DATE – Develop Approaches and Tools to End Online Teen Dating Violence

The content of this publication represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

Planning/Editing
Medialab

Page layout
Davide Dorigatti

Cover
Medialab | Andrea Mantica

Cover images
© #######

Artistic management
Giordano Pacenza

© 2023 Edizioni Centro Studi Erickson S.p.A.
Via del Pioppeto 24
38121 TRENTO
Tel. 0461 951500
Toll-free number 800 844052
Fax 0461 950698
www.erickson.it
info@erickson.it

ISBN: 978-88-590-####-#

All rights reserved. Republication by any means prohibited without Editor's prior authorisation

Printing concluded January 2023
by ########

DATE – Develop Approaches and Tools to End Online Teen Dating Violence

Toolkit for teachers and health and social care professionals

Save the Children

Erickson

1.

The DATE project

(Develop Approaches and Tools
to end Online Teen Dating Violence)

Introduction

Adolescence is the period where we transition from childhood to adulthood and where the boundaries of chronological age have become increasingly more fluid. Nowadays, when we speak about adolescence we mean the period of life that goes **from 12 to 23 years** of age, characterized by a **search for one's individuality.** Along with significant physical and emotional changes, we may start our first intimate relationships.

Unfortunately, things do not always go as well as possible for those involved and **relationships can also be fertile ground for abuse and violence.**This is **Teen Dating Violence (TDV),** defined by Mulford and Giordano in 2008 as "different behaviours, ranging from physical and sexual abuse ranging from physical and sexual abuse to forms of psychological and emotional violence, that occur in teenage couples".

Social networks and technology use are part of everyday life, as well as a space and a tool for meeting and realizing these relationships. These days, much interpersonal violence is mediated by digital technologies and there is no clear boundary between online and offline life, so much so that **real life has been defined onlife** (Floridi, 2017).
Online Teen Dating Violence(OTDV), is not a distinct form of violence compared to TDV but an extension of it through digital channels.

The DATE project (Develop Approaches and Tools to end Online Teen Dating Violence)

Save the Children and Centro Studi Ericsson devised a project which aims to tackle and prevent gender violence in the intimate relationships of teenagers - Teen Dating Violence (TDV) - with particular regard to abusive behaviour implemented through digital technology - Online Teen Dating Violence (OTDV)
- since it is impossible to distinguish between online and offline life when we speak of the experience of teenagers.

The project lasted 24 months from January 2021 to December 2022 and was part of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) programme funded by the European Commission.

The proposed project was formed of different initiatives, all of which were connected and integrated with the others, directed at understanding and tackling TDV/OTDV adequately, with particular regard to that unfolding online, where teenagers spend so much time.

PHASE 1 - Analysing the phenomenon

This first phase was dedicated to collecting the information necessary to create an adequate, up-to-date theoretical framework of reference that also took the personal opinions of teenagers into account.

It thus provided for:

- a **scoping review,** that is, an analysis of projects and scientific evidence currently available on the matter, nationally and internationally;

- the **consultation** of 1.259 adolescents aged 14 to 22 who filled out an online questionnaire with their opinions on online violence in relationships with peers.

PHASE 2 - Learning along with the teenagers

Mutual learning workshop (MLW) involving respectively the boys and the girls from the Reggio Calabria and Venice groups of «SottoSopra – Movimento giovani per Save the Children».[1] The workshops facilitated the exchange of information, experiences, and points of views between adults and young people with the objective of realising mutual shared learning. During the meetings, in addition to presenting the DATE project, we had the chance to explore certain key concepts, such as the definition of OTDV, as well as ideas and experiences of intimate relationships, including those unfolding online. 37 teenagers and 10 adults took part in the MLW's.

PHASE 3 - Sharing the lessons learned

This phase aimed to translate what had emerged until then into concrete action aimed at training different sorts of professionals involved in the teenager world. This phase allowed for understanding the matter of OTDV through the experiences and realities of individual participants, with particular regard to their educational role, experiences and knowledge on the matter and through listening to young people. There were two parts:

- **an e-learning course** to build the theoretical and practical bases regarding OTDV, with the involvement of more than 1700 participants;

- **Training for Trainers,** training initiatives in synchronous face-to-face and online format, directed at acquiring operational tools for working with teenagers, with the involvement of more than 90 participants.

1. The Movimento Giovani per Save the Children is a network which is active throughout Italy, which involves young people aged 14 to 25 involved in promoting the rights of children and teenagers.For further information: http://www.savethechildren.it/partecipazione/movimento-giovani-sotto-sopra (accessed 27/12/2022).

PHASE 4: Result dissemination

The conclusive part was dedicated to the organization of events for result dissemination that allowed for focusing on all the elements emerging along this packed project.
Specifically:

- **territorial events** where teenagers and adults, both professionals and non, interacted with teenagers and exchanged ideas on the matter of OTDV;
- peer-to-peer **communication campaign;**
- conclusive national event.

Exchanging experiences

One of the main innovative aspects of this project was the direct **involvement of teenagers as the real experts on the matters in question.** Putting teenagers at the heart of the project means adopting a participatory methodology which provides for horizontality and mutual respect among adults and teenagers who share their knowledge.
This means allowing the teenagers to have an active role in everything that affects them.

This requires a dual effort from the adults involved: taking a back seat and **listening to the young people** to be able to learn from them while maintaining a sound educational role. The teenagers were generous and willing to speak about their experiences and their lives, questioning their convictions and opening up the doors to their world.

The objective of the Toolkit

This toolkit is an important product of the DATE project, co-created across the course of the project with the collaboration of experts, researchers, professionals, not to mention, with the help of a great number of teenagers.
The objective of the toolkit is to **support people who are involved with young people for different reasons and wish to «make a difference» with regard to Online Teen Dating Violence.**

We would like these materials to provide initial support for understanding the phenomena, for knowledge dissemination but also for working out the first important actions for effectively supporting those experiencing it in person.

2.

The Online Teen Dating Violence (OTDV) phenomenon

Introduction

Online Teen Dating Violence (OTDV) - i.e. online violence among young couples - is a **complex phenomenon** which brings together issues such as the evolution of the onlife and gender violence among teenagers.
In this section, we take an in-depth look at these matters and how they intersect.

We introduce insight and indications regarding the method that guided the project - and that should guide us every day in our work with teenagers - based on promoting their participation in matters that directly involve them.

Teenagers online

Digital technologies are an integral part of the lives of children and teenagers since they are necessary tools for communication, relating to each other, and learning.
As such, they **satisfy fundamental needs and offer opportunities for growth and participation.**
The widespread use of information and communications technologies (ICT) is resulting in big changes in the **dynamics of relationships and identity** of teenagers, and transforming languages and means of communication, habits and styles of life.
The healthcare crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic quickly increased their use and further reduced the age bracket of those accessing digital technologies, accelerating a trend which was already in act over the past years and which requires a lot of our attention. Participation in online environments is associated with **exposure to risks relating to inappropriate or harmful contents:** these risks are particularly high for more vulnerable people, above all if deriving from an lack of awareness of digital technologies or how digital environments are designed.

Children and teenagers, thus, need adults to support them as they **develop the autonomy necessary to understand how digital environments work**, to recognize and manage their emotions, to develop a sense of responsibility and an ability to think critically, all while bearing in mind that their lives, like ours, are also online.

What is the connection between digital technologies and violence in young couples? Technology permeates all relationships including that of a couple. It gives us **new tools to carry out forms of violence**, such as coercion to produce pornographic images (child pornography in the case of minors), the sharing of intimate images without consent sex extortion forms of oppression (e.g. forms of control and monitoring the use of online profiles, tracking or geolocation).

Furthermore, teenagers are exposed to **sexualized images** from a very young age: the increase of such images on the main media and social media platforms, the use of sexual contents for advertising and marketing, and pressure on children and young people to provide perfect images of themselves online, are all factors that can contribute to early- or hyper-sexualization of very young people.

To reduce the incidence or the possibility of such risks, the necessary competencies and capacities must be promoted so that young people are informed and can take advantage of the potential of digital technologies and manage the implications. Since it seems appropriate to consider emotional and sexual education as indispensable to the development of **relational competencies** in group and couple dynamics, such as listening skills, empathy, a capacity to be in a relationship, recognition, consent, valorisation of differences, without neglecting the more sexual aspects.

It makes no sense to distinguish between offline life and online life if we want to understand the changes that we are experiencing; above all due to the early age at which children access digital environments and the integration of our experiences using them and the presence of technologies in the environments we live in (for example, smart speakers).
The **term onlife** has been coined to describe this new dimension of existence (Luciano Floridi, 2013)

What are the risks?

The risks of the «online life» are being studied and recognized increasingly.
To this regard an important awareness-raising project and training project is «Generazioni Connesse» promoted by the Ministry of Education.
On the website http://www/generazioniconnesse.it you can find the definitions in detail (and many other materials for teenagers, teachers, and parents), which you can read by clicking on the words reported below, that regard the main risks teenagers can encounter online.

Useful links

- **Online grooming**
  https://www.generazioniconnesse.it/site/it/0000/00/00/adescamento-online/
- **Cyberbullying**
  https://www.generazioniconnesse.it/site/it/0000/00/00/cyberbullismo--2/
- **Sexting and Sex extortion**
  https://www.generazioniconnesse.it/site/it/0000/00/00/sexting/
- **Use and production of child pornography**
  https://www.generazioniconnesse.it/site/it/0000/00/00/pedopornografia-online/
- **Early use of age-inappropriate pornographic content and exposure to harmful or inappropriate content** (e.g. racist contents, that incite suicide, that promote unhealthy eating habits, etc.)
  https://www.generazioniconnesse.it/site/it/0000/00/00/contenuti-inadatti/
- **Risks connected to the violation of privacy, datafication and profiling and exposure to forms of hidden or manipulative advertising**
  https://www.generazioniconnesse.it/site/it/0000/00/00/privacy-tra-i-banchi-di-scuola/
- **Gambling**
  www.generazioniconnesse.it/site/it/0000/00/00/gioco-dazzardo/

An idea

Do you want to speak to teenagers about issues like privacy and digital security, digital well-being and online information sharing?
Take a look at **Data Detox Kit** www.datadetoxkit.org part of the project «The Glass Room Misinformation Edition» coordinated by Tactical Tech, in partnership with Save the Children Italia and IFLA. This interactive tool is easy to use.

