

TRAINING FOR PARENTS

iTac

Training in anti-cyberbullying

Luca Pisano

psychologist, psychotherapist, expert of juvenile justice

EDUCATION

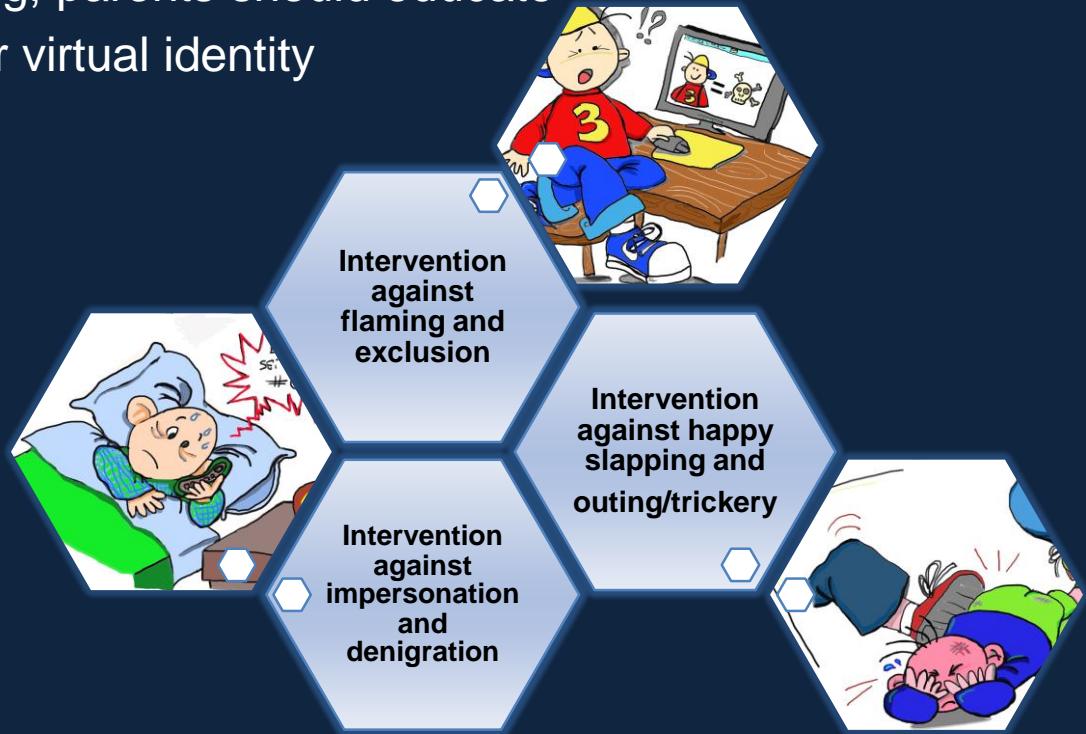
Since 2000, with the spread of the Internet and virtual reality, the educational role of parents have been fundamentally changed. Educating a child in contemporary society means, above all, to teach him about the risks he may encounter online, to protect himself from any harassing behavior, and especially to use the virtual with caution, having care and respect for others.

In fact the virtual world seems more free than the real one: apparently there are no laws but only codes and internal rules (netiquettes) that can lead young people to be able to do whatever they want without any consequences. They can then kill, destroy, rape, do extreme sex, assume another identity, gambling, without the risks of the real world.

So, the virtual world can become the ideal space in which young people can express in a narcissistic way their needs of power, visibility and success. As a matter of fact the virtual can make believe people that everything that happens online is not completely true and therefore you can seduce, abuse, harass other Internet users without any real consequences.

Modern Parents should therefore teach children to distinguish fantasy from the virtual: virtual behaviours are always real, because they produce specific effects on their lives and on the others too.

