



ThinkUKnow e-Newsletter - Volume 4, Issue 11

One of the major concerns for parents nowadays centres on their child's use of the internet and mobile phones. It's easy to get caught up in the cyber safety and cyber security space and concentrate merely on those issues involving technology. The reality is, however, that the influences on children and young people come from all different areas and we need to take a holistic approach to their safety and wellbeing. Often, cyberbullying and sexting are the most visible of a range of issues as they leave behind some digital trace, but they may coexist with other crucial concerns. In our second-last issue of the year, we're going to look at some of the other influences on children and young people.

Ethical decision-making

From a very young age, children need to learn how to make ethical decisions, factoring in not only laws and regulations, but also how their actions affect others. It is crucial that we equip children and young people with the skills to use their moral compass to guide them in making safe and ethical choices.

Ethical decision-making skills will not only help children and young people to interact respectfully with others in the offline space, but also the online space where quick decisions can have long-lasting consequences.

Sexualisation, gender stereotypes and sexual bullying

Teenagers plus mobile phones does not

Time2Talk

In this section we look at ways to start talking with children and young people about their use of technology.

How much do you think about what you do online before you actually do it?

If you weren't comfortable asking me a question about sex, who would you ask or where would you go?

Do you think there is more pressure on teenagers to drink than previous generations?

Are there too many rules around your use of technology? What rules would you prefer to have in place?

Alcohol

Binge-drinking is an important health issue facing young people that also relates to their activity in the digital space. There are increasing pressures for young people to consume alcohol and behave in certain ways, coming not only from their peers, but also from media. Recent overseas studies have found that almost 20% of top ten music hits contain references to alcohol, increasing to almost 50% of rap and R&B songs. When young people drink, there is an increased likelihood that they will make poor decisions which are often recorded in some digital

automatically equal sexting or the sharing of explicit images, often there are many other factors at play. Children and young people are now being exposed to pornography in unprecedented ways, often at a younger age than ever before. The types of pornography which young people may willingly seek or inadvertently come across are often quite explicit and reinforce unhealthy sexual attitudes. This may lead to young people having a skewed idea of what a healthy sexual relationship looks like, a lack of appropriate resources for non-heterosexual couples, and pressure to look like and perform certain gender stereotypes.

The sexualisation of children and young people comes not only from pornography, but mainstream media and advertising as well. We need to encourage children and young people to analyse the depictions they see of men and women and develop a healthy body image and self-esteem. This is by no means an easy task, but it is one we need to continue to develop with children and young people so that they gain healthy attitudes towards themselves and others.

Bullying and harassment

Most studies link cyberbullying with other forms of bullying that do not contain elements of technology usage. It is likely that those who cyberbully others also bully in the traditional sense and rather than focus on the technology component, we need to look at social and emotional learning and conflict resolution skills. With workplace bullying becoming a major focus for a number of employers, we need to ensure that we help children and young people to grow into adults who do not tolerate bullying in any form.

form. We need to help children and young people to overcome the pressures to partake in unhealthy alcohol consumption and change attitudes around what “having a good time” really looks like.

Self-control and boundaries

Children and young people need boundaries in all aspects of their life, not to stop them from having fun but to create a safer environment in which to challenge norms and to determine who they really are. Some parents may feel as though they don't know enough about technology to set boundaries for their child, but this doesn't mean we should give children and young people free reign. We need to develop rules and boundaries with children and young people so that they understand why there are restrictions (to keep them safe) and negotiate loosening of some rules as they grow up and develop their independence.

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