

# An atmosphere of intrafamily trust tends to prevent problematic internet use

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Cyberbullying already accounts for one in four cases of bullying and,

according to the latest UNICEF report issued on the occasion of Safer Internet Day, it affects at least two students per class in Spanish schools.

In this regard, the Laboratory of Studies on Coexistence and Violence Prevention at the University of Cordoba, under the direction of professors Rosario Ortega-Ruiz and Eva M. Romera, has just published a study examining [family communication](#) and its impact on cyber-gossip and the excessive use of social media-two of the main factors with the greatest influence on cyber-bullying. Their results point in the same direction: an atmosphere of trust in the family is an antidote to this type of behavior, reducing the risk of schoolchildren engaging in problematic use of the Internet and excessive involvement in cyber-gossip.

The study, completed by professors Eva Romera, Rosario Ortega-Ruiz and young researchers Antonio Camacho and Daniel Falla, stresses the impact of what in the [scientific literature](#) is called filial disclosure, a term referring to the relationship of trust between children, adolescents and young people and their parents.

"Dialogue between parents and their children, when it allows them to speak spontaneously, revealing their own ideas, feelings and interests, has very positive effects. An affectionate, warm and convivial intra-family climate encourages children to express themselves naturally and reveal their emotions, worries, ideas and problems. A parental bond of this nature provides security and favors an ability to face many of the challenges that cyber behavior entails," the researchers stress.

They are not referring to a [control mechanism](#) exercised by parents, and far less a 'heavy-handed' disciplinary approach, but rather cultivating a climate of trust and security. "According to our results," says Prof. Eva Romera, "the communicational mechanism of filial disclosure tends to shield schoolchildren from the risks that lead them to become involved in phenomena like cyberbullying, excessive use of the Internet and cyber-

gossip, fostered by social situations that can be problematic and, in some cases, precipitate the emergence of other cyber behavior problems."

The study, which was carried out with a large sample of Andalusian primary school students from urban, rural, public and state-subsidized schools, was published in *Comunicar*, the Spanish journal with the greatest international impact in the field, and its results also reveal that the age factor is very important.

In this regard, early adolescence (ages 12-13) is a critical evolutionary period. On the one hand, schoolchildren are at greater risk, and on the other, it is a period in which there is the most pronounced correlation between the variables studied. "Parents should always pay attention to the quality of their communication with their sons and daughters, but in these years they should know that there is a lot at stake, in order to steer them away from cyberbullying and to prevent, through their dialog and trust, specific episodes of cyberbullying and problematic use of the Internet from seriously affecting them," stresses Professor Eva Romera.

The study, whose results could inform the designs of virtual harassment prevention programs, underscores the importance of family climates and that, rather than excessive control, communication, trust and dialog are often the keys to effective child-raising.

**More information:** Eva M. Romera et al, Cybergossip, cyberaggression, problematic Internet use and family communication, *Comunicar* (2020). [DOI: 10.3916/C67-2021-05](https://doi.org/10.3916/C67-2021-05)

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