

SOCIAL MEDIA: ISSUES AND TIPS FOR PARENTS

OVEREXPOSURE: Includes both posting a great deal of personal/private information and self-published sexual pictures (sexting, selfies, etc.).

The invincibility factor: children/teens (and adults) can have an illusion of anonymity and privacy; many don't understand the risks and they struggle to connect actions with consequences.

What can WE do:

- Encourage youth to think before they post: what would family, a prospective employer or college recruiter think of it? Almost all employers search job candidates online.
- Inform children/teens that what they post is PUBLIC AND PERMANENT! Anything can still be online even when you go back to delete it – don't believe the "10-second" hype (e.g., picture is only visible for 10 seconds) apps (Instagram, Snapchat) are promising.
- If they are talking about sex or posting sexually suggestive pictures, they may draw attention both from perpetrators AND law enforcement.
- Privacy is a myth in social media - help children/teens think critically: YOU CAN'T TAKE IT BACK!

ADULT PREDATORS: Most likely scenario: kids are lured into online contact and then persuaded over time to meet offline, force is rarely used; use promise of acceptance and love. Youth who take risks "in real life" are the same ones willing to take risks via social media.

- It's usually not 'Stranger Danger.'
 - 70% - 90% of sexual abuse committed by persons known to the child.
- Deception is not the norm.
 - 5% of offenders tried to deceive victims about being older adults. Most deception involved promises of love and romance. Predators use GROOMING!
 - Start with chat rooms, go to Instant Messaging, then e-mail, then cell phone.
- Force is seldom used.
 - 5% of offenders used force, 16% coercion, 3% used abduction

What WE can do:

- Talk with kids about the risks of communicating with people they don't know and encourage CRITICAL thinking: help them understand how perpetrators can try to MANIPULATE them. DON'T TALK DOWN TO THEM.
- Maintain open dialogue about healthy sexual development throughout their development – research suggests this is a major protective factor.

CYBERBULLYING & HARRASSMENT: An array of activities including: teasing others about appearance, sexuality, etc., embarrassing someone using text, photos, etc., making threats and using physical intimidation. Can take place via all social media. Many older youth refer to this behavior as "drama" and sometimes don't perceive it as bullying.

What can WE do:

- Encourage kids not to reply or respond to what is being said about them. Inform friends they should also not respond on their behalf.
- Encourage youth to be allies – when they see something nasty posted about someone else, they can be encouraging to the victim (anonymously when needed).

- Encourage them to be choosy about what they post of themselves – gives less information for others to use against them.
- Tell adults – but try to help youth figure out a solution rather than storming in and taking over – kids report this is why then often don't tell anyone for fear of making the situation worse.
- Inform the Internet service provider, school, and/or law enforcement when necessary.
- Inform school and police when necessary.
- Don't erase or delete messages: keep them as evidence. Block bully from access to cell phone and social networking sites.
- NEVER share passwords with any friends, not even best friends!!!
- DON'T LET YOUR OWN KIDS/TEENS BULLY OR HARRASS OTHERS!

EXPOSURE TO INAPPROPRIATE MATERIAL: Teens/kids having access to adult-related material in general. For instance – among 2-to-11 year olds, YouTube was the number one online viewing choice with Disney Channel being a distant second.

What WE can do:

- Can use blocking software, but teens/kids can access the Internet almost anywhere.
- Encourage CRITICAL thinking and talk with your kids about what is out there!
- If you catch them going to a site you don't approve of, don't overreact and take everything away! Use it as a teaching moment and build trust.
- Maintain open dialogue about healthy sexual development throughout their development – youth need to have a filter to counteract the negative images and content. If you do not offer them this information, they will find it elsewhere – and it may not be the information you would choose for them.

OVERALL TIPS:

- TALK and COMMUNICATE with your teens/kids about the need for everyone to be CIVIL to each other in using social media. Discuss both the negatives AND the positives.
 - Communication is two-way street: listen, be supportive and have an open mind.
 - Don't overreact! Try to discuss the issue to come up with a solution together.
 - Encourage teens/kids to use privacy options whenever possible, BUT discuss the limitations.
 - Privacy is a 'double-edged sword' – try to have access to your child social networking profiles and other info. However, many youth are starting to move away from Facebook to more mobile and brief services (Snapchat, Tumblr, Twitter).
- Report misconduct to Internet providers and/or social networking sites.
- Depending on your level of trust, you can try to locate your child online, but research suggests time talking with youth is better spent than spying.

RESOURCES:

- www.missingkids.com: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children; or www.NetSmartz.org or www.NetSmartz411.org
- www.getnetwise.com
- www.safekids.com
- www.isafe.org
- www.common sense media.org
- www.webwisekids.org
- Subscribe to the SafeKids/NetFamilyNewsletter (www.netfamilynews.org)
Sources: www.netfamilynews.org and www.netfamilynews.org.

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