Gender violence and teenagers

Over the past years, we have witnessed numerous changes in relation to the issue of gender violence, that have led to the phenomena being better defined and understood.
For example, the terminology now used frequently to speak about it: we refer increasingly to the concept of gender violence to specify a **form of violence against women because they are women** as sanctioned by the Istanbul Convention (2011).
This international document was the first that, based on the scientific evidence available at the time of its drafting, outlined a regulatory framework to guarantee and safeguard women who have experienced or are experiencing violence.

Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention defines violence against women as a **violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women**, including all acts of violence based on gender that provoke or that may provoke harm or suffering, whether physical, sexual, psychological, or economic, including threats of these acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of freedom, in both public and private life.
The Convention focuses on the importance of structural (cultural, social, political) interventions and not only emergency interventions for individual violent situations, identifying **four cornerstones** for eliminating gender discrimination and violence: prevention measures; effective integrated policies; victim protection and support; punishment of those responsible.

Why do we refer to gender violence when we are faced with violence among teenage couples?
Because this type of violence is situated within and emerges from the **same cultural framework** which violence against women originates from in adult couples. In addition to the shared origin, both have the same mechanisms and experiences. In both adult and teenage couples:

- violence mainly takes place in the context of an intimate relationship, in a space founded on trust, within which one expects to find protection and care;

- violence is cross-cutting, that is, it can occur to anyone anywhere, regardless of social and economical status, level of education, professional position, ethnicity, religion, or lifestyle.

The **behaviours** that come under a definition of violence within an intimate relationship between young people can be summarized as follows (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014).

- Physical violence: this occurs when a partner is pinched, hit, pushed, slapped, punched or kicked

- Psychological/emotional violence: threats, insults, shaming, bullying within a group of peers, deliberately embarrassing another, isolating another from friends and family.

- Sexual violence: forcing a partner to take part in sexual acts without their consent; forcing a parter into unwanted sexual activities; forcing a partner to not use contraception.

- Stalking: intrusive behaviour of monitoring, control, and seeking unwanted contact.

One of the main aspects that characterizes this form of violence, as with that identifiable in adult couples, is the presence of domination/control, which is the cornerstone on which all behaviours that we can observe are founded on or launched from.The person experiencing violence thus has the perception of being in a prison without recognizing the bars but from which they feel they cannot escape.
Among teenagers, it is rarer to hear of economic violence: the very coordinates within which a couple's relationship is developed are the background to this dimension although sometimes behaviour such as removing or controlling a partner's money or involving the other in actions that include an economic return (for example, dealing or theft) are reported.
In any case, even when there are no such actions, the constant, continuous pressure that those experiencing maltreatment feel reduces and limits their personal autonomy and development

When this occurs to a developing individual, it entails not only harming what exists, but also preventing that which could be, restricting their spheres of experience and thus their knowledge of themselves and of the world.

In a certain sense, thus, we can speak of the removal of «an asset» even when there is no concrete point of contention. Limiting an individual's spaces for growth and empowerment can and must be recognized as significantly limiting an individual's personal freedom.

The Istanbul Convention (2011) was ratified by Italy in 2013 and became state law on the 1 August 2014. The text is available at www.senato.it.

The figures

In 2012, Euripses and TelefonoAzzurro performed research to investigate the violent behaviour in a sample of 1523 teenagers aged 12 to 18 in Italy: 29.1% reported to have experienced verbal aggression in a relationship; 20.9% to have been insulted by a partner and 8.7% to have been the victim of threats they'd be left if they didn't do what the other person asked them to. 5.4% of teenagers reported that a partner had threatened to hit them.

WARNING!

Over the past years, the matter of gender violence and its final and most brutal expression, femicide, have become increasingly widespread matters of discussion. However, **just because we are speaking about this phenomenon does not mean we understand it**.
Understanding it entails having to explore the cultural framework which we are all immersed in, that we carry inside of us and that we act on whether aware of it or not.

Online Teen Dating Violence

Online Teen Dating Violence or Digital Dating Abuse or Cyber Dating Behaviours are the set of **behaviours directed at damaging a partner using digital technologies to control them, pressurise them, or threaten them** (Reed, Tolman and Ward, 2017).

Online violence has real emotional and physical effects and is characterized by the absence of boundaries and limits, in terms of time and space, so the victim is **constantly exposed to violence**. Furthermore, some content (images and videos) can escape control and be deliberately used against a partner, disseminated and stay online for a long time.

Digital Dating Abuse behaviours can be categorized as follows (Save the Children, 2020).

- Behaviours directed at **damaging a partner's reputation**: spreading rumours, gossip, lies, (often) doctored photos and videos, which aim to harm a partner's reputation and ridicule them.

- **Controlling behaviours**: controlling a partner's mobile phone and devices without their consent (or asking for/getting their pin and password); controlling their movements; phoning/sending messages insistently to know where a partner is and who they are with; making them use geolocation apps, or using them without consent; not allowing them to use their mobile phone/social networks.

- **Aggressive behaviours**: threatening and humiliating a partner; pressurizing a partner to consent to unwanted sexual acts, also online, etc. These behaviours may have both physical and psychological elements.

- **Violation of privacy**: sharing private/intimate contents with third parties without the partner's consent.

The causes, consequences, and dynamics of teen dating violence taking place through digital tools are not distinct from the more general gender violence. However, the digital element characterizes violent situations with two additional risks. The first and perhaps the most significant is the even more reduced opportunity for the victim to get away from their aggressor that **can act without limits**: they can know their movements with geolocation, see what they are doing by monitoring their stories on Instagram, know what they are thinking or what is happening to them at all times by reading their Facebook posts, check if they are online by checking WhatsApp, who they are interacting with by checking who they are following on social networks, etc. Of course, the victim could choose to go silent on digital platforms or environments but, within a violent relationship, this **could lead to repercussions which are even worse** than constant control and monitoring. And so Silvia, aged 15, would rather answer the WhatsApp messages that her 17-year-old boyfriend sends her every night at 3 a.m. than risk making him angry and having to pay the consequences the day after.

The second risk is the **disappearance of safe places** for finding some relief. Ironically, one ends up feeling alone as well as completely «bare» and vulnerable, at the mercy of the harassment they can suffer from those acting violently towards them. While it is true that no one can see, that the interaction between myself and the other occurs in an online but private context, such as Messenger or Instagram chat, the perception is that everything is public because it could become such in just an instant, with the press of a button.

3.

Over to the teenagers

Introduction

Teenagers were involved in the DATE project from the word go. This participatory approach is based on the premise that teenagers have to be directly engaged in actions that involve them.
Beginning with some general considerations on the participation of teenagers, in this section, we describe the results of two project actions intended to gather their point of view and disseminate it: the consultation which more than 1200 teenagers took part in and eight participatory workshops (mutual learning workshops) where teenagers and adults exchanged experiences and ideas on the matter of Online Teen Dating Violence.

The importance of participation

Save the Children aims to guarantee meaningful participation of children and teenagers so that they are never mere beneficiaries of interventions, but direct actors. The word participation is used by Save the Children (and other organisations) to express the situation where children and teenagers think autonomously, express their ideas and points of views effectively and assertively, and interact with others through positive means. This means **involving children and teenagers in the decisions that regard their lives**, the lives of their families, of the community, and of the broader society that they live in (Save the Children Italia Onlus 2020,

https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/Linee%20guida%20monitoraggio%20partecipazione_finale.pdf).

Participation is one of the rights sanctioned by the international **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** whose adoption by the United Nations was fundamental for the recognition and the realization of the rights of children and teenagers. Above all, article 12 underlines the principle of participation of children and teenagers, recognising them the right to **freely express points of view on all the matters that regard them** (in accordance with their age and maturity). The **role of adults** (parents, teachers, operators, and other figures of reference) is thus fundamental since they have the task of creating the conditions that encourage the meaningful participation of children and teenagers as expressed in article 5 of the Convention.

Furthermore, it is important that all public, private, national, and international bodies work in a network to promote a **culture of participation** directed at making participation ordinary practice, with «stable places» for exploration, action, consultation, and joint decision making.
In order to become a stable culture and practice, participation has to prove its efficacy.

The **evaluation of participatory processes**, above all those involving young people as actors, is not a particularly developed practice. This is due to cultural obstacles and the difficulty in detecting and trying out effective models. However, national and international literature provides some indications on three areas of evaluation for participatory processes: participation quality, extension, and impact.

For further information:

Toolkit for monitoring and evaluation the participation of children and teenagers

https://resourcecentre.savethechildren. net/document/toolkit-monitoring-and-evaluating-chil- drens-participation-introduction-booklet-1/

Save the Children Italia Onlus (2010), Tu partecipi io partecipo.Un'analisi dei metodi di lavoro e delle buone pratiche di partecipazione di bambini e adolescenti.

https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo/pubblicazioni/tu-partecipi-io-partecipo

Save the Children Italia Onlus (2019),Partecipare si può: strumenti e buone pratiche di partecipazione e ascolto dei minori migranti.

https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo/pubblicazioni/partecipare-si-puo-volume-2

Save the Children Italia Onlus (2020), La qualità della partecipazione. Monitoring guidelines and tools.

https://www.savethechildren.it/sites/default/files/files/Line%20guida%20monitoraggio%20partecipazione_finale.pdf

Dipartimento per le Politiche per la famiglia (2021), Linee guida per la partecipazione di bambini e bambine e ragazze e ragazzi.

https://famiglia.governo.it/it/politiche-e-attivita/comunicazione/notizie/linee-guida-per-la-partecipazione-di-bambine-e-bambini-e-ragazze-e-ragazzi/

Watch out for traps!

Participation doesn't "work" if its added value is connected only to the opportunities for strengthening and growth offered to the individual children and teenagers involved.
It is valuable when its prerequisite allows the participatory process to:

- tangibly improve adults' decisions;
- strengthen dialogue and relationships between adults, children, and teenagers;
- highlight the point of view of children and teenagers;

pursue effective (and measurable) change.

