

PROTECTING YOUR CHILD IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLAYGROUND

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Abstract:

Forced into top down, reactive responses to issues associated with the rapid uptake of mobile and internet based technology, this paper seeks to explore alternative proactive actions. The need to bridge the digital divide between parents and their children, and to empower parents to be closely involved with their child's digital education has never been greater. We must be involved from our child's first steps into the online world.

It is vital that we embrace a collaborative approach in order to better address and to try and minimize cyberbullying and its effects on our population.

Objectives

This paper seeks to provoke discussion and further research into the benefits of cultivating healthy respectful use of internet and associated technologies during the formative years (birth to age 7) and the important role of parental involvement and modelling during these years.

Research

Research has at this stage been limited to collection of information from existing research papers and discussion with parents and parent groups during workshops and through online forums by the author. At the time of writing an online survey is being developed by the author. Methodology: Analytic approach seeking to focus a fresh viewpoint. My personal research, underpinned by evidence based research by relevant bodies. The author seeks support to continue this research.

Issues surrounding online safety and protecting our children in the online space have been increasingly growing with many organizations and government bodies providing programs in schools and through community groups. Whilst this continues to be imperative, there is a gap where children are not exposed to good digital citizenship and etiquette until they are in some form of formal education. By this time habits have already formed through observation of parents and other influences (peers, siblings etc). We must be proactive from the first contact with internet, mobile devices and technology in order to instil good habits and hone instinctive behaviours to help protect our children from the outset.

Just tweaking our privacy settings is not enough and can create a false sense of security. The introduction of further legislation, law making and regulation whilst of some benefit may also create further issues for society down the track and in the author's view removes responsibility away from the users and onto the law makers.

This report seeks to provide a new perspective, a ground up approach for parents from the day they conceive their child, right through to adulthood. We must be proactive from the first contact with internet, mobile devices and technology in order to instil good habits and hone instinctive behaviours to help protect our children from the outset.

The issues of protecting our children online goes beyond cyberbullying to the entire digital footprint and behavior of our children in the online environment. The use of technology we believe will only continue to further invade and enhance our lives – whether for positive or negative influence.

Schools cannot do it all – but many parents are not equipped to do it either. There may be other risk factors in place. Studies of children whose parents have a mental illness, live in poverty or abuse substances indicate that these children often have a lower resilience (Australian Psychological Society, April 2005). The author has observed issues often with families with risk factors such as drug use and depression and mental illness. There is perhaps anecdotal evidence for further studies on the possible influence that generations of use of both prescribed and non prescribed substances could be having on our children.

In a society moving more and more towards condoning and legalizing more and more substances and chemical and plant based stimulants, the effects of using social media when under the influence of such substances is one that bears research but of which parents must be aware. It raises a further question “Could the ongoing affects be actually affecting the ability for our children to develop sense of responsibility and resilience”?

Providing access to information for parent's right from the start of a pregnancy is vital to help parents provide a safe and secure environment for their children to thrive. It has been noted that Children who have more developed coping skills tend to be able to define a person or persons in their life who had believed in them, provided support and encouragement or the child had at least one ability of skill which they were competent in, leading to a great sense of achievement and acceptance into peer groups. (Werner, 1993).

The information provided must not just be around safety settings, but encompass the full scope of the use of modern technology, in particular the development and use of apps. If there is an area which the author believes needs legislation, it is surrounding the development of apps for use on mobile devices. There is minimal guidance concerning the use of apps in regards to age and content and the types of advertising that app developers allow in order to make profits. It is important that we remain open minded to create healthy debate and to be wary of politicizing these matters.

Currently there is debate on the appointment of an eSafety Commissioner but author is yet to be convinced that this is the best approach in the long term and concerns around additional delays and red tape arise. As someone who regularly reports inappropriate content to sites such as facebook, I do not believe that this is the best approach. We need to insist upon improvements to the existing reporting facilities within each program and across countries as a unified approach. We must have the ability to notify of content unsuitable for children under 13 which organisations such as google and facebook should immediately act upon.

Time to turn perspective around – in addition to resources being ploughed into top down solutions, we need to plant the seed from ground up. The best outcome for long term results lies with parental guidance and continual involvement. Our recommendation is for support for programs such as future proof your kids to provide user friendly guidance, education and support to parents with a collaborative approach to programs which then commence at school age.

The important factors to consider when developing such programs are:

- That language used is “parent friendly” and uses lay terms rather than imbedded in research based terminology.
- Children are encourage to participate and even to “guide” parents through learning
- The public is made aware of issues but that we try and avoid “scare” campaigns.
- Research and statistics be made which highlight positives so that our children are not growing up surrounded by fear, but rather in an environment which supports making considered choices.

In Conclusion the author determines that we must open up conversations and include thoughts and discussions from all walks of life, particularly from the ground level. Parents must feel empowered to be able to cope with the influence of online life on themselves and their child and support must be provided for a collaborative approach to education and awareness, along with government support for considered legislation.

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