So, to counteract cyberbullying, parents should educate young people to manage their virtual identity



MAIN STEPS

STEP 1

- Learn about the properties of digital identity
- Educate young people to use the virtual world without dangers

STEP 2

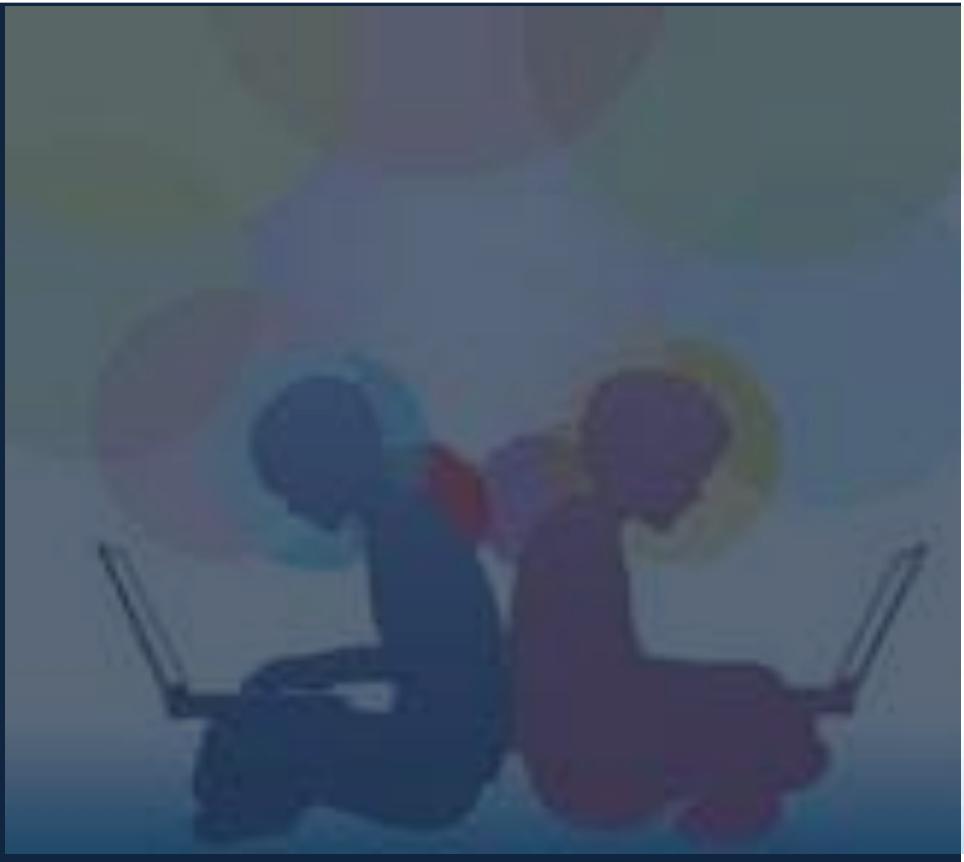
- Do exercises with your kids

iTac
Training in anti-cyberbullying



THEORETICAL ASPECTS ON VIRTUAL IDENTITY

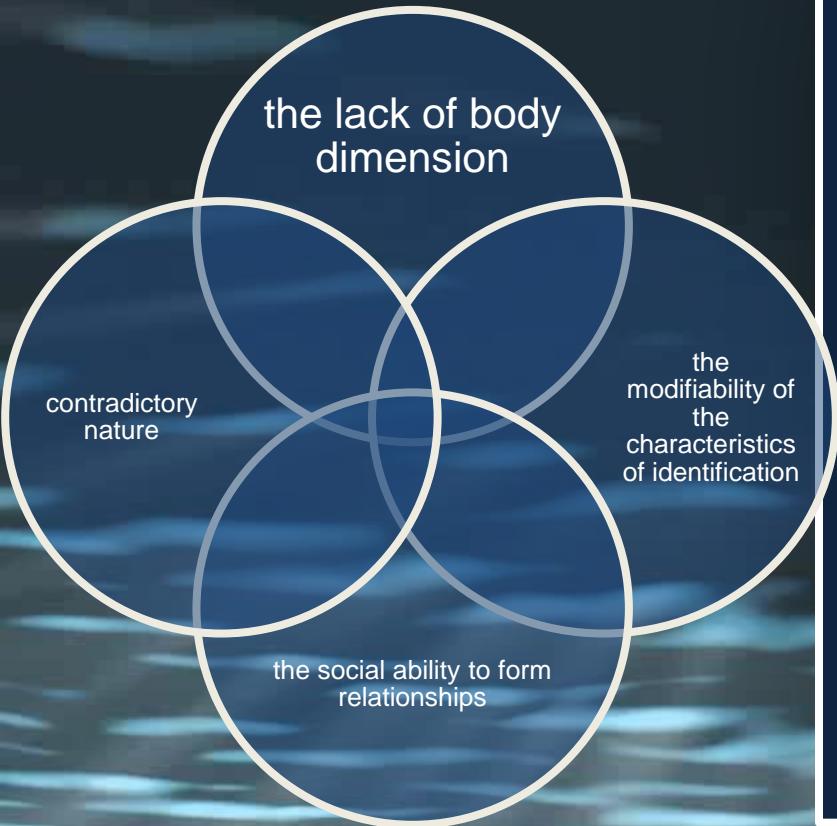
STEP 1



THE VIRTUAL IDENTITY

- The virtual identity is a complex system of images, videos and written information that the person has published in a social network to represent himself as a unique digital individual, and then with a specific physical, sexual, social and psychological identity. Its main properties are: the lack of body dimension, the modifiability of the characteristics of identification, the social ability to form relationships and the contradictory nature.





MAIN PROPERTIES OF THE VIRTUAL IDENTITY

- the lack of body dimension
- the modifiability of the characteristics of identification
- the social ability to form relationships
- the contradictory nature

THE LACK OF BODY DIMENSION

- Regarding the first property, we observe that the absence of a body dimension limits the cognitive demands of the internet user, because the body, the necessary condition of experience, is the subject of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

- Therefore, the absent body, that is present in the social networks only through photos and videos, does not receive the digital experience in a direct way, but indirectly, so becomes the depository of the internet user's thoughts during his virtual activities: chat, post messages, tag photos. This division between res cogitans (thought) and res extensa (body) can often produce a partial, confused and ambiguous perception of the real experience, because only the mind, which is on line, thinks the experience that the body (off-line) doesn't help to know.