Access the full text of the international Convention of the Rights of the Child at:
https://www.savethechechildren.it/convenzione-sui-diritti-dellinfanzia

The results of the consultation with more than 1200 teenagers

What are teenagers' opinions on Online Teen Dating Violence? In its first phase, the DATE project tried to answer this question through an online questionnaire that was filled out by 1.259 teenagers aged 14 to 22.

This publication was funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).

Erickson

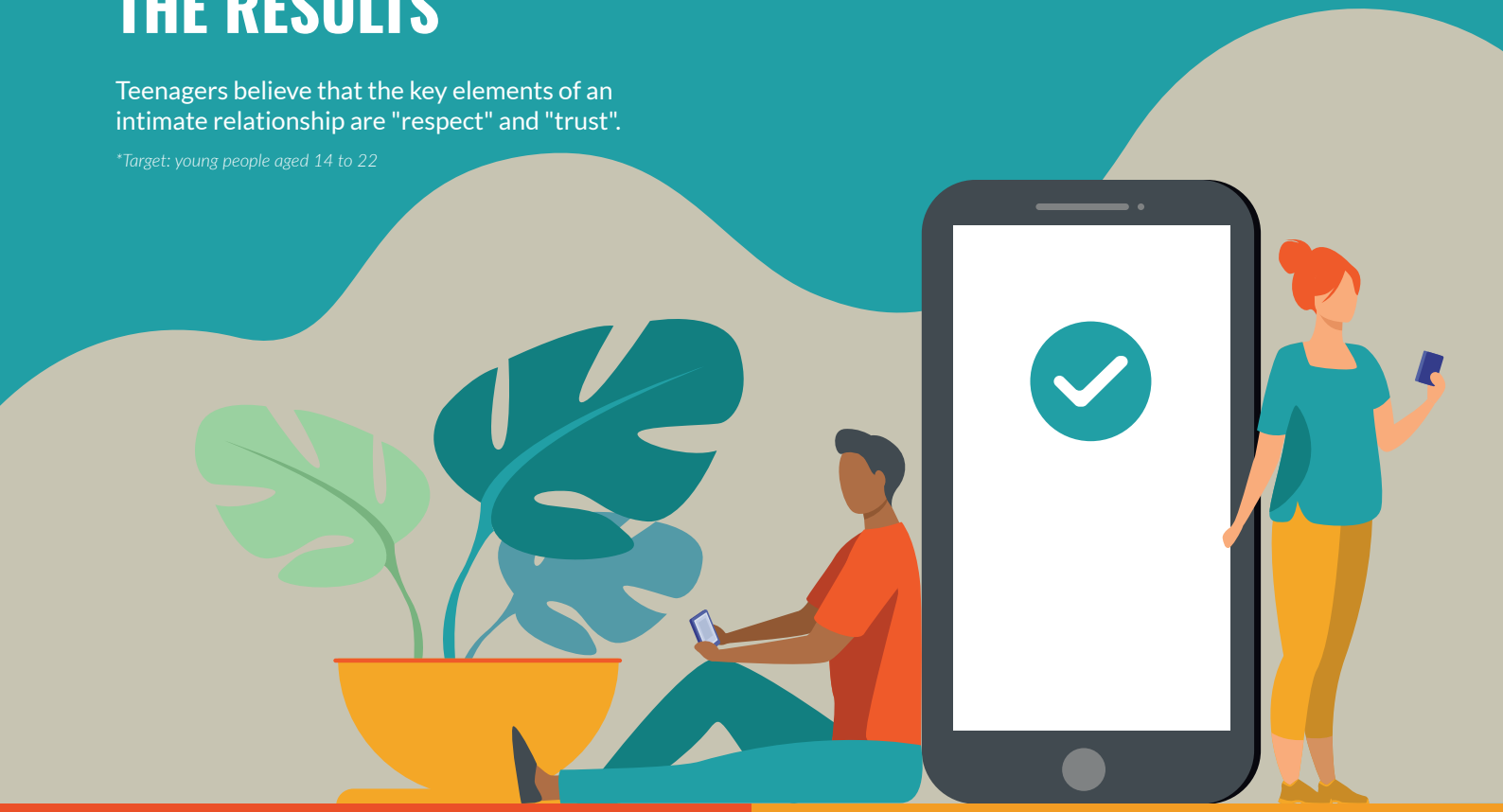
Save the Children

101005772- DATE- REC-AG-2020/
REC-RDAP-GBV-AG-2020

THE RESULTS

Teenagers believe that the key elements of an intimate relationship are "respect" and "trust".

**Target: young people aged 14 to 22*



- There are distorted beliefs about behaviours and attitudes that are still too often mistaken to be love: many teenagers believe that jealousy is a form of love and control is a way for a partner to show interest. They are not always recognised as elements that limit freedom and form the roots of violence within a couple

- Above all, it is the girls that recognize the spread of abusive behaviours online and their attitude is not to minimize or normalize these behaviours.

- Teenage boys and girls seem ready to ask for help and offer support to people close to them that are experiencing online dating violence. It is thus fundamental for adults to be prepared to get requests for help and to respond adequately.

- These data indicate to us that there is still a lot of education and prevention to do on these matters and that the failure to tackle the continuity between the online and offline world (onlife world) increases the risk of violence.

The contents of this poster express the points of view of the authors who take exclusive responsibility for it.
The European Commission does not take any responsibility for any potential use of the information contained here.

The Mutual Learning Workshops

Mutual Learning Workshops (MLW) are based on a technique which facilitates the exchange of ideas and experiences to the ends of mutual, shared learning (through the exchange of information, experiences, and points of view, but also good practices, the definition of needs, intervention ideas etc.).
These training sessions should allow for the connection of experiences, knowledge, techniques, and strategies within a community of people who experience these matters on a daily basis.

In 2021, the DATE project held **8 Mutual Learning Workshops** with teenage boys and girls from the «SottoSopra – Movimento giovani per Save the Children» local groups of Reggio Calabria and Venice, and professionals from social care and educational services. They were performed by Save the Children and Erickson experts, with the support of Sottosopra group facilitators: 4 Mutual Learning Workshops in Venice and 4 Mutual Learning Workshops in Reggio Calabria.

The MLW were devised as flexible workshops, so that the different activities could be adapted to the specific features of the two groups and their participants: each group developed the requests and proposed contents differently, but all the teenage boys and girls in both groups had the opportunity and the capacity to explore and reflect on the matters relevant to the DATE project and to express their opinions on matters that regard their lives.

Along with the teenagers, and beginning with them, we tried to explore three aspects above all.

- **Relationships with adult figures**: what makes an adult someone you can look to in difficult situations? As well as: What do I need, as a teenage boy or girl, to be able to look to that person, perhaps to learn, to let myself become intrigued, to identify them as someone that can accompany me adequately along my path of growth?
  Not only to support me, but also to «walk alongside me».

- **Perceptions and experiences** in relation to the project focus, OTDV: what words images come to mind when we deal with this matter?

- **Trust and control**, two central matters in a couple's relationship, with specific and explicit reference to the online world: how are these constructed by teenage boys and girls and what meaning do they give them?

This image summarizes what emerged.

Matters explored

The role of the adult

The characteristics of a trustworthy adult that can be a good person to speak to in difficult moments were explored: they should be able to listen and provide emotional and practical support without judging and should demonstrate comprehension and an authentic interest.

Recognition and awareness of OTDV

- What is it?
- What's it got to do with me?
- What do teenage boys and girls my age think about it?(also regarding the results of the consultation presented above)

Trust and control in online dating

We explored ideas/experiences on:

- trust and control in online dating
- couple «values»
- jealousy (is it possessiveness? do I like it? is it a sign of love?)
- communication (when is it easier? Are there online shortcuts?)
- Getting to know the other (does the truth exist online?)
- gender differences in behaviours
- Recognition of violent behaviours carried out or experienced
- Fear of not being understood by others or being judged in moments of difficulty
- Difficulty understanding one's own feelings (in a society that always questions «victims»)
- Difficulty understanding «boundaries» in relationships

What emerged

I feel judged by adults

Getting to know the other... the truth doesn't always exist online

I trust adults that don't judge me

Sometimes I like jealousy... but it's not love

Love can make us fragile

I'm scared of not being understood by others if I'm in difficulty

Sometimes it's difficult to define the line between a behaviour that's "allowed" and one that isn't

I would like to know how to recognise violence, also so that I can help others

I would speak about a difficulty with an adult who can listen

I don't know if what I'm feeling is right

It's important to speak about OTDV

4.

Listening to violence: working on ourselves

Introduction

In this section, we shift our gaze from the phenomenon of ODTV, and what the teenagers have to say, to us. What's our position when it comes to gender violence? How do we experience our role as adults when we encounter it? How can we tackle it effectively?

The following reflections can help us to be more aware of ourselves and thus more prepared when it's time for us to help.

Listening to violence: what do I hear?

A film scene plays on the screen. A boy attacks a female peer at a party, forcing her into an unwanted sexual act. There are no explicit images. The director has decided to give the audience the task of filling in the gaps through the noises, whining, brief phrases, individual gestures. Many people are watching. Concentrated on the screen, ears pricked up. The atmosphere is thick. Silence echoes.

What is happening inside each of them? What would happen if it wasn't a film but if that girl was there in flesh and bone, telling them what had happened to her? What would happen to each of us?

Let's try to imagine it. Let's close our eyes. Let's listen. Let us try not to filter what surfaces, through what we think is right to feel. Let us pay attention to the free flow of thoughts and emotions that spontaneously come up.

What images come before our eyes? What effect do they have on us? What does our body tell us? What sensations does it communicate to us? What does it «cost» us to be there? How difficult is it for us to listen to the pain and suffering that reaches us? Is there something that disturbs us in particular? What aspect is it that seems so unbearable for us?

Would we rather cover our ears and look elsewhere? Pretend it isn't true, it didn't happen, we misunderstood, or exaggerated? Or do we feel able to tolerate it and stay? Do we realize that what we are «seeing» impacts us, disturbs us, but, somehow, we feel capable of facing it, that it won't pull us down and crush us? **Are we able to stay upright despite the wind?**

Gender violence hurts. It hurts.
Not just for those directly involved, but also for those who witness it or who are told about it. It is like a razor blade. It cuts into us. This may tempt us to leave it alone, to let it go, almost without realizing. It was there but it's not any more. I can stop thinking about it. I can get my breath back after feeling like I was suffocating.

