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ABSTRACT “We don't have a choice on whether we do social media, the question is how well we do it.”

– Eric Qualman

Social media is a computer-based technology that facilitates sharing of ideas and information and building of virtual networks and communities. Social media is an increasingly common and integral part of people's lives, including those of children. Children use social media to have fun, make and maintain friendships, share interests, explore identities and develop relationships with family. It's an extension of their offline and face-to-face interactions. The reach of social media has outpaced research into potential benefits and harms for younger users. Social media is ever-present in the lives of children and adolescents and has great impact on their behavioural and mental health. It is important for parents to be aware of the risks and benefits. Parenting is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child from infancy to childhood. Better understanding of how and why children interact with social media, as well as the associated risks and benefits, can help parents engage in productive conversation and create strategies for responsible use. The paper is designed to throw some light on how parenting could serve children in using social media for their and others goodness.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

What Is Social Media ?

Social media are interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. By design, social media is internet based and offers users easy electronic communication of personal information and other content, such as videos and photos. Users engage with social media via computer, tablet or smartphone via web-based software or web application, often utilizing it for messaging.

Social media originated as a tool that people used to interact with friends and family but was later adopted by businesses that wanted to take advantage of a popular new communication method to reach out to customers. The power of social media is the ability to connect and share information with anyone on Earth (or multitudes of people) as long as they also use social media.

WHAT IS PARENTING ?

Parenting is the activity of bringing up and taking care of one's own child. It refers to the intricacies of raising a child and not exclusively to the biological relationship. Parenting not only refers to the raising of children but also to all the responsibilities and activities that are involved in it.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CHILDREN

Social media is ever-present in the lives of children and impacts the behavioural and mental health of children. Children regularly use the internet, cell phones, and video games to gather information and communicate with each other. This ability to interact with others is the unique feature of social media, which provides powerful new ways for children to create and navigate their social environments. Children's use of social media occurs simultaneously with their developing identity, physical development, moral consciousness etc.

Overuse of social media has been likened to addiction and contributes to inattentiveness, stress and jealousy. Heavy social media use leads to depression. Documentations also prove social media as a conduit for misleading information and falsehoods. It is important for parents and caregivers to be aware of the risks and benefits and instil positive values in their children. But how can parents instil these values in kids in a world where tech trends evolve far more quickly than our parenting skills? Better understanding of how and why children interact with social media, as well as the associated risks and benefits, can help parents and caregivers engage in productive conversation and create strategies for responsible use.

TIPS TO HELP PARENTS CULTIVATE SOCIAL MEDIA WELLNESS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Although the relationship between media and education is complex,

studies have shown that media content and parental engagement matter. Engaging in your child's media activities, at home or at school, can help them better understand lessons and the world around them. In addition, educational technology can promote a child's healthy development and increase their motivation to learn. Once your child is using your family devices and home internet, there are approaches you can use to ensure that they are having a positive experience and here are some ideas:

MEDIA USE BY KIDS UPTO 5 YEARS AGE

- Avoid digital media use (except video-chatting) in children younger than 18 to 24 months of age.
- For children 2 to 5 years of age, limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality programming, coveiw with your children, help children understand what they are seeing, and help them apply what they learn to the world around them.
- Avoid fast-paced programs (young children do not understand them as well), apps with lots of distracting content, and any violent content.
- Turn off televisions and other devices when not in use.
- Avoid using media as the only way to calm your child.
- Monitor children's media content and what apps used or downloaded. Test apps before the child uses them, play together, and ask the child what he or she thinks about the app.
- Keep bedrooms, mealtimes, and parent-child playtimes screen free for children and parents. Parents can set a “do not disturb” option on their phones during these times.
- No screens 1 hour before bedtime, and remove devices from bedrooms before bed.

MEDIA USE BY KIDS ABOVE 5 YEARS AGE

Treat media as you would any other environment in your child's life. The same parenting guidelines apply in both real and virtual environments. Set limits; kids need and expect them. Know your children's friends, both online and off. Know what platforms, software, and apps your children are using, where they are going on the web, and what they are doing online.

Set clear ground rules. Talk to your children about appropriate social media use before you give them a phone or allow them to download a new app. Once you hand it over, they'll be too excited to focus on your instructions. Clearly state rules and expectations, and stick with them as much as possible. Parents should involve kids in creating a family mission statement about responsible technology usage.

Set limits and encourage playtime. Social media use, like all other activities, should have reasonable limits. Unstructured and offline play stimulates creativity. Make unplugged playtime a daily priority, especially for very young children. Join your children in unplugged play whenever you're able.

Families that play together, learn together. Family participation is also great for media activities. It encourages social interactions, bonding, and learning. Play a video game with your kids. It's a good way to demonstrate good sportsmanship and gaming etiquette. As you play the game you can introduce and share your own life experiences and perspectives and give guidance.