- In addition, the absence of the body, and so the absence of non verbal communication that characterizes every on line interaction based on writing, can create a communication and interpretation problem, that can be only partially resolved with the use of emoticons. In fact this mind-body division and the absence of non verbal communication tend to lead to imperfect tunes (Stern, 1987) and misunderstandings that can easily escalate into conflict. If we add the perception of invisibility, "You can't see me", and the lack of a tangible feedback, "I can't see you", it is understood the risk of uncontrolled explosions of emotion (acting out), as witnessed by the Public Prosecutor's Office , in recent years the crime of defamation is increased, many young internet users report that they have been insulted and slandered in social networks from their friends and classmates.

THE MODIFIABILITY OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF IDENTIFICATION

- Not constrained by the presence of his body, the Internet user has the option to "create" several virtual identities and change them choosing the most appropriate. As a matter of fact the user can modify the characteristics of its appearance (the physical identity represented by published photos), the sexual identity (preferred sexual orientation and gender), the type of work or school (the social identity declared on his notice board) and the definition of operation's qualities of his personality (the psychological identity that he intends to assume).

- And all this can be done in a few hours, uploading many photos, videos and some comments about their real life on a social network's profile. In this way, when the virtual identity becomes unpleasant or is compromised for any reason, the Internet user has the opportunity with a few mouse clicks to retouch or replace it, eliminating the unwanted parts. Therefore, this is a "disposable identity" that can be created, modified and deleted depending on his needs and objectives to achieve.



