adding credit, can help your child learn more about how to manage his or her spending, an ability that will continue to be useful throughout life.

## **HOW TO FOSTER A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND A CRITICAL SENSE**

Technical knowledge is of course essential for understanding the potential and implications of the variety of new media tools available. However, the internet, mobile phones and video games also place us within a system of relationships where their responsible use necessitates an ability to manage the relationships formed as well as recognise and manage our own feelings. For this reason, the safe use of such tools also depends on the emotional and value-guided dynamics mentioned earlier. For example, being aware of when one is developing a fascination for someone met online, or feeling offended by the online behaviour of some friend, or uneasy about certain images or information, are all essential for the safe use of new media. Until your children are able to do this by themselves, you as parents will need to educate them in three key areas.

- **Socio-emotional education:** help your children to recognise and express their feelings, so that at every stage of their development they feel understood and accepted, even when they experience antisocial feelings like anger, envy, or jealousy. This will enable them to better understand what they and others are going through and so better manage contacts with people they meet online and reject attempts at allurements or bullying.
- **Sex education:** help your children deal with sexuality in ways appropriate to their age. Such guidance will help them avoid fuelling allurements by, for example, uploading compromising photos or talking about intimate issues with the first person they happen to meet online. From early on, you can help by offering appropriate answers to satisfy your children's natural curiosity about sexuality, their own bodies and the types of behaviour they see around them. When they reach adolescence, parents should accept their children's new sexual interest in others their own age and respect their privacy, while remaining vigilant and protective where necessary.
- **Ethical and moral education:** help your children to translate their needs into rights which should be respected within a system of coexistence based on universal values and common codes of behaviour. Remember that such values and codes of behaviour also entail responsibilities on their part. A good start would be to involve them in the choices that affect them in every sphere of their lives.

## **THE EDUCATIONAL ALLIANCE BETWEEN SCHOOL AND FAMILY**

Many different agencies, including the family, school, associations and civil society, play an important role in the education of our children. Some of these roles are different and others overlap. For example, families are involved directly in emotional and moral education while schools concentrate more on cultural learning, although they are also involved in emotional education. In many areas the school and family need to collaborate. This is particularly true when it comes to education about media usage, where both institutions may feel that they lack the necessary technical competency to perform their roles.

Furthermore, the need to control the relationship between minors and the media, both in protecting them from potential risks as well as helping them to explore opportunities, forces schools and parents to reconsider their educational roles and resources. As far as schools are concerned, youngsters can become detached from their everyday reality if access to new media is not fully integrated into the learning process. It is important that the media is not viewed as yet another “subject” to add on to the traditional ones. Schools need to constantly re-design the content and methods used in their educational programmes so that media is introduced in a cross-cutting and integrated way. Equally, parents have the responsibility to support the school in this by making sure it stays in touch with their children’s experiences and by taking part in forums that provide mutual support to parents and teachers. Together with the help of the youngsters, the aim should be to establish a common path towards IT literacy that can be pursued both at home and at school. In fact parents and schools should see themselves as “nodes” within a broad educational safety network that may include the IT industry, watchdogs and other associations. The collective aim should be to protect, defend and promote the right of youngsters to be educated in the use of media, through programmes and information that encourage the development of a critical consciousness.

What should parents do, together with schools, to achieve this common objective? To start with, they should discuss educational aims and work on common projects, integrating different methodologies and sharing resources and responsibilities. In recent years, many such projects have focused on creating “laboratory” situations, in which small multimedia products have been produced based on specific themes. The aim has been to assess the participants’ ability to use the technology and offer concrete tools to strengthen their critical abilities. Much more can and should be done to influence youngsters’ online behaviour and ensure they are educated in the positive and responsible use of new media. However, to achieve this, the dialogue between schools and parents needs to be intensified.

# APPENDIX

## THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (1989)

### ARTICLE 1.

**Definition of a Child.** A child is recognized as a person under 18, unless national laws recognize the age of majority earlier.

### ARTICLE 2.

**Non-Discrimination.** All rights apply to all children without exception. It is the State's obligation to protect children from any form of discrimination and to take positive action to promote their rights.

### ARTICLE 3.

**Best interests of the child.** All actions concerning the child shall take full account of his or her best interests. The State shall provide the child with adequate care when parents, or others charged with that responsibility, fail to do so.

### ARTICLE 4.

**Implementation of rights.** The State must do all it can to implement the rights contained in the Convention.

### ARTICLE 5.

**Parental guidance and the child's evolving capacities.** The State must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and the extended family to provide guidance for which is appropriate to his or her evolving capacities.

