**Social Media Is Stealing Our Social Butterflies**

### Social media has become an integral part of our lives, connecting people from all corners of the world and providing a platform for people to share their experiences, opinions, and ideas. While it has many benefits, it can also have harmful effects, particularly on young girls.

Statista reported recently that almost 90% of 12 - 15 year olds had their own social media profiles. Further research has shown that social media can negatively impact young girls' neurological development, affecting their decision-making, impulse control, and emotional processing.

In this article, we will explore the harmful effects of social media on our younger generation and provide some simple and effective strategies to counteract these negative learned behaviors and belief patterns, whilst empowering ourselves at the same time.

**The Harmful Effects of Social Media on Young Girls**

Our social platforms have changed the way young girls interact with the world. While it offers many benefits, including increased access to information and self-expression, it can also have detrimental effects on their neurological development through a number of ways;

**Social Comparison**

Social media can create a distorted sense of reality, where people only post the highlights of their lives. Young girls can feel pressure to conform to a certain standard and compare themselves to others, leading to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

**Cyberbullying**

### Cyberbullying is a growing problem on social media platforms, between March 2019