

Cyber World

The New Fantasy World For Children

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Now kids are using the social networking sites for a number of purposes, such as for chatting, playing games, blogging etc. These days, many kids can actually draw little distinction between real life and online life. They may use social websites designed for children: Webkinz or Club Penguin, or social websites designed for adults: Windows Live Spaces, YouTube, MySpace, Flickr, Twitter, Facebook, and others. Whatever they're doing, they should understand that many of these web pages can be viewed by anyone with access to the Internet. Unfortunately, some of the information kids post on their pages can also make them vulnerable to cyberbullying, and Internet predators. Here are several ways you can help your kids can use social websites more safely.

With their limited capacity for self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure, children and adolescents are at some risk as they navigate and experiment with social media. Recent research indicates that there are frequent online expressions of offline behaviours: such as bullying, clique-forming, and sexual experimentation, that have introduces problems like cyberbullying, Privacy issues, and "sexting". There are some other problems which include Internet addiction and concurrent sleep deprivation.

Though many parents today are well aware about the advancement of technology and also feel comfortable and capable with the programs and online venues that their children and adolescents are using. Nevertheless, some parents may find it difficult to communicate to their digitally savvy youngsters online for several reasons. Such parents may require a basic perceptive of these new forms of socialization, which are integral to their children's lives. The end result is often a knowledge and technical skill gap between parents and youth, which creates a disconnect in how these parents



and youth participate in the online world together.

Children and the Cyber world

Social media using has become a risk for the children more often than most adults realize. Most risks fall into the following categories: peer-to-peer; inappropriate content; lack of understanding of online privacy issues; and lack of understanding the difference between advertisement and the programme or game contents.

Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

Cyberbullying refers to bullying through information and communication technologies,

mediums such as mobile phone text messages, emails, phone calls, internet chat rooms,

instant messaging – and the latest trend – social networking websites such as MySpace, Facebook and Bebo.

Cyberbullying is deliberately using digital media to communicate false, embarrassing, or hostile information about another person. It is the most common online risk for all teens and is a peer-to-peer risk. Although 'online harassment' is often used interchangeably with the term 'cyberbullying,' it is actually a different entity. Current data suggest that online harassment is not as common as offline harassment, and participation in social networking sites does not put most children at risk of online harassment. On the other hand, cyberbullying is quite common, can occur to any young person online, and can cause profound psychosocial outcomes including depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and, tragically, suicide.

Though the age requirement for creating a facebook account is 13 but there are many parents who are not at all aware of this fact and as a result children ages below 13 are also using facebook by registering with false information. Researchers have proposed a new phenomenon called "Facebook depression," defined as depression that develops when preteens and teens spend a great deal of time on social media sites, such as Facebook, and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression. Acceptance by and contact with peers is an important element of adolescent life. The intensity of the online world is thought to be a factor that may trigger depression in some adolescents. As with offline depression, preadolescents and adolescents who suffer from Facebook depression are at risk for social isolation and sometimes turn to risky Internet sites and blogs for 'help' that may promote substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, or aggressive or self-destructive behaviours.

Advertisers are targeting the children in order to establish 'brand name preference as early as possible. A very recent study by Cancer Council and the Heart Foundation of Australia of among

12,000 students in years 8 to 11 across 237 schools in 2009 and 2010 shows excessive prevalence of overweight and obesity among students inadequate rates of physical activity, insufficient fruit and vegetable intake and a high proportion of students making food choices based on advertising. The study found food marketing is a driver of adolescents' purchase decisions, with over half of the students indicating they had tried a new food or drink product in response to seeing advertising. Currently advertisers are using many online techniques for the food advertisements. Advergame is the most popular technique which is used by the advertisers to attract children. It is a custom-built online game which is designed to promote a company's brand.



The majority of food brands which previously advertised on television are currently being promoted on internet and often includes online games which are heavily branded, i.e. 'advergames'. Advergame is advertiser-sponsored video games with embedded brand messages in colourful, fun and fast-paced adventures. Advergame is advertiser-sponsored video games with embedded brand messages in colour. Advertisers have chosen this venue because through internet rather than capturing children's attention for 30 seconds, the advertiser may now engage children for several minutes. Some studies suggest, for example, that visitors spend an average of 25 minutes on a gaming site fun and fast-paced adventures. Sites for children are designed in accordance to their taste and highly involving, with "brand immersion" as an essential objective.

Advergame has become a matter of concern as it is targeting children. If children face difficulty in distinguishing advertising messages from the content of television programming where the advertising break is distinct then they will face more difficulty in distinguishing advertising messages

from the content of advergames, when advertising messages are often integrated into the story line of the game.

There is some advertising which obtain the personal information from the children. Some advertisers use the marketing techniques such as incentives, promising free gifts such as T-shirts, mouse pads, and screensavers, in exchange for such personal data as E-mail address, street address, purchasing behaviour and preferences, and information about other family members. And in case of many websites children require to fill up a form as well as the questionnaire to proceed into the site. Disclosures of personal information often are mandatory when a child wants to play a game, join a club, or enter a contest. For example

The KidsCom communications playground, aimed at children 4 to 15, uses such approach. Child is required to put all personal details and it is also mandatory to fill up a questionnaire, which includes questions about his/her favourite TV show, commercial and musical groups, as well as the name of the child who referred him/her to KidsCom. After entering the play ground then the child also has to disclose other personal information in order to win 'KidsCash,' a form of virtual money that can be used to purchase conspicuously-placed products (<http://www.kidscom.com/>).

Things parents can do

The American Academy of Pediatrics has suggested following guidelines for the parents to protect their children from above circumstances.

1. Parents should talk to their children and adolescents about their online use and the specific issues that today's online kids face.
2. Parents should work on their own participation gap in their homes by becoming better educated about the many technologies their youngsters are using.
3. Regular family meetings are also helpful to discuss online topics and checks of privacy settings and online profiles for inappropriate posts.

Supervising online activities via active participation and communication.

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