THE SOCIAL ABILITY TO FORM RELATIONSHIPS



- In addition the virtual identity has the opportunity to form emotional, playful and professional relationships, adding friends, who can be partially unknown (for example friends of friends) or completely unknown. Sometimes this friending of the virtual identity can become a repetitive act and so also expression of the nihilism which leads people to form superficial and opportunistic relationships.

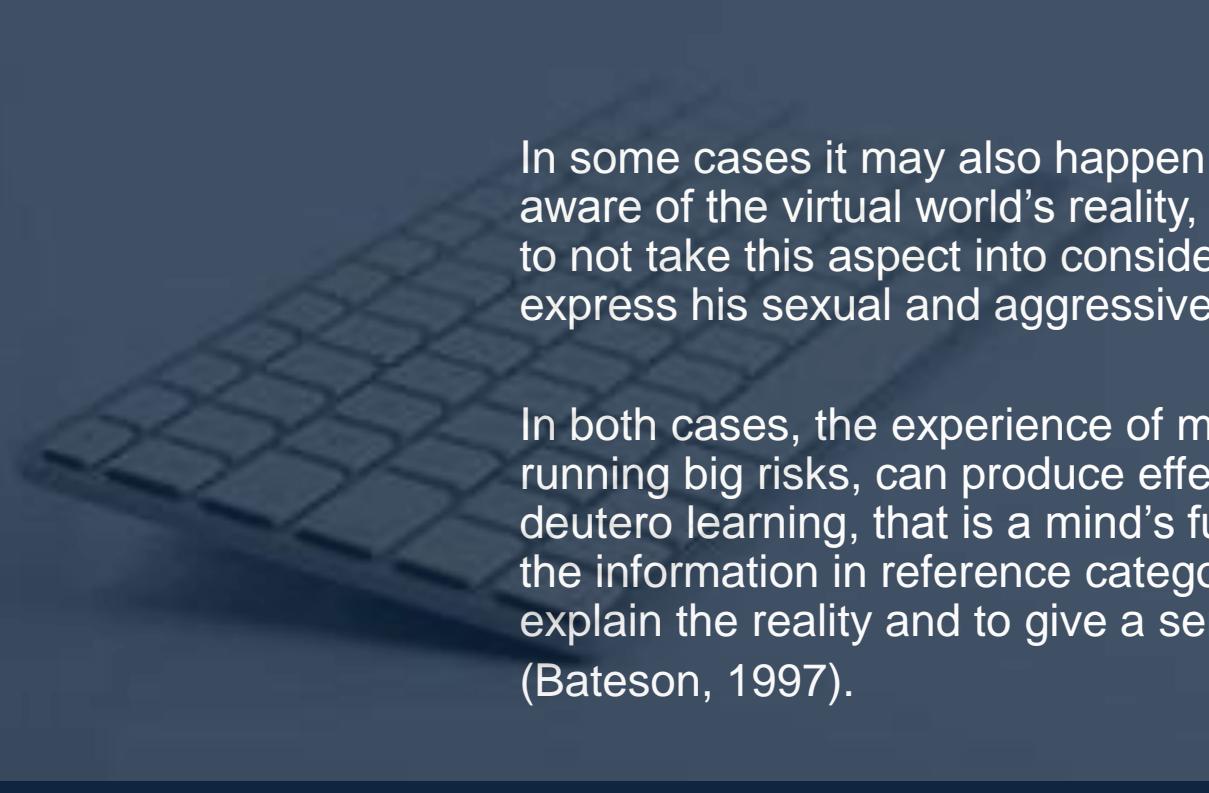
This continual pursuit of friends, can lead the virtual identity to consider these friends as a commodity, something to use in order to achieve a personal satisfaction, and after that something to eliminate because no more useful.

THE CONTRADICTORY NATURE

- With regard to the contradictory nature, we can see that the virtual identity produces two antithetical messages: on the one hand he produces an unreal message represented by images, videos and intangible written information; on the other hand we have a real message, because what the virtual identity communicates and what he receives, produces real effects on online and offline life of the internet user.
- If the internet user doesn't consider both these opposite aspects, he can run the risk to consider all the actions that he did in his virtual reality as unreal, consequently he will consider the on line world as an attenuated reality where actions have no consequences.

