THREATS AND RISK OF ONLINE EXPOSURE IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC

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The coronavirus or covid-19 pandemic rewired the way the world flows. The virus caused people to be constantly be mindful of hand sanitation and wearing masks whenever we’re in public spaces and transportations. Even though the world seemed to have stopped in the early onset of the pandemic, people has learned to adapt and work their way around the inconvenience.

In order to mitigate the failing economy, companies started to apply skeletal and remote working arrangements for their employees. Schools used a mix modular approach and online learning in order to continue with the school year 2020-2021. With so many of us spending relatively more time at home and in the internet, it is vital that we discuss the risks that we all face, particularly children, on the world wide web.

Based on a 2019 poll conducted by the UNICEF in 30 countries, the most common sites and platforms that online predator and perpetrators use to access their victims are social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram. This fact can be attributed to the accessibility of these sites to younger demographics, especially since security features of these sites which prevents minors can easily be faked. On Facebook for example, the minimum age required to be able to create an account should be 13 years old, however, there are still younger children that have Facebook accounts. Social media sites not only facilitate cyberbullying, it can only host different kinds of danger, especially for unaware and vulnerable children, through exposing them to online predators that can easily take advantage of their innocence. A UNICEF article published in 2019 stated that half of children 13-17 years old in the Philippines were victim of cyberbullying, including
verbal abuse and sexual messages. Although this kind of bullying rarely escalate to an actual physical altercation, the abuse can cause trauma and can affect children psychologically.

Bullying in general is a very problematic topic to address. Most of the time the victims of bullying do not appeal to people of authority due to the fear and lack of support system. Victims of bullying hide their experiences due to the fear of being judged, or perceived as weak for allowing themselves to be victimized. They also fear that their perpetrator will retaliate if they tell on them. In a physical setting, teachers or the school staff can intervene if a case is brought to their attention, however, through online, it is much difficult.

Online, people can use troll accounts or fake accounts under aliases and fake names which makes it harder to pinpoint the person responsible. This is also the reason why online bullies are bold and cocky in their activities. They know that the likelihood of them being caught is very slim, thus making the consequences of their action bleak. Cyberbullying can also come from not only a singular person but through a group of individuals. Some online bullying can reach what is known as a ‘viral stage’ where numerous people attack another person without context or just based on a post.

These kinds of scenarios are extremely harmful for anyone, let alone a child. As much as possible, children, or even teenagers should limit their time in the internet to decrease their exposure to dangers and unprecedented risks like bullying and/or harassments. But since it can not be helped these days, there are ways to monitor the apps and site that children are accessing through their devices.

Most gadgets have settings for ‘Digital wellbeing and Parental control”, the functions are depending on the brand or unit of the gadget but basically it is a way to control the sites and apps that can be accessed from that particular device. It is also a good way to keep track of the amount of time an individual spends online. In the setting, you can view graphs of data from the device with dates and times.
Online bullying is not something to disregard, as a parent or as guardian, the effects of these seemingly irrelevant things can manifest to a child’s behavior and mental health in the future. Being cyberbullied can cause social anxiety and strain in social interactions of a child or person. It can lower a person’s self-esteem and the way the perceive themselves, because most of the time, they see the fault on themselves as to why they are experiencing that negative situation, instead of looking at how the other people involve are misbehaving or treating them bad, they project the responsibility to themselves.

All of us are still in the middle of navigating through these unexpected changes due to the health crisis that the virus caused, but there are ways to ease ourselves to it slowly. Making sure that despite the unaccounted threats that the internet and social-media sites poses, we stay vigilant and aware is one of the approaches to protect ourselves and our children against any form of bullying and abuse.

References:


https://support.google.com/android/answer/9346420?hl=en