Or it may stimulate in us a sense of violated justice, motivate us to fight with all our forces, not only to counter it, but, also, and above all, to prevent it. However, while this second option appears to be the right choice, it isn't if the exercise just carried out brought out an extreme sensation of discomfort, or a tremendous sense of disorientation.

Why? Let's play a game.

Let's imagine it's Friday and our friend Matteo calls us to suggest a trip to the mountains together on Sunday. His chosen destination is well known and everyone we know says it's beautiful. The weather forecast seems perfect: sunny, not too hot, and a slight breeze. The answer seems obvious: how could we say no? All the circumstances seem to encourage us to agree.

But hang on a moment. Think carefully: what's missing? Us. We are missing. We haven't asked ourself if we want to, if we feel like getting up early, if we are able to bear the physical effort that the walk would require and if we want to make that type of effort or if we would prefer to do something else because we know that we would run the risk of reaching the top exhausted and not being able to get out of bed the morning after.

It seems a bizarre comparison: I can choose not go to the mountains but I can't decide to not bear the burden of a violent story. This is partly true, but partly not: **we have to answer what we bear witness to, but understanding where we are and what we can or cannot** do will lead us to make the most adequate and functional choice for that specific situation. Sometimes this as we will see can mean saying: I can't do it, I can't manage, I don't feel able, **I'll ask for help**.

Let's try it. Using intellectual honesty. Trusting that we are taking a path that will allow us to become «**the best tool possible**» for a teenage boy or girl who tomorrow may need us.

My construction of the violence: stereotypes and prejudices in action

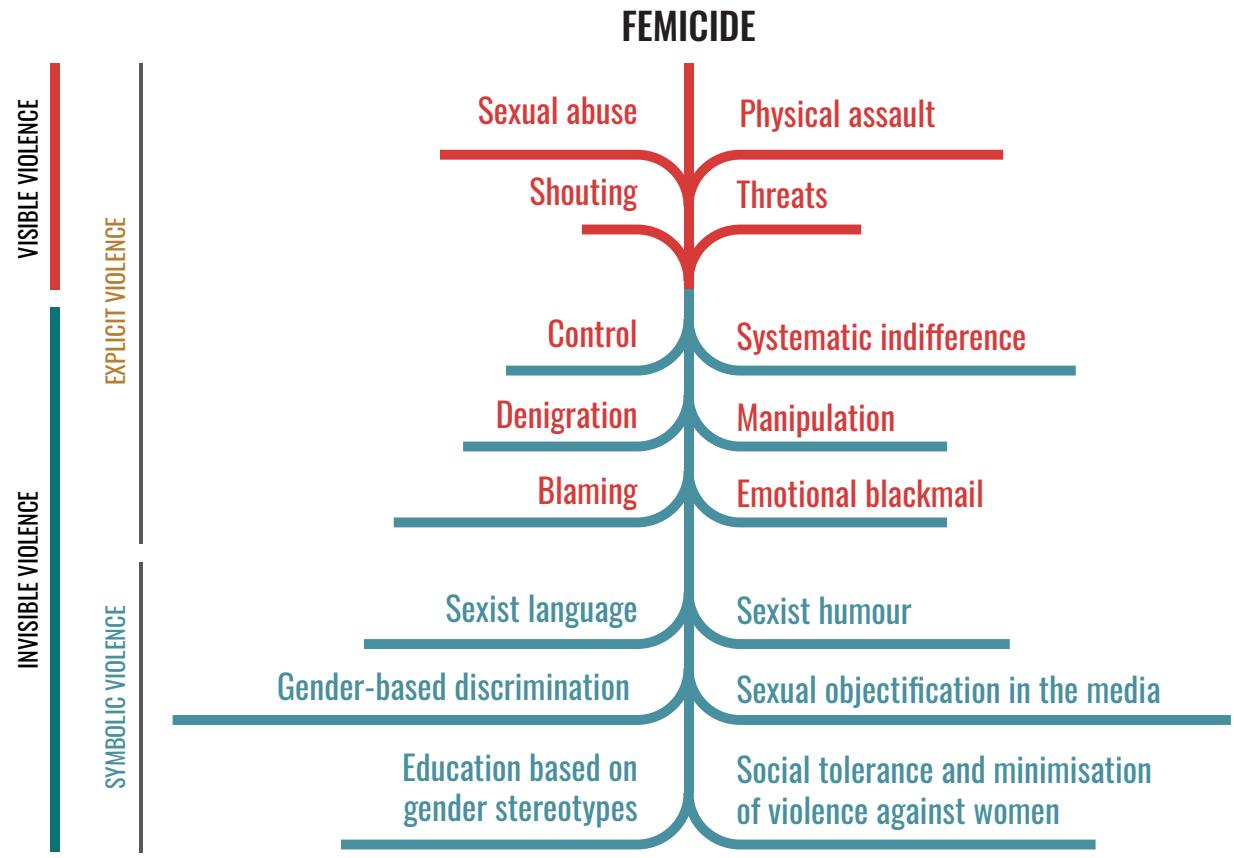
Gender violence exists. It is part of our everyday life, it takes up the corridors connecting school classrooms, it permeates the walls of homes that should protect, it penetrates parties, we breathe it in on our streets. **Its presence is such that it risks being taken for granted.** It is an inevitable part of our lives. We condemn it publicly, loudly objecting to its invasion of our relationships that should nurture and provide us with care, yet often it escapes our gaze, like a shop we walk by every day but would have difficulty pointing out.

Why does this happen? Each of us is immersed in a culture that frames and is the background of our existence, directing it, sometimes pushing it, but without us realizing completely. **We find ourselves saying, thinking, performing a certain action almost as if «automatically», so it appears «obvious»**. This happens, above all, when it comes to that which appears widely accepted by most of those around us. It's like getting constant, tacit confirmation that we are directed in the «right» direction.

But are we so sure of that? We all carry prejudices and stereotypes within us, which, for example, orientate our way of looking at gender roles: what should we expect from a little boy? And what about a little girl? Often, these days, boys and girls and adults say they are not restricted by these mechanisms, and that they recognize the right for all males and females to state and express their identity as they wish. **But none of us are free.**

But why are we speaking about this? What has this got to do with the matter that we are all tackling here together? Gender stereotypes form the basis on which relationships between males and females are structured, and establish what we can consider acceptable and what we cannot. This is a product, a social construct, but is framed as an absolute, inviolable truth, on which all the following levels are constructed and on which **power disparities** are created. These power disparities, as the famous Istanbul Convention definitively showed us (see the paragraph «Gender and teen violence», page xxx), forms the fundamental cause of the perpetration of gender violence.

We must be careful: having stereotypes simply shows us and confirms our specific cultural belonging. This does not mean that we are making a mistake or we are wrong So what's the point then? **We must become aware.** We must self-monitor constantly so as to be able to recognize and question, although this requires enormous effort.
It is the fundamental starting point which is inevitable to the ends of promoting true gender equality and thus preventing all forms of violence.



It is the fundamental starting point which is inevitable to the ends of promoting true gender equality and thus preventing all forms of violence. Seeing violence and identifying what it implies is very difficult.
Daily practice is necessary to be able to become capable of recognizing all the forms in which it unfolds which are not always evident. Let's think about it: how many times have we laughed at a joke made by a man or a woman, often with sexual connotations, **without asking ourselves what it implies in terms of gender roles?** How many times have we stayed silent, perhaps irritated or embarrassed because of a comment made in bad taste, finding it difficult to find the words to answer back? Each one of these examples and the many more that we could make represent the ways through which violence **invisibly permeates our lives**, so much so that we take it for granted and consequently consider it normal. Only when it is expressed through clear, evident, tangible actions, like femicide, that is, the killing of a woman because she is a woman, are we impacted, and truly perceive its seriousness. However, we perceive it as unrelated to us, as something that does not involve us directly, that could not ever happen to us or someone we love. In reality, each one of us is responsible for similar acts on an everyday basis that could sadly happen to anyone. Save no one.

Let us reflect on this: are we free from prejudices?

Let us ask ourselves the following questions.

Would we give a doll as a present to a little boy of two years old?

Would we give the little newborn Giorgio a pink jumpsuit?

Would we allow our little 4-year-old boy to go to school wearing a skirt just because he liked it?

If we saw Marta and Paola fighting, pulling each other's hair, pushing and hitting each other, would we feel the same as would have had it been Filippo and Roberto?
And if it were Sophia and Mattia, how would we feel?

If we went into a beauty centre and were welcomed by male workers only, would we react in the same way as would have had we met only female workers?

If we called the fire brigade because a fire had suddenly broken out in our home, what effect would we have if an all-woman team came to our rescue?

Let's play a game

Try to write a list of names, five male ones and five female ones, and then ask different people, of different ages, to match each of these to an occupation.

What results do you get? Were the names equally distributed? Were there recurring things you noticed, that is, occupations that were always attributed exclusively to women or to men?

Let us now ask ourselves: are there occupations that a man or a woman respectively could NOT do?

The question, as you can see easily at this point, is rhetorical: the only truly existing obligations are those that we construct and impose on ourselves and on those around us.

Knowing roles and boundaries in order to guarantee efficacy

Let us imagine a wardrobe full of T-shirts and jumpers lying on its floor. Do I have everything that I need or is there something I don't have for when it's hot or when it gets cold? I don't know unless I sort out the mess. If I don't take everything, separate it, and organize it.
We have to define in order to understand. We have to clarify in order to be able to be better prepared.
These aspects are always fundamental, and become essential when someone that has experienced or is experiencing violence comes to us.

One of the fundamental questions to ask yourself must be: **<who> am I for that person?** That is, what role have they assigned me? A confidant to entrust with their pain, someone that can help them to understand what's happening or what has happened to them, someone to ask help from?

The immediately subsequent question must be: who am I «actually» for that person? What is my role? What are my boundaries? How far can I go? What are the limits that I must not pass for any reason? Why? What would happen if I did?