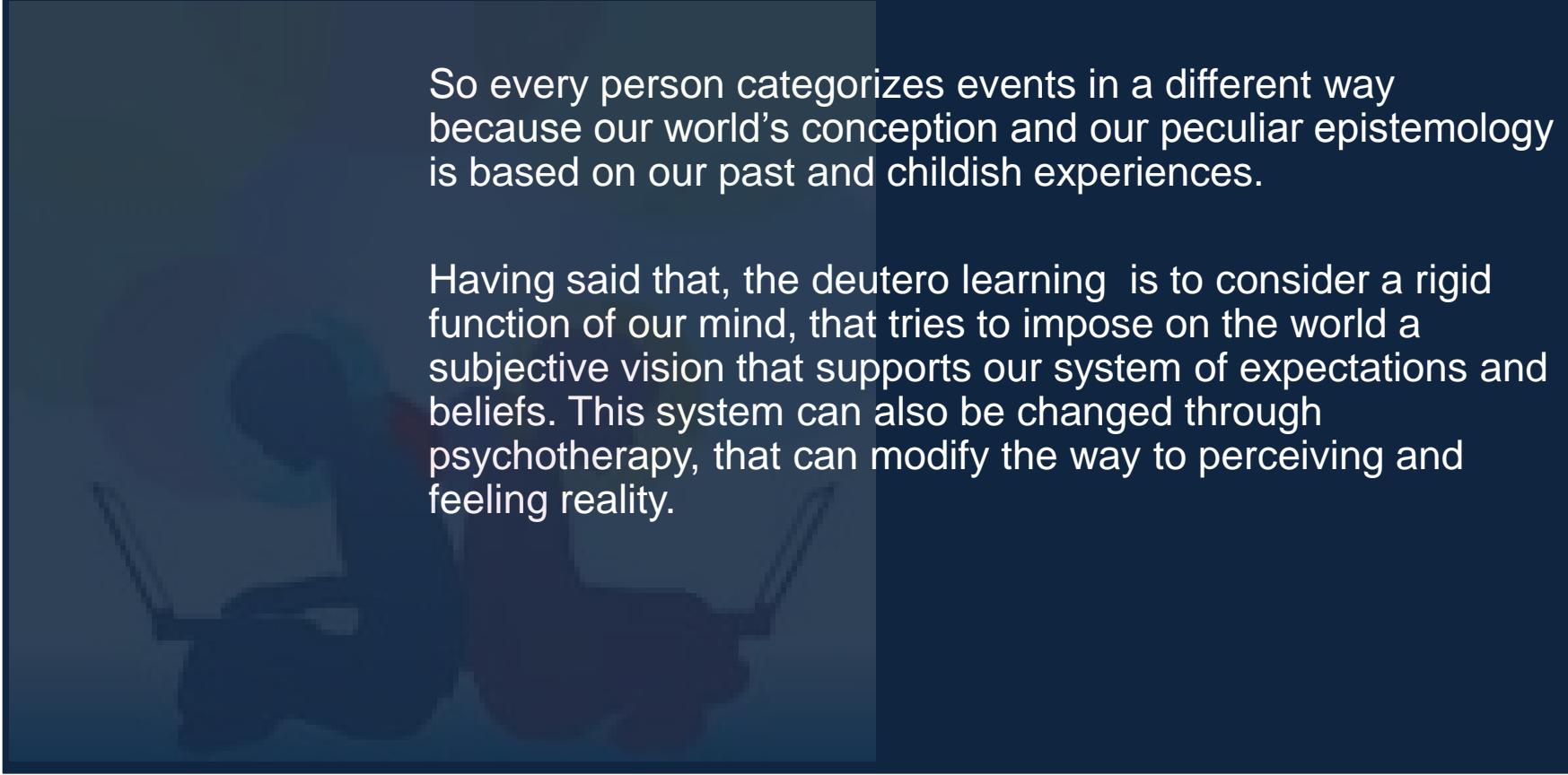
On the contrary If the internet user can distinguish the two messages, so what is always real from what seems unreal, he will also consider his actions as concrete and can monitor these actions in a pro social way.