### ARTICLE 6.

**Survival and development.** Every child has the inherent right to life, and the State has an obligation to ensure the child's survival and development.

### ARTICLE 7.

**Name and nationality.** The child has the right to a name at birth. The child also has the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, to know his or her parents and be cared for by them.

### ARTICLE 8.

**Preservation of identity.** The State has an obligation to protect, and if necessary, re-establish basic aspects of the child's identity. This includes name, nationality and family ties.

### ARTICLE 9.

**Separation from parents.** The child has a right to live with his or her parents unless this is deemed to be incompatible with the child's best interests. The child also has the right to maintain contact with both parents if separated from one or both.

### ARTICLE 10.

**Family reunification.** Children and their parents have the right to leave any country and to enter their own for purposes of reunion or the maintenance of the child-parent relationship.

### ARTICLE 11.

**Illicit transfer and non-return.** The State has an obligation to prevent and remedy the kidnapping or retention of children abroad by a parent or third party.

### ARTICLE 12.

**The child's opinion.** The child has the right to express his or her opinion freely and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child.

### ARTICLE 13.

**Freedom of expression.** The child has the right to express his or her views, obtain information, make ideas or information known, regardless of frontiers.

### ARTICLE 14.

**Freedom of thought, conscience and religion.** The State shall respect the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, subject to appropriate parental guidance.

### ARTICLE 15.

**Freedom of association.** Children have a right to meet with others, and to join or form associations.

### ARTICLE 16.

**Protection of privacy.** Children have the right to protection from interference with privacy, family, home and correspondence, and from libel or slander.

ARTICLE 17.

**Access to appropriate information.** The State shall ensure the accessibility to children of information and material from a diversity of sources, and it shall encourage the mass media to disseminate information which is of social and cultural benefit to the child, and take steps to protect him or her from harmful materials.

ARTICLE 18.

**Parental responsibilities.** Parents have joint primary responsibility for raising the child, and the State shall support them in this. The State shall provide appropriate assistance to parents in child-raising.

ARTICLE 19.

**Protection from abuse and neglect.** The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child and establish appropriate programmes for the prevention of abuse and the treatment of victims.

ARTICLE 20.

**Protection of a child without family.** The State is obliged to provide special protection for a child deprived of the family environment and to ensure that appropriate alternative family care or institutional placement is available in such cases. Efforts to meet this obligation shall pay due regard to the child's cultural background.

ARTICLE 21.

**Adoption.** In countries where adoption is recognized and/or allowed, it shall only be carried out in the best interests of the child, and only with the authorization of competent authorities, and safeguards for the child.

ARTICLE 22.

**Refugee children.** Special protection shall be granted to a refugee child or to a child seeking refugee status. It is the State's obligation to co-operate with competent organizations which provide such protection and assistance.

ARTICLE 23.

**Disabled children.** A disabled child has the right to special care, education and training to help him or her enjoy a full and decent life in dignity and achieve the greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration possible.

ARTICLE 24.

**Health and health services.** The child has a right to the highest standard of health and medical care attainable. States shall place special emphasis on the provision of primary and preventive health care, public health education and the reduction of infant mortality. They shall encourage international co-operation in this regard and strive to see that no child is deprived of access to effective health services.

ARTICLE 25.

**Periodic review of placement.** A child who is placed by the State for reasons of care, protection or treatment is entitled to have that placement evaluated regularly.

ARTICLE 26.

**Social security.** The child has the right to benefit from social security including social insurance.

ARTICLE 27.

**Standard of living.** Every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. Parents have the primary responsibility to ensure that the child has adequate standard of living. The State's duty is to ensure that this responsibility can be fulfilled, and is. State responsibility can include material assistance to parents and their children.

ARTICLE 28.

**Education.** The child has a right to education, and the State's duty is to ensure that primary education is free and compulsory, to encourage different forms of secondary education accessible to every child and to make higher education available to all on the basis of capacity. School discipline shall be consistent with the child's right and dignity. The State shall engage in international co-operation to implement this right.

ARTICLE 29.

**Aims of education.** Education shall aim at developing the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to the fullest extent. Education shall prepare the child for an active adult life in a free society and foster respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, and for the cultural background and values of others.

# APPENDIX

## ARTICLE 30.

**Children of minorities or indigenous populations.** Children of minority communities and indigenous populations have the right to enjoy their own culture and to practise their own religion and language.

## ARTICLE 31.

**Leisure, recreation and cultural activities.** The child has the right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities.