Do your homework. More than 80,000 apps are labeled as educational, but little research has demonstrated their actual quality. Products pitched as "interactive" should require more than "pushing and swiping." Look to organizations like Common Sense Media for reviews about age-appropriate apps, games and programs to guide you in making the best choices for your children. Engage in your children's education and familiarize yourself with the media they are using in the classroom. Communicate with their teachers and stay current with any new technology that is introduced. This way you can support their learning at home and be available to help them if they should need it. Studies have shown that parental support of a child's education has been linked to a child's positive attitude toward learning.

Practice Media Literacy. In today's often media saturated environment, teaching children to think critically about media is important. Stay current with the technology that is introduced to your children and discuss when and how to use technology to best complete work. This will help them understand that media are tools and should be used to complete specific tasks and then turned off in order to move on to other activities.

Educate Yourself.

"People fear what they don't understand and hate what they can't conquer" — Andrew Smith. Social media is still relatively new and is still a mystery to many people. It's in our human nature to be afraid of things we don't know. As parents there are plenty of things we won't understand about our children. As parents and role models it's important that as adults we understand social media. By understanding social media we lose the fear and can educate our children clearly.

Educate Your Children. Once you have educated yourself on social media you are able to educate your children on social media. Understanding each network and why children want to be there allows you to have deeper knowledge and give better advice. If you stop children from being on Twitter or Facebook they'll just move to WhatsApp or Instagram or SnapChat or Google+ or ... you get the point. Give them the skills to make good decisions and to stay safe first and foremost. **Explain to your children that whatever they put online is permanent and also tell them not to interact/follow people they don't know in person.**

Know the value of face-to-face communication. Young children learn best through two-way communication. Engaging in back-and-forth "talk time" is critical for language development. Conversations can be face-to-face or, if necessary, by video chat, with a traveling parent or far-away grandparent. Researches have shown it's that "back-and-forth conversation" that improves language skills — much more so than "passive" listening or one-way interaction with a screen.

Create tech-free zones. Keep family mealtimes and other family and social gatherings tech-free. Recharge devices overnight outside your child's bedroom to help children avoid the temptation to use them when they should be sleeping. These changes encourage more family time, healthier eating habits, and better sleep, all critical for children's wellness.

Don't use technology as an emotional pacifier. Media can be very effective in keeping kids calm and quiet, but it should not be the only way they learn to calm down. Children need to be taught how to identify and handle strong emotions, come up with activities to manage boredom, or calm down through breathing, talking about ways to solve the problem, and finding other strategies for channelizing emotions.

It's okay for your teen to be online. Online relationships are part of typical adolescent development. Social media can support teens as they explore and discover more about themselves and their place in the grown-up world. Just be sure your teen is behaving appropriately in both the real and online worlds. Many teens need to be reminded that a platform's privacy settings do not make things actually "private" and that images, thoughts, and behaviours teens share online will instantly

become a part of their digital footprint indefinitely. Keep lines of communication open and let them know you're there if they have questions or concerns.

Check your child's phone. A parent is responsible for monitoring what a minor does online. Particularly school children should know that parents can ask for their phones at any point and be allowed full access. It's important to make the distinction between privacy and safety. If you find something you don't like, talk to your kid about why you find it inappropriate and then ask them what they think. Once they verbalize their thoughts, it allows them the opportunity to think things through and come up with their own set of values. By keeping the electronics in a common area, parents can monitor their use much more easily and be aware of how much media their children are using and if the content is appropriate for their developmental.

Be a Role Model. Teach and model kindness and good manners online. Be aware of the media you are engaging in, especially when your child is present. Children often try and imitate their parents so it is important to be mindful of how and how often you use media. Also, media should not interfere with quality time between you and your child. In fact, you'll be more available for and connected with your children if you're interacting, hugging and playing with them rather than simply staring at a screen. Media can be educational and fun, but it cannot replace the learning that takes place through direct parent and child interaction.

CONCLUSION

"Make it a rule never to give a child a book you would not read yourself"

- George Bernard Shaw

Media and digital devices are an integral part of our world today. The benefits of these devices, if used moderately and appropriately, can be great. Remember kids will be kids. They will make mistakes using media. Try to handle errors with empathy and turn a mistake into a teachable moment. But some indiscretions, such as sexting, bullying, or posting self-harm images, may be a red flag that hints at trouble ahead. Parents should take a closer look at your child's behaviors and, if needed, enlist supportive professional help, including from your pediatrician.

Research has shown that face-to-face time with family, friends, and teachers, plays a pivotal and even more important role in promoting children's learning and healthy development. Keep the face-to-face up front, and don't let it get lost behind a stream of social media and technology.

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