The answers to these two questions may be very different. The first is connected to the need that the specific individual recognizes in themselves at that given moment and the second is connected to the position actually held by those receiving the revelation.

There are other questions that we can ask ourselves about our role and our boundaries.

- What is **the space within which I can act?** What can I actually do and what can I not do?
- Did I get a direct **request for help** or do I have a suspicion or did I witness a situation that worries me?
- Do I know the **legal implications** of this situation? They change, for example, depending on the specific role that we cover and based on the age of the person involved (see also pages ***).
- What **type of help** can I guarantee? A parent can be comforting and welcoming, a point of reference and a constant presence, but they'll need to rely on others in order to understand what to do and how to behave to guarantee adequate protection for their teenage child. An educator may represent a significant support, but they'll have to limit their intervention to specific actions and spaces, preferably working in a network with other professional figures in a tangible action that guarantees safeguarding and care.

Recognizing boundaries does not mean putting up walls but **defining limits in order to contain and manage subsequent steps** in terms of what is most functional to the well-being of all individuals involved, including who is experiencing or has experienced a violent action, that needs to be listened to, received, supported, but also those carrying out the action, so that they can understand and, hopefully, stop and not repeat the harm carried out so far.

Violence disorientates, confuses, and disrupts. Those who are experiencing it or have experienced it bear the outcomes of the trauma, of the blow dealt. **Understanding it can re-establish stability**, allowing them slowly to reclaim the role that they hold in their own life, which is defined also thanks to that of others.

Violence is unpredictable.
There is no cause-effect logic. it is not rational.
Making the surrounding world predictable and foreseeable **reassures those who have to face it** and allows calm to take over where chaos reigns.

Be careful!

Stopping and asking ourselves who we are and what we can do is one of the most crucial steps for guaranteeing the efficacy of our intervention, whatever it is. Sometimes just recognizing that the only possible action for us to perform is accompanying that person to someone else whose role and competencies are different from ours.

5

Detecting violence and activating support

Introduction

This section proposes tangible indications for detecting situations that could be considered OTDV, to understand what to say/not to say to the potential victim and to identify the possible actions to take. All this must occur with an important underlying awareness: these are complex situations! We must not hold back from asking help ourselves, getting support from people who are adequately trained whenever necessary.

Being able to detect OTDV: glasses for seeing or, rather, taking off the goggles

Naming it means making what we see real.
This is our way of categorizing and thus organizing or giving a shape to the reality which we are experiencing. **Giving the violence a name is a crucial act** for both those carrying it out and for those experiencing it because it restores order which has been lost, restoring to those who choose to exercise it the responsibility of their actions and lightening the load of blame and shame often experienced by those who are subject to it. However, in order to name it, we must first see it and recognize it as such.

What do we expect when we speak about Teen Dating Violence both when it is carried out in the tangible context of a real life meeting and when it also occurs online? This is one of the most crucial aspects when we are dealing with this matter. **Sometimes, we feel the need to be able to formulate a set of indicators**, as clues that guide us as we discover that world which we would not like to encounter at all.

This, however, brings with it an enormous risk. If I create a sort of identikit of actions and of people that can carry out or experience violence, I risk missing everything that does not correspond exactly to what I expected. In addition, it is easy to fall into the trap of stereotypes already discussed. Ideas of victim and perpetrator often have nothing to do with the real people we may find before us in a class.
These are the very goggles that we have to choose to take off in order to be able to see more clearly.
Let us look at an example.

Let's imagine we are a teacher, walking down one of the corridors of the secondary school we teach in. It's break time: teenagers noisily fill up the spaces outside of the classrooms.

At a certain point, we hear a slightly raised voice. We turn around and we recognize two of our pupils, Carlo and Federica, from 4F. He is up in her face. She seems to hold her own. She doesn't back away, standing firm. We go over and ask what is happening and this pair immediately break up, both claiming it was just a nasty fight caused by a difference in opinions.

What did we see? What did we hear? Was there something that impacted us? If so, what?

According to what those directly involved told us, the event was limited exclusively to that specific present moment so we are comforted. **Asking ourselves if this could be a sign of something else**, however, implies questioning oneself, and looking for answers, but, above all, it entails having to recognise the possibility that we may be faced with a relationship between a boy and a girl which is characterized by violence.

Let us look at another example.

I am an educator, aged 37, and have worked in a recreational structure for teenage boys and girls aged up to 23 for 10 years. One day, I see Marco sitting on a little wall near the basketball court holding his mobile, with a sad look on his face. I go up to sit down beside him and speak to him. Initially he seems a little reluctant, but then he shows me the chat he was reading. The chat is with Claudia, the girl I know he has been dating recently: they often arrive in the afternoon holding hands. She had sent him numerous messages asking him where he was, who he was with, and what he was doing. I give him back his phone and ask him how he feels. He tells me he can't stand it anymore, that every time he doesn't answer his phone she immediately gets angry and starts pelting him with messages, first loving ones and then full of unpleasant phrases that hurt him.

What am I witnessing? It would be easy, and very tempting, to reduce everything I'm told to jealousy. But can I be sure? Could it be something else? And if so, what?
What name can I give to what I am observing? **Yes, perhaps this is the central question: what name can I give to what I am observing?** And if the answer is violence, I have to say so and act consequently.

What am I witnessing? It would be easy, and very tempting, to reduce everything I'm told to jealousy. But can I be sure? Could it be something else? And if so, what?
What name can I give to what I am observing? Yes, perhaps this is the central question: what name can I give to what I am observing? And if the answer is violence, I have to say so and act consequently.

When violence is revealed to us: what to say and what not to say

Francesca: «I have to tell you something...».

Teacher: «I'm here for you. I am listening».

Francesca: «I can't...».

Francesca, aged 15. Sitting on the chair in front of us looking troubled, she raises her gaze to meet ours and looks quickly away. She tries to avoid that contact which she needs but it becomes a mirror, scaring her.

She is deciding whether to share something that is troubling her, a burden that is mixed up with her books and notebooks in her school bag. She needs to. She is suffering. But she feels embarrassed. Ashamed. Of what? Why? What is she asking us?

When we find ourselves in a situation like that just described, how can we help? What must we pay attention to? What must we avoid? Let us give ourselves some rules: just a few, but fundamental ones.

1 Every word has a value, as does silence

The more complex, the more important it is to choose every word carefully, including silence.
What we say or don't say, above all, if it is the first contact, can significantly determine the course of our relationship with the person and even their personal journey.

2 Believe without judging

Those who choose to tell us what they have experienced or are experiencing need to feel there is a space where they can come and feel safe, without condemnation, without questioning.
It is not up to us to establish whether what we are told corresponds to real facts or otherwise. Our only task is to receive.

We must not minimize, we must not underestimate, we must never reject what we are told. We can easily run that risk or convey this message to the person, sometimes even without realizing:
«Are you sure?»; «Really?».
Even these few words can insinuate doubt, in ourselves and in those who have come to us.

3 Being there and supporting what the story implies

We must avoid being intrusive by asking factual questions or asking for details that we do not need to support who has come to us. We must concentrate on the emotions that we recognise in the other, reflecting them back in order to be able to verify if we have understood well and to make the other person feel seen and understood.

4 Follow their lead

Revelations often require flexibility in terms of time and space because they accompany the process of awareness that the person is dealing with: we must try to follow their lead, without interfering.

5 Don't make promises that we can't keep

Sometimes what we find ourselves managing is too troubling, painful, complex to be able to tolerate it.
The person can ask us for help in a way that can lead us to say simply: «Yes, I will save you». But a promise that we cannot keep has a more damaging effect in the long term than a little careful step.

Let us try to reflect together on some examples

Teacher (T): Angela how are you? You don't seem your usual self today.

Angela (A): I'm fine. Thanks. Just some trouble with my boyfriend.

(T): I'm really sorry to hear you're having trouble with your boyfriend.
It seems to me that this is really disturbing you.

Not a generic willingness to listen but a communication that I have recognized discomfort and I'm expressing it.

What is it that Angela is telling me? What need is she expressing? What is her non-verbal behaviour telling me?
Do I feel that she wants to leave the conversation or not? For example, is she looking away? Is she staying or trying to move away? What am I feeling? How do I feel? Do I feel concerned, fear, indifference? Why?

The importance of silence: respect it and do not interrupt it to try to fill the silence.
Often this is a sign of a difficulty of ours rather than what the person needs.
If it's not possible to do otherwise, explain it:
I'm sorry for interrupting this silence, which I feel has a lot of meaning for you, but I'm worried I don't fully understand what you're thinking.

Serena (S): Do you remember Matteo? We've been chatting for about a month on Insta.

Educator (E): Yes, I remember

S: He asked me to meet him.

E: And what did you reply? How do you feel about this?

S: Don't know. Really, I don't know. I mean, I want to see him, but then what if I don't like him?

E: Well, that is a possibility. What are the others?

S:That I like him? But that wouldn't be a problem.

E: So what do you think could happen then?

Serena is sharing something she is experiencing.
The doubt, desire, and need for dialogue with an adult that is capable of receiving is the first thing we can perceive. And then possibly that is capable of helping to make a choice.

The girl has to be accompanied towards exploring alternatives that she thinks could occur. This reflection must come from her, even if mediated by the adult.

Asking a question rather than expressing an opinion guarantees that the boy or girl will feel that the adult is authentically interested in what they feel and think, without judging, and is open to dialogue.
This can help to keep the conversation going.

Marco (M): Coach, can I speak to you for a moment?

Coach (C): Sure, what's up?

(M): It's about Francesca.

(C): Your girlfriend?

(M): Yes.

(C): …..

(M): I really like her... but she's too jealous...

C): Help me to understand what you mean... give me some examples...

(M): I don't know... she always wants to know where I am... if I don't answer my phone because I'm at training she might not answer me for the whole day or make a scene in front of everyone

(C): And how do you feel? It seems like this situation it's really difficult for you...

(M): Well, when we're together it's great. It's just that sometimes she hits me and I can't stand that...

(C): Well, from what you say her behaviour must be difficult to tolerate...

Respond without hesitation, if possible.
The windows for dialogue are often fleeting and based on what is perceived as urgent.