## ARTICLE 32.

**Child labour.** The child has the right to be protected from work that threatens his or her health, education or development. The State shall set minimum ages for employment and regulate working conditions.

## ARTICLE 33.

**Drug abuse.** Children have the right to protection from the use of narcotic and psychotropic drugs, and from being involved in their production or distribution.

## ARTICLE 34.

**Sexual exploitation.** The State shall protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, including prostitution and involvement in pornography.

## ARTICLE 35.

**Sale, trafficking and abduction.** It is the State's obligation to make every effort to prevent the sale, trafficking and abduction of children.

## ARTICLE 36.

**Other forms of exploitation.** The child has the right to protection from all forms of exploitation to any aspects of the child's welfare not covered in articles 32, 33, 34 and 35.

## ARTICLE 37.

**Torture and deprivation of liberty.** No child shall be subjected to torture, cruel treatment or punishment, unlawful arrest or deprivation of liberty. Both capital punishment and life imprisonment without the possibility of release are prohibited for offences committed by persons below 18 years. Any child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interests not to do so. A child who is detained shall have legal and other assistance as well as contact with the family.

## ARTICLE 38.

**Armed conflicts.** States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that children below 15 years of age have no direct part in hostilities. No child below 15 shall be recruited into the armed forces. States shall also ensure the protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict as described in relevant international law.

## ARTICLE 39.

**Rehabilitative care.** The State has an obligation to ensure that child victims of armed conflicts, torture, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation receive appropriate treatment for their recovery and social re-integration.

## ARTICLE 40.

**Administration of juvenile justice.** A child in conflict with the law has the right to treatment which promotes the child's sense of dignity and worth, takes the child's age into account and aims at his or her re-integration into society. The child is entitled to basic guarantees as well as legal or other assistance for his or her defence. Judicial proceedings and institutional placements shall be avoided wherever possible.

## ARTICLE 41.

**Respect for existing standards.** Wherever standards set in applicable national and international law relevant to the rights of the child are higher than those in this Convention, the higher standard shall always apply.

ARTICLE 42-54.

**Implementation and entry into force.** The provisions of articles 42-54 notably foresee;

- the State's obligation to make the rights contained in this Convention widely known to both adults and children.
- the setting up of a Committee on the Rights of the child composed of ten experts, which will consider reports that States Parties to the Convention are to submit two years after ratification and every five years thereafter. The Convention enters into force - and the Committee would therefore be set up - once 20 countries have ratified it.
- States Parties are to make their reports widely available to the general public.
- the Committee may propose that special studies be undertaken on specific issues relating to the rights of the child, and may make its evaluations known to each State Party concerned as well as to the un General Assembly.
- in order to "foster the effective implementation of the Convention and to encourage international co-operation", the specialized agencies of the un (such as ILO,WHO and UNESCO) and UNICEF would be able to attend the meetings of the Committee. Together with any other body recognized as "competent", including NGOs in consultative status with the un and un organs such as UNHCR, they can submit pertinent information to the Committee and be asked to advise on the optimal implementation of the Convention.
- a reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the present Convention shall not be permitted.



Since 2004, EASY is a national awareness campaign that targets younger

children (preteen), parents and teachers. It aims to promote the safe and responsible use of new media. The campaign reaches out more widely to industry and all those who impact on young people and new media as everyone needs to take responsibility for raising awareness.

[www.easy4.it](http://www.easy4.it)



Since 2002, STOP-IT is the Italian hotline that has been working with

Save the Children Italy to combat the sexual exploitation of children on the internet. In particular, it aims to fight against online child pornography and promote the right for children to be protected from any form of sexual exploitation (article 34 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). The project targets industry, education, law enforcement agencies with the aim of raising awareness and getting all parties involved in the fight to stop the sexual exploitation of children.

[www.stop-it.org](http://www.stop-it.org)

EASY and STOP-IT have joined together to form the Italian Safer Internet Center which deals with awareness raising, media education, and advocacy as well as the protection of children from harmful and inappropriate content. It works with educational institutions as well as industry partners to promote a culture of respect for younger users of online technologies, based around the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Italiansafer Internet Center is managed by Save the Children and Adiconsum and is co-funded by the European Commission as part of the Safer Internet Programme which promotes the safe use of the internet and online technologies amongst children and young people.



"Insafe is a network of Safer Internet Awareness

Centres from 30 EU countries. The role of the Centres is to promote safe, responsible use of the Internet and mobile technologies to children and young people. Each Centre comprises an Awareness Centre, a helpline and a youth panel. The Insafe network is coordinated by European Schoolnet in Brussels. Insafe works in partnership with the INHOPE network of hotlines, for the reporting and take-down of illegal online content.