So the internet user has to use at the best his abstract thinking, only this way he will analyse and elaborate the contradictory messages that he receives from his virtual identity, in order to avoid detrimental behaviours.



In some cases it may also happen that the internet user is aware of the virtual world's reality, but he can also choose to not take this aspect into consideration, in order to freely express his sexual and aggressive impulses.

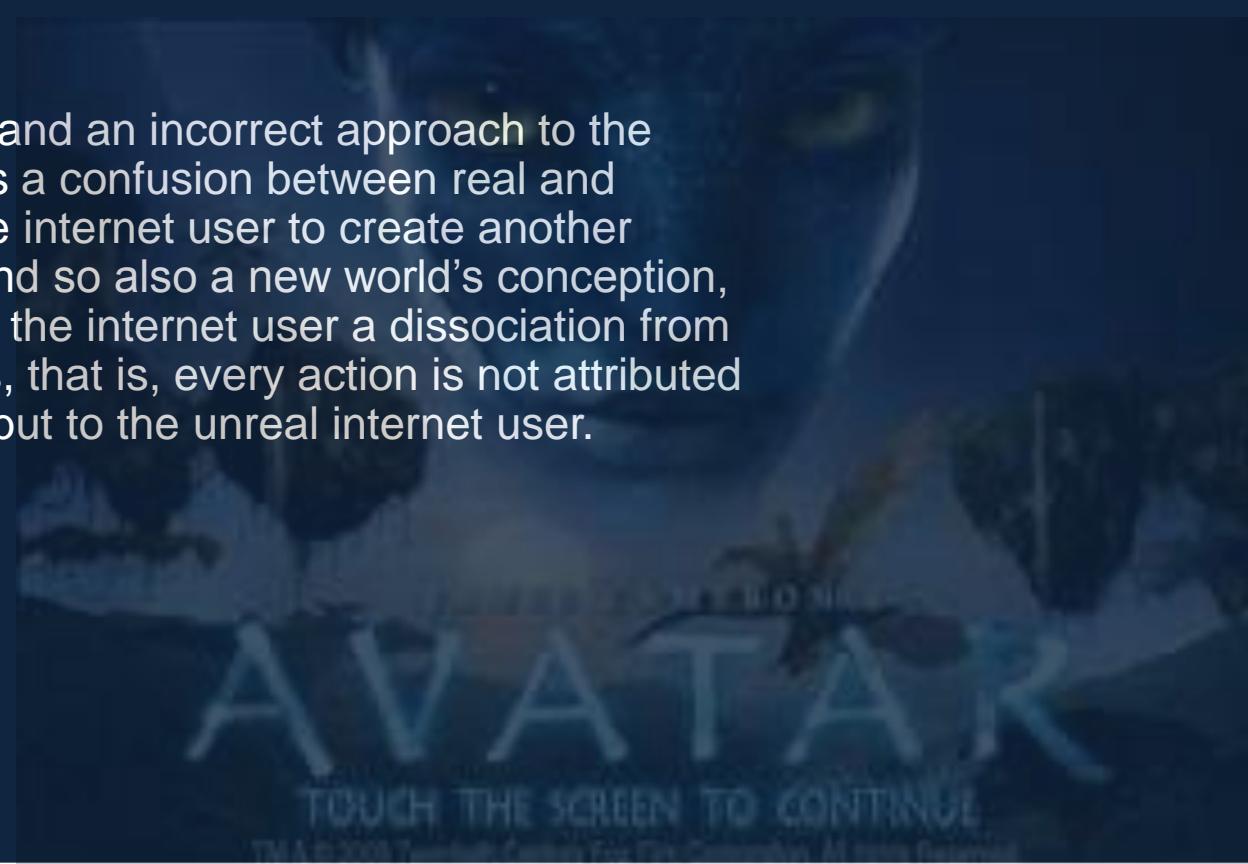
In both cases, the experience of making actions without running big risks, can produce effects on the navigator's deutero learning, that is a mind's function which organizes the information in reference categories, that people use to explain the reality and to give a sense to reality.
(Bateson, 1997).