Try to guarantee a "special" space and time, without external interruptions, above all, if it seems that the matter is particularly sensitive.

Don't take for granted that you are talking the same language. Asking for examples is the best way to guarantee that you have the same baseline.

Marco isn't asking for solutions or advice. He's only looking to be listened to.

Focusing on WHAT and not WHO does what. It's fundamental to express a negative opinion exclusively regarding the behaviour rather than the person, above all for a boy or a girl who's exposed to unpleasant experiences like those that can occur in a violent relationship.

In this second case, if the teenager hasn't already become aware that what is happening is not fair, the risk is that they close up and stop communicating, feeling the person they are in some way bonded to is being judged

Federica (F): Have you got a second?

Teacher (T): Sure. What's up, Federica?

(F): I need to tell you something but you have to promise me that you won't tell anyone.

(I): Federica, you seem really upset.
What you want to tell me must be really important.
But I can't promise you that I won't speak to anyone about it if I don't know what it's about.

(F): I won't tell you anything then. I don't want you to speak to anyone about it.

(I): I can't make a promise that I'm not sure I will be able to keep. I would be betraying your trust. And I don't want to do that. Will you help me understand what's worrying you? Who are you scared will find out?

(F): My parents! My parents! If my dad finds out he'll kill me!

(I): You're really scared. Why do you think your father would react so badly?

(F): because I know him. He would say it's all my fault, that I'm the usual troublemaker.

(I): I don't know your father like you do and if you're scared about this, there must be a reason. I can't guarantee you that I won't say anything to anybody because it depends on what you have to tell me. But you have my word that you will be made aware of every step I take and that I will remain by your side whatever steps must be taken.

Even when the teenager's immediate reaction seems highly negative, what we are reflecting is a taking of responsibility, safeguarding that they have the right to receive from us as adults.

Sometimes this can prevent the revealing of the problem at that time, but it guarantees that the trusting relationship, which is probably underlying the request for help, will be preserved.

Demonstrating a sound stance, while remaining open to receive them with their concerns, usually guarantees a space for dialogue that can lead to them sharing their experiences.

Although you may be tempted to reassure them about their parent, you must be extremely careful to not do so.
We don't know if who we have before us is a child who is experiencing violence at home and if we minimize their fears we risk doubling the harm: not helping her in this specific request and telling her that what happens at home is not that significant, not so serious.

Wanting to give more than we can or that is not within our capacity will immediately satisfy our need to ease the burden of supporting another person's pain, but in the long term we risk disappointing the expectations of the boy or girl if we don't keep this promise. This can be particularly harmful in certain situations which are already extremely difficult.

It's extremely important to only make promises that we are able to keep, paying particular attention to those that are within our professional capacities. Maintaining a clear and well-defined role can seem limiting. Actually, it's a guarantee of predictability for the boy or girl who will know who to ask about what, with the certainty of being able to obtain it or not.

When violence is revealed to us: what to do and what not to do

Dealing with the complex phenomenon of TDV requires great efforts in terms of reflection and coordination between the different levels and the different realities that may be involved in different capacities. **There is no general or strict and unequivocal response to the issue of what to do when dealing with a case of violence.**

A necessary starting point, before taking any step, is to clarify **one's role** in the situation which you are facing, asking oneself first of all whether to intervene **in a personal or professional capacity**, without ever forgetting that, the more complex the matter, the more proportionally important it is to consider the steps to take with extreme care, getting support from adequately trained people when necessary.

Aware that it is extremely reductive to try to use a specific story as a general example, we here propose two potential situations in order to give examples about what questions we may encounter and how it may be appropriate to face them.

Scenario 1

My name's Ilaria and my daughter Beatrice is 15. Yesterday, after lunch, Sofia, her best friend since they were little, confided in me and told me that her boyfriend, Luca, who she's been dating for six months, is driving her crazy sending her constant messages on Insta, checking her every move, complaining to her constantly whenever he sees her online on WhatsApp and isn't chatting to him or commenting every story she posts saying they're inappropriate. He won't leave her alone.

Sofia cries when she speaks about it, saying that she's ashamed to tell her mum and dad and that she doesn't know what to do anymore.

WHAT TO DO?

Listen, believe, return the effort made telling you about what happened

I'm here for you. Thank you for sharing this with me. What you are telling me is very important. It must be very difficult to speak about it.

WHAT NOT TO DO?

Minimize, say everything will be fine, ask for details, propose solutions.

Maybe he's just a bit anxious. He cares about you. He's worried about you.

Don't worry. We'll sort it all out. I'll speak to him.

You have to end it with him

And then what? What's our role in this case? Providing a listening space may not be sufficient.

There are two things we can then do depending on the relationship we have and the resources we have available to us: we can suggest the girl speaks to someone that can support her adequately, perhaps offering to accompany her

What you told me is very difficult to put up with. I think it would be important to try to speak to someone that knows about this type of situation. To understand better what is happening. I can accompany you if you want...

Or we can first ask someone for more specific indications on what to do, sharing them with the person we have before us.

What you're telling me is very difficult to bear. Thank you for sharing it with me. I would like to be able to help you and to do that I think it's better if I try to speak to someone that deals with this type of situation so we can understand what's happening and how it's best for you to proceed.

In both cases, it's necessary to give importance to the person's fears whether expressed explicitly or perceived intuitively from the non-verbal communication.

You seem scared. I understand that you're scared.
I am a little too. What you're experiencing is a very sensitive situation. That's why it's important to ask for help. I support you.

We must remember that when we perceive the need to speak with experts that can help us to understand how to proceed, we can contact the social services on our territory. For example:

- The anti-violence centre (in the case of girls aged 18+)
- Family counselling unit
- The hospital's A&E
- Social services for children
- Social services for adults
- Healthcare services for children
- Police forces
- Private professionals who are experts in gender violence (for example, psychologists, lawyers)

These services may have different names, duties, and organization, depending on the region.

Scenario 2

I'm a teacher of Italian literature in a technical school in my city. This morning during my lesson I realized that one of my pupils, Marta, seemed particularly upset: her gaze was absent, as if she was thinking about something else and was on the verge of tears.
During the break, I asked her what was wrong, telling her that I had noticed that she wasn't her usual self.
Marta told me that she was going through a very difficult moment with her ex-boyfriend. She had split up with him the week before and this morning she found out that he had sent some intimate photos that she had taken to the class chat. And now all her classmates were making comments about her and she felt really ashamed.

COSA FARE?

Receive, believe, return the effort made telling you about what happened

Thanks for sharing this experience with me. I can imagine that it must be difficult for you to speak about it. It is not in any way your fault. What has happened is very serious

WHAT NOT TO DO?

Minimize, say everything will be fine, ask for details, propose solutions

Oh come on, in the end it's not that serious, it's just a few photos. I'm sure everything will be fine. Maybe later I can speak to him and I'll make him understand that he has behaved badly.

WHAT MUST I DO?

Explain your position and what you are required to do by law, which provides that in cases which entail automatic prosecution,*i.e. that a complaint is not required from the victim to be able to proceed, a person who holds public office, for example, a teacher is legally obliged to report to the legal authorities, or to another authority that has the obligation to refer to this, for example, the police forces.
If this does not happen, you are committing the crime of failure to report a crime (articles 361 of the Criminal Code).

This is valid also in the event that a minor is the perpetrator of a crime.

*for further information on crime offences which entail automatic prosecution refer to this document:

https://www. generazioniconnesse.it/_file/documenti/E-LEARNING-LE- ZIONI/Corso-5/Elenco%20reati%20procedibili%20 Ufficio.pdf

What you told me is very serious. It is so serious that the law provides that people like me, who have the task of protecting boys and girls like you, must report what happened to the police forces so that they take all the steps necessary to safeguard you but also to teach him that certain actions must not be committed.

This type of statement can result in fear and confusion and our role will be to receive them and frame it to make sense for the girl.

I imagine that you might feel scared about all this. You're right, it's something that doesn't happen every day. But it happens often to boys and girls like you. That's why we must take these steps, so that it doesn't happen anymore.

6.

Doing to understand:

awareness raising on OTDV

Introduction

Experience is the most functional way to translate theoretical concepts, which as such are abstract, into solid thoughts. This is why when we work with boys and girls to prevent TDV and OTDV and to promote nourishing relationships, we propose **activities that allow them to experience what we are speaking about** and then other reflections are able to surface and be shared.

Before giving some examples, we must provide an essential premise. We have seen that TDV and OTDV are **extremely widespread** phenomena. Likewise, we know that gender violence and connected witnessed violence take place in the homes of many of our teenage boys and girls, so, when we speak to them, we must always consider that **we could have someone who is having or has had similar experiences before us.** When we propose an activity, we must therefore always ask ourselves not only how pertinent it is in terms of our objectives, but what it could activate in those listening and if we are sufficiently prepared to be able to deal with this. **Asking help from expert staff is not only advisable, but a duty** to avoid exposing those who are already suffering or have suffered to more harm. For this reason, the proposals that follow were devised to be more informative than psycho-developmental, so as to be used with sufficient security.

Activity 1. The adventure of meeting and choosing each other

Objective

Teenage boys and girls these days are growing up in a sort of **cultural paradox: pushed to grow up quickly but often left alone** to deal with the development challenges they find themselves facing. Communicating with themselves and with those that share this part of their lives with them becomes an adventure which is sometimes sensitive, sometimes critical, since it takes place in a sort of social void, without the adequate attention and care that should be directed at this very complex, important phase.

In addition, **the online dimension** has now become so pervasive in the everyday lives of teenagers that it is an integral to it and no longer a separate dimension distinct from the real one. This implies the amplification of certain problems. While, understanding limits and resources, boundaries and potentials of a sentimental relationship can be difficult, it becomes even harder when it unfolds mainly online.

The following activity is intended to make young participants reflect on the central, indispensable elements of a relationship that can be recognized as nourishing and, thus, healthy.