Insafe aims to promote the positive use of online technologies as well as highlighting the risks and challenges. Through sharing experiences and good practice between national members across Europe and beyond, Insafe offers a wealth of resources and information through its central portal at [www.saferinternet.org](http://www.saferinternet.org) and national language portals in all 30 countries of the network."

[www.saferinternet.org](http://www.saferinternet.org)



Funded by  
the European Commission

**Save the Children** is the world's largest independent international organization for the protection and promotion of children's rights. It operates in over 120 countries, with a network of 28 national organizations and an international coordinating office: the International Save the Children Alliance. At a national level, Save the Children Italy works to support the weakest and most vulnerable groups of minors in Italy such as unaccompanied migrants, and victims of child labour and other forms of abuse. It also carries out educational programmes that address the relationship between minors and new technologies.



**Adiconsum** is an Italian consumer association with over 128,000 members, established in 1987 by the Italian trade union confederation CISL. It operates as a consumer protection agency with complete autonomy from businesses, political parties, the government and even the trade union that formed it. With around 300 information and advice booths in the country's main cities, the association promotes sustainable, socially responsible and informed consumerism. Since 2001, Adiconsum has also carried out various projects to educate and raise awareness among children, parents, and teachers about the net and new technologies.



**The Coordinamento genitori democratici (Cgd)**, or "Democratic Parents Association", is an Italian non-profit organisation founded by Marisa Musu and Gianni Rodari in 1976. At the core of its activities are children and their right to grow up freely, healthily and with dignity. The Cgd identifies priority areas for action in individual schools where it operates as the national parents and students association. It also takes part in a variety of national committees and commissions, where it works to safeguard minors against the risks of various types of media.



## Insafe Member countries Web address

Austria	<a href="http://www.saferinternet.at">www.saferinternet.at</a>
Belgium	<a href="http://www.clicksafe.be">www.clicksafe.be</a>
Bulgaria	<a href="http://www.safenet.bg">www.safenet.bg</a>
Cyprus	<a href="http://www.cyberethics.info">www.cyberethics.info</a>
Czech Republic	<a href="http://www.saferinternet.cz">www.saferinternet.cz</a>
Denmark	<a href="http://www.medieraadet.dk">www.medieraadet.dk</a>
Estonia	<a href="mailto:malle@lastekaitseliit.ee">malle@lastekaitseliit.ee</a>
Finland	<a href="http://www.ficora.fi">www.ficora.fi</a>
France	<a href="http://www.internetsanscrainte.fr">www.internetsanscrainte.fr</a>
Germany	<a href="http://www.klicksafe.de">www.klicksafe.de</a>
Greece	<a href="http://www.saferinternet.gr">www.saferinternet.gr</a>
Hungary	<a href="http://www.saferinternet.hu">www.saferinternet.hu</a>
Iceland	<a href="http://www.saft.is">www.saft.is</a>
Ireland	<a href="http://www.webwise.ie">www.webwise.ie</a>
Italy	<a href="http://www.easy4.it">www.easy4.it</a>
Latvia	<a href="http://www.drossinternets.lv">www.drossinternets.lv</a>
Lithuania	<a href="http://www.draugiskasinternetas.lt">www.draugiskasinternetas.lt</a>
Luxembourg	<a href="http://www.lusi.lu">www.lusi.lu</a>
Malta	<a href="http://www.mca.org.mt">www.mca.org.mt</a>
Netherlands	<a href="http://www.mijndigitalewereld.nl">www.mijndigitalewereld.nl</a>
Norway	<a href="http://www.medietilsynet.no">www.medietilsynet.no</a>
Poland	<a href="http://www.saferinternet.pl">www.saferinternet.pl</a>
Portugal	<a href="http://www.internetsegura.pt">www.internetsegura.pt</a>
Romania	<a href="http://www.sigur.info">www.sigur.info</a>
Russia	<a href="http://www.saferunet.ru">www.saferunet.ru</a>
Slovakia	<a href="http://www.zodpovedne.sk">www.zodpovedne.sk</a>
Slovenia	<a href="http://www.safe.si">www.safe.si</a>
Spain	<a href="http://www.protegeles.com">www.protegeles.com</a>
Sweden	<a href="http://www.medieradet.se">www.medieradet.se</a>
United Kingdom	<a href="http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk">www.thinkuknow.co.uk</a>



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