So every person categorizes events in a different way because our world's conception and our peculiar epistemology is based on our past and childish experiences.

Having said that, the deutero learning is to consider a rigid function of our mind, that tries to impose on the world a subjective vision that supports our system of expectations and beliefs. This system can also be changed through psychotherapy, that can modify the way to perceiving and feeling reality.

- As we can understand an incorrect approach to the virtual reality, that is a confusion between real and unreal, can lead the internet user to create another deutero learning, and so also a new world's conception, that can produce in the internet user a dissociation from his on line activities, that is, every action is not attributed to the real person, but to the unreal internet user.



The contradictory nature of the virtual identity, and the alteration in the deutero learning, can also generate in the internet user some problems of logic (Russell, 1922).

In fact, if the effects of the chat are considered part of two different classes, real reality and virtual reality, a logical confusion can arise, and in this case the internet user can't clearly remember that a virtual experience is also always a real experience, an extension of reality.

To prevent this logical confusion and the wrong use of social network, parents and teachers have to explain that the virtual world is a real world, because actions that the internet user make in the virtual world, produce real effects on real people.

Conclusions

To use of the virtual without dangers, you need:

Educate
young
people to
distinguish
fantasy
from the
virtual

**Help young people to understand that the
virtual is a form of reality**

EXERCISES

TO DO WITH YOUR KIDS

EXERCISES TO DO WITH YOUR KIDS

STEP 2



FIRST OF ALL

VISIT AND READ THE FOLLOWING WEB SITES

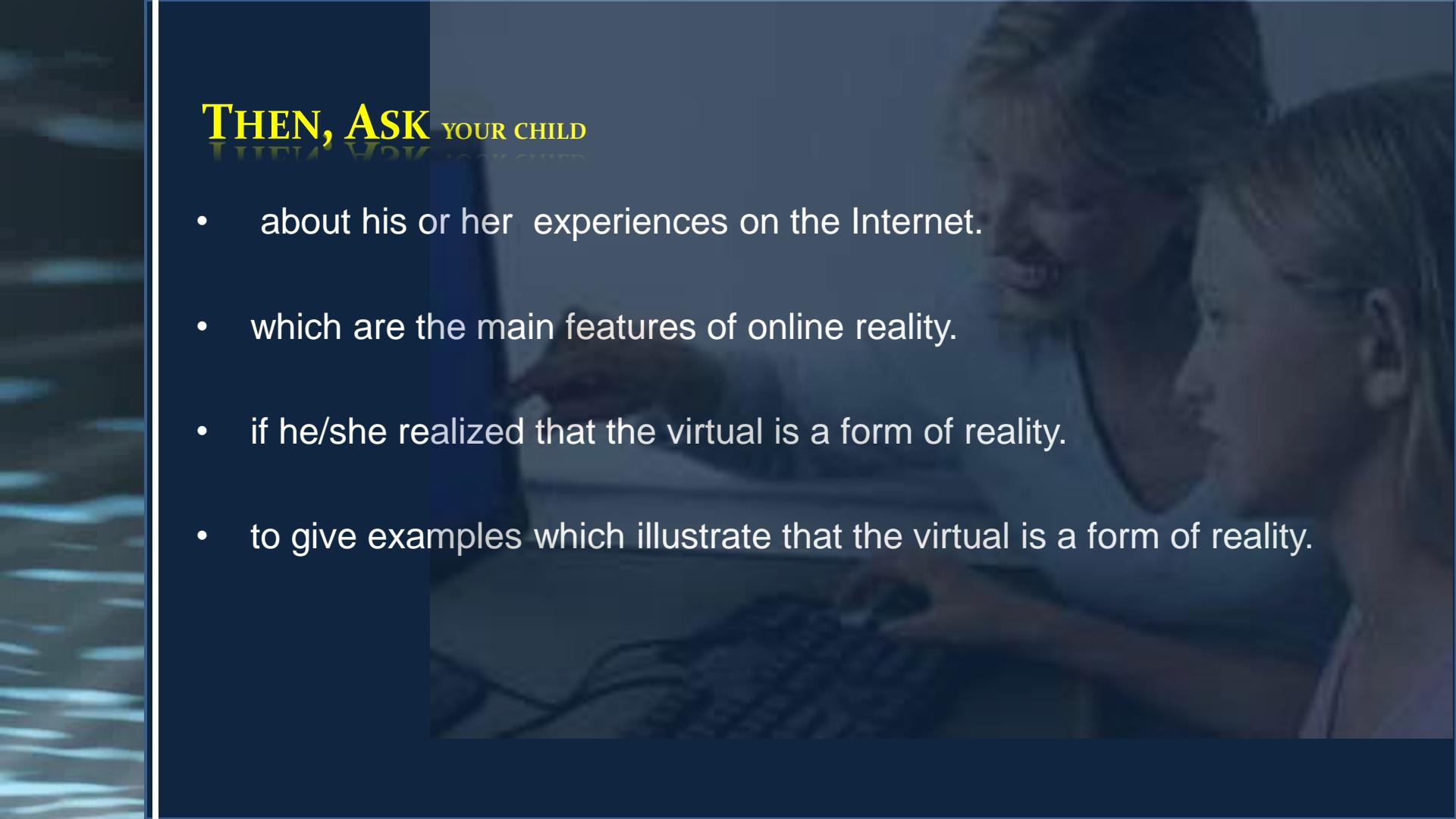


www.connectsafely.org



www.ifos-formazione.com/ifos/english/cyberbullying

THEN, ASK YOUR CHILD