Targets

Teenage boys and girls aged 16-18

Time provided for

one hour and a half

Method

Start the activity introducing the matter of relationships and the rules which facilitate a positive group atmosphere:
Relationships are fundamental for our lives, for our growth, and for our well-being.
Not all relationships are however. Sometimes we can experience relationships where words and/or behaviours hurt us. It's fundamental to learn
to distinguish these different types of relationships and we will do that by giving them a name and trying to define together what we mean. Before starting, there are some important rules: each of you has the right to be listened to and respected. So, we will be quiet when each person speaks and not make comments.
(5 minutes)

Form groups of four or five people.
Give each group a poster, three different coloured felt pens and a sheet where the phrases on the table below have been copied out randomly (Tab. A).

Those leading the activity will invite the groups to draw three different columns on their posters, each in a different colour entitled, respectively, "nourishing relationships", "toxic relationships", "violent relationships".

Afterwards, they will be told to select the phrases and put them on the poster in one of the three columns, depending on the type of relationship that they describe and add others, if considered appropriate. (5 minutes for the explanation and distribution of materials + 20 minutes of activity).

At the end, a group spokesperson will be asked to show their work giving reasons, also through examples (30 minutes).

The educator will summarize what has emerged, trying to focus attention on the importance of legitimizing oneself and those around us by seeking relationships that are not only not harmful but are, above all, nourishing (30 minutes).

Warning!

This activity can activate reactions in the boys and girls present who may be the direct and/or indirect witnesses of violent relationships.
It is thus indispensable: to pay extreme attention to one's role and the purpose of the activity which are informational and not clinical.
Before starting up an activity of this sort, it is thus extremely important to explore where teenagers in difficult situations can potentially be sent and/or accompanied in the territory.

Advice for managing activity

Certain phrases may not be connected to a single type of relationship, but are useful in the exercise and must always be included within the context of a relationship.

Tab. A

In the following table, the indicated actions are already inserted in the column considered most adequate. The participants will be given the terms in a random order.

Nourishing relationships	Unhealthy relationships	Violent relationships
I know I can speak openly about my problems	If there is a problem, it's difficult to speak about it, and we fight	I'm afraid
I listen to the other person and I know that they listen to me	If there is a problem, sometimes I avoid speaking about it so we don't fight	They often tell me that I'm worthless
I respect their opinions and I know they respect mine	They don't always respect my opinions	They insult me. They denigrate me
They recognize my worth, who I am and I recognise theirs	I feel that I don't completely trust them	They hit me with their hands or with objects, they throw and/or break things
I trust them	I feel that they don't trust me completely	They always accuse me of betraying them and, for that reason, they attack me, verbally and/or physically
They trust me	Sometimes they tell me lies	Often they don't realise that their behaviour hurts me
I believe what my partner tells me	Sometimes I tell them lies	They often blame me for what they do
I'm honest with them I know that it's mutual	When we have to make a decision, I don't always feel free to express myself	They decide who I can spend time with or not spend time with, when I can go out, where I can go
I like when we spend time together but I also have my own space	Their behaviour sometimes upsets or hurts me	I'm afraid to say no to their requests because I'm scared they'll make a scene
When we have to make a decision, we do it together	Sometimes I don't feel free to be able to choose what to do or say	They call me in the middle of the night and I have to answer otherwise they'll be angry the next day

Nourishing relationships	Unhealthy relationships	Violent relationships
I don't judge and I don't feel judged	I don't always feel free to spend time with other people apart from them	Their jealousy limits my every move
They respect my spaces, including the digital ones (my posts, images, videos that I post)	We have to share everything otherwise they get upset and we fight	They write to me constantly to know where I am, with who, and what I'm wearingIf I don't respond straight away they become aggressive
If they don't agree with something I've posted, we speak about it	I feel manipulated	They often raise their voice
I know their social media profile but I don't check it all the time	Sometimes I feel like they don't respect my spaces including the digital ones (my posts, images, videos that I post)	They want to know my passwords and they check my phone and every message I get
They know my social media profile but they don't check it all the time	They know my social media profile and they look at it often	When we are out I'm scared that they might behave badly and embarrass me
We write to each other often If one of us isn't able to answer straight away nothing happens	They often control my social media profiles	They always know where I am through my telephone's geolocation
We speak about our fantasies and fears and feel free to create together how we experience sexuali	We write to each other often If one of us isn't able to answer we often fight	When it comes to sex, they make me do things I don't want to
We speak about and agree on contraceptive choices	When we get intimate, sometimes they try to make me do things that I don't want to	When it comes to sex, they make me have sex even when I don't want to, often with emotional blackmail ('if you love me...')
When it comes to sex, we speak about what we like and what we don't like	We often fight about sex	We don't agree on contraceptive choices

The table was adapted from "Non è amore se... Piccola guida per adolescenti su come dare vita a una relazione d'amore senza abusi e prevaricazioni"
(Giovannini A., 2017,Thttps://www.alessiagiovannini.com/non-e-amore-se , p. 6) and www.loveisrespect.org.

Activity 2. What is jealousy for me?

Objective

Violence within young couples can be characterized **by dominating and controlling behaviours:** wanting to know what the other person is doing, where they are, and with who, what they're wearing, who they're spending time with, who 'likes' their social media profile posts, what they're doing and with who when they're online, what images or videos they post, etc. These are just some of the behaviours that are referred by those who find themselves experiencing a relationship with a violent partner.

Sadly, these same actions can easily be misunderstood, and **confused with interest, love, and care:** «If they worry about these aspects, then they really care about me». Jealousy can also be interpreted in similar ways: «If they say I'm theirs it's because they really love me!».

It's difficult to manage to connect what happens with what the boy or girl is experiencing in the meantime.

But this is the very aspect which we must focus on: if something **hurts you**, then it is something that must not exist within a good relationship.

This reflection is where we want to arrive with the following activity, which is intended to help boys and girls learn, through experience, how certain behaviours that are interpreted positively can hide different intentions, of possessiveness and not love, that provoke harmful emotional reactions for those who are experiencing them.

Targets

Teenage boys and girls aged 14-18

Time provided for

2 hours

Method

- The activity begins with a brief introduction from the educator who shares the premise with the participants. Specifically, it's fundamental to convey the following message: we all have the right to be in relationships which allow us to feel well, safe, and not afraid. This does not mean not fighting, not having reasons to disagree, but it means feeling equal, and free to express ourselves without fear of repercussions or judgement.

- It's important to highlight that sometimes relationships can be characterized also by behaviours that are very hurtful and that this happens to many teenage boys and girls. The central problem is that this does not invalidate what we feel for the other person: we can still feel very close to them even if they sometimes hurt us. This can make us confuse some behaviours with an excess of attention and care towards us, even if, if we think about it carefully and listen to ourselves, we can feel that they hurt us, they make us feel like there is something wrong with us, they make us feel constantly in a state of alert.

- It's important to highlight that sometimes relationships can be characterized also by behaviours that are very hurtful and that this happens to many teenage boys and girls. The central problem is that this does not invalidate what we feel for the other person: we can still feel very close to them even if they sometimes hurt us. This can make us confuse some behaviours with an excess of attention and care towards us, even if, if we think about it carefully and listen to ourselves, we can feel that they hurt us, they make us feel like there is something wrong with us, they make us feel constantly in a state of alert.

- Each pair will present their poster and we'll discuss in the bigger group what emerged. The concluding focus will be on the need to pay attention to one's experiences, to what we feel, at all times, letting ourselves be guided by this, both in the everyday context and online.

The 10 couple situations to be used in the activity

1. Imagine ... 2 teenagers walking, holding hands. They turn towards each other, they speak, listen to each other, smile. They stop to look at something together, then start walking again.

2. Imagine ... 2 teenagers at a party. She asks him to keep her phone while she goes to the bathroom. He takes it and, while she's not there, checks her messages and her chats. She comes back and he gives it back to her, pretending nothing has happened.

3. Imagine ...2 teenagers sitting next to each other on the bus. They are fighting: you can tell from the tone of voice they're using, and how they're looking at each other. She wants him to tell her all his passwords. She says that, if he really cared for her, then he would give them to her. He says that it's got nothing to do with that, but it's a matter of trust. In the end though he gives in and gives them to her so that they can stop fighting.

4. Imagine...2 teenagers in the corridor at school. He's shouting at her that she can't afford to keep behaving in that way. She looks at him scared, she says nothing, she seems like she's just waiting for him to stop shouting.

5. Imagine... Two teenagers sitting at a table in a cafe. They are chatting while they drink a coffee. Every so often, their hands brush and they smile at each other. Sometimes they sit in silence, looking at each other. Then they start talking again.

6. Imagine...Two teenagers that have been dating for a while. She isn't able to trust him. So she decides to create a fake profile and to use it to ask him if she can follow him on Instagram to see what he answers.

7. Imagine...2 teenagers. One of the two writes a WhatsApp message to the other who doesn't answer for more than two hours.n So the first decides to make them wait double the time before responding, to get back at them for having made them wait so much.

8. Imagine...Two teenagers sitting on the steps outside of school. They are fighting: it's clear from the way they are talking and behaving towards each other. They aren't shouting but it seems that she is asking him for explanations about his behaviour the day before. He tries to answer her. Every so often, he tries to touch her face, she draws back, she's still angry, but she listens to what her boyfriend is saying.

9. Imagine...2 teenagers. One asks the other to send them a private, intimate photo, just between the two of them. At first, the other says no, then they do it. After a few months, they decide to break up because they're not happy. The other threatens them: if you leave me I will post the photo on social media.

10. Imagine...2 teenagers. He controls what she does constantly. He writes to her, he calls her continuously. If she's online, he asks her who she's chatting to. He asks her continuously to take photos of herself to show how she's dressed and who she's gone out with. He doesn't want her to see other boys, not even her classmates. If she does, he makes terrible scenes of jealousy and either won't see her for days or won't leave her alone even for an instant.

Activity 3. The invisible strings: gender stereotypes and prejudices

Objective

Teenage boys and girls live in a patriarchal society that still today produces **gender stereotypes and prejudices** that aim to place women in an inferior position to men. This, as the Istanbul Convention has clarified, is one of the key elements behind continuing gender violence. Why is it thus so difficult to dislodge them? What is slowing the possibility to effect the necessary structural change to prevent this phenomena which is still so frequent?