A close-up photograph of a young girl with dark hair, wearing a blue t-shirt. She is looking down at a computer keyboard, which is visible in the foreground. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a window or a screen with some light-colored text or graphics.

THEM HOW TO USE IT

- about his or her experiences on the Internet.
- which are the main features of online reality.
- if he/she realized that the virtual is a form of reality.
- to give examples which illustrate that the virtual is a form of reality.

GO ONLINE WITH YOUR CHILD AND TEACH HIM/HER

- **Don't respond.** If someone bullies you, remember that your reaction is usually exactly what the bully wants. It gives him or her power over you.
- **Don't retaliate.** Getting back at the bully turns you into one and reinforces the bully's behavior. Help avoid a whole cycle of aggression.
- **Talk to a trusted adult.** You deserve backup. It's always good to involve a parent but - if you can't - at school counselor usually knows how to help. Or see if there's a way to report the incident anonymously at school.
- **Save the evidence.** The only good news about digital bullying is that the harassing messages can usually be captured, saved, and shown to someone who can help. Save evidence even if it's minor stuff - in case things escalate.
- **Block the bully.** If the harassment's coming in the form of instant messages, texts, or profile comments, use preferences or privacy tools to block the person. If it's in chat, leave the "room."

- **Be civil.** Even if you don't like a person, it's a good idea to be decent and not sink to his or her level. Researches show that gossiping about and "trash talking" others increase your risk of being bullied.
- **Don't be a bully.** You know the old saying about walking a mile in someone's shoes; even a few seconds of thinking about how another person might feel can put a big damper on aggression.
- **Be a friend, not a bystander.** Forwarding mean messages or just standing by and doing nothing empowers bullies and hurts victims even more. If you can, tell bullies to stop, or let them know bullying is not cool. If you can't, try to help the victim and report the behavior.