Stereotypes depict an easy way to interpret reality, they create certainties and predictability: they produce certain expectations that make it easier for the individual to control their existence and require less effort when it comes to questioning oneself about what we should do or think. One of the consequences of the pervasiveness of stereotypes is **the limitation to our freedom of choice:** we are deceived that each of us have a single option.

Jealousy can also be interpreted in similar ways: «If they say I'm theirs it's because they really love me!».

This activity has the purpose of allowing teenage boys and girls to recognize what gender stereotypes and prejudices still exist in their everyday life and to start to question them, trying to create alternatives which are more functional to their growth.

Targets

Teenage boys and girls aged 14-16

Time provided for

2 hours

Method

- In a wide circle, knowledge of the term gender stereotypes will be explored to ensure that there is an agreed definition which refers to a set of shared beliefs which are socially conveyed and what are considered 'appropriate' behaviours, attitudes, rules, and occupations for males and females. It is fundamental to remember that these are social constructs, that is, products that have no objective or scientifically founded value. There is no 'pink gene' for females, and no exclusive male gene, implying the incapacity to iron or to listen with empathy, has ever been found.

- It is also indispensable to distinguish between **biological sex**, which is defined based on a person's anatomy when they are born and defines their appearance, and **gender** roles, which are the set of socially-sanctioned construct that determine the expectations which form the basis of what is considered appropriate for a male or for a female that current society imposes.

- After this short introduction, the participants will be split into mixed groups of four or five members, and they will be given the task to identify, starting with their daily lives, the male and female models that the current society imposes. Each group will have to propose both models, male and female, reflecting on what correspond to themselves, in their opinions.

- If possible, it's a good idea to give each group IT support to be able to access multimedia content. At the end, each group will report what they have encountered and the activity will conclude with shared reflections in the wider group.

- The focus will be to receive and then get the reactions of each teenager regarding their image of themselves: to what extent do you identify with the model that you encountered or that your team mates proposed to you? Completely or only partly or not at all? It will be fundamental to underline that even where we identify shared points, each and every one of us has our own inescapable identity that has the right to be expressed freely.

Warning

This activity deals with particularly sensitive matters. When we choosing to use it with teenage boys and girls to help them to reflect on the social constructs within which we are all trapped as males and females, we have to bear in mind that the binary simplification which we refer to does not correspond to the complexity of reality.
Even when we speak of biological sex, referring to a person's autonomy when they are born, when we limit these to only categories of male and female, we wrongly exclude all the variations which actually exist and which are commonly grouped under the term «intersexuality».
When we refer to gender as intended in this activity, that is, to all those social conventions that really seem to establish how we «should be» as men and women in an absolutist way, it's important to specify that we are speaking about gender roles, so as to distinguish them when necessary from the concept of «gender identity» which refers to the perception that every individual has of themselves as man, woman, or other.
We must be careful: this concept is frequently confused with that of «sexual orientation» which refers to who attracts you sexually.

«It is often said that gender is a spectrum, like the spectrum of electromagnetic waves: this means that there is not just a female gender and a male gender, but a continuous spectrum of genders between these two extremes» (Cavallo, Lugli and Prearo, 2021).[1]

All these elements create a variety of combinations, which is what we will recognize if we try to carefully observe and receive what is really present in the context of life of each and every one of us.
Considering the sensitivity of these matters and the consequent difficulty of being able to manage them with care, above all in a group context like that of a class, we suggest presenting the activity as above described, bearing in mind however the complexity of what we are dealing with, in order to be able to respond appropriately to any specific inquiries and to be able to adequately receive anything that may emerge.

1. Cavallo A., Lugli L. e Prearo M. (edited by) (2021), Cose spiegate bene. Questioni di un certo genere. Milan, Iperborea.

Activity 4. Is this all true?

Objective

The online world is increasingly more present in the lives of our teenage boys and girls, so much so that often the relationships of couples begin on virtual channels and digital environments, and in some cases existing only online. We have to consider this dimension and not demonise it, in order to accompany teenage boys and girls as they **develop the necessary competencies** to recognize the existing differences between the two dimensions of life and the risks that could be associated with lack of awareness.

The purpose of this activity is to accompany the boys and girls towards sharing reflections on some central aspects of the online dimension, to the ends of preventing unpleasant, sometimes harmful, or even dangerous situations.

Targets

Teenage boys and girls aged 14-16

Time provided for

2 hours

Method

- Having briefly introduced the activity focusing on the online world, the boys and girls will be split into pairs and each pair will be given the image of a boy or a girl that acts as an Instagram profile photo (if possible, providing them a laptop, otherwise on paper). They will then be asked to try to describe what kind of person they think they are based on what they see posted.

- Having given 20 minutes for this first part, they will be asked to try to imagine meeting this boy or girl by chance at a party: what would they see in the other person? What would they tell them about themselves? How would they build this relationship? They will try to write the main points of what they have imagined/ felt. At the end of this second part (20 minutes), each pair will be asked to report on what they discussed and then you will conclude with a reflection in the wider group.

The main focuses will be on:

- Everything that DOES NOT emerge online

- the gap between what I want to communicate and what those looking at me receive (the example of the telephone game aka Chinese whispers: information, at the end of the line, can be very different because we all fill in what we don't understand with our own ideas)

- the virtual dimension alters the capacity to go and verify these sensations: being in my own room, on the bus, at school, and chatting with a person does not allow me to hear what I would feel if that person was sitting next to me. The timing is different, the space is different.

- There's a particularly important final element: what seems to protect us can actually become what exposes us to more risk. Being elsewhere makes me feel free to risk more, to be less embarrassed, to play more with my body and my desires. This can result in me making choices, like sending photos for example, that can then expose me to the risk of ending up unable to manage what happens next: blackmail, threats, manipulation.

Activity 5. Let's design the finale

Objective

When we deal with the matter of Teen Dating Violence with boys and girls it's often very difficult to be able to facilitate and allow for the recognition of dominating and controlling behaviours that are often confused with high interest and sometimes **an excessive jealousy which is however tolerated**. So, getting insistent messages, wanting to know always where they are and with who, is interpreted as a sign of love and care. We must remember that identifying as a person that is experiencing some form of violence and attributing the role of perpetrator of the violence to the person you care for is very difficult, to the extent that it is difficult to stand.

It is however fundamental to help teenagers to distinguish between care and possessiveness. To do so, it can be useful not to focus on the list of actions carried out, but to direct attention to the emotions felt:

violence hurts, always, and recognizing the suffering experienced, legitimizing it, can guarantee a gradual realization of what we are experiencing personally or what we are seeing someone else experiencing.

Targets

Teenage boys and girls aged 16-18

Time provided for

1 hour

Method

- Having briefly introduced the activity, specifying that it is a moment for reflecting on couples' relationships and boundaries and spaces that there can be within them, you will present the video Non è amore, made by the association «Il Progetto Alice» within the workshop Mai più violenza with the collaboration of Liceo M. Minghetti, Bologna.[1] The video will not be shown in full, but only until time code 2:50. (5 minutes)

- The boys and girls will then be split into groups of four or five and asked to complete the story they've just seen, that is, to imagine how it will end. (20 minutes)

- A group representative will tell their version. (15 minutes)

The conclusion of the video will then be presented and discussed in relation to the ideas that emerged. It's important to highlight how that depicted in the video depicts only what could hopefully happen, while in reality, often, what happened to the girl in the film would require a much longer and more complex path, frequently characterized by an enormous burden of suffering due to the contradictions of that experienced: the person hurting me is the person that says they love me and that I have a bond with, although I feel that I'm suffocating.

1. The video can be viewed at the following link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrVyZrKi9gs&t=309s&ab_channel=MARAW (accessed 27/12/2022)

Activity 6. Is it really just a matter of consent?

Objective

The matter of sexuality is still a minefield today. While, on one hand, boys and girls are constantly exposed to media characterized by continuous references to sex, very little space is given to education on the matter, which is too often an enormous taboo which is difficult to tackle, above all when critical elements have to be dealt with.
This complicates speaking about what may have happened within a violent couple's relationship. **Very frequently, when we speak about sexual violence, we are not speaking about whether the act has occurred or not, but about the consent of those involved.**

And this is a very sensitive matter, since we know that most violence occurs within sentimental relationships, thus with a partner or ex partner. It's thus very complex to speak about consent in these contexts. This can entail adhering to common places that risk deviating the attention from what happened (the violence), identifying justifications or a sort of extenuating circumstance.
An example is taking alcohol and/or drugs, which becomes a fault of the victim rather than forming an aggravating factor for who committed the assault.

The activity aims to shed light on some complex aspects connected to sexual violence, from the concept of consent to secondary victimization, and the media representation of violence.

Targets

Teenage boys and girls aged 18

Time provided for

1 hour

Method

- Brief introduction to the matter of sexual violence and how its representation, also through the media, often focuses on identifying extenuating circumstances for the perpetrator, that in most cases coincide with the description of characteristics of who experienced it (how much they'd drunk, how they were dressed, where they were, etc.). As part of this introduction, you will propose the video Tea consent [1] (10 minutes)
- The boys and girls will be split into groups and asked to identify the key points in the video: what messages does it want to communicate? What comparisons can be made with a couple's relationship? (20 minutes)
- The individual groups share with the broader group. (15 minutes)

Discussion together underlining the importance of distinguishing sex from sexual violence: defining the second «a sexual act without consent» can be extremely misleading because it shifts the attention from what occurred to the possibility of communicating or not adequately your intentions, with the enormous risk of exposing who was subject to the action to secondary victimization, that is, further harm.

Warning

The reflections made in this activity are extremely complex and require a clear framework of reference when we propose the activity to teenage boys and girls.

We suggest that the adult proposing the activity already has personally examined some reflections by reading through readings such as the text of Brison (2020)[2], which broadly explores the matters mentioned above, with clear, targeted examples.
Again in this case, furthermore, it's extremely important that, before beginning an activity of this sort, you know where potentially to be able to send and/or accompany teenagers that may speak about difficult situations.

1. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhaZDVcGo-o&t=3s (accessed 27/12/2022).
2. Briston S. J. (2021), Dopo la violenza. Lo stupro e la ricostruzione del sé, Trento, Il Margine.

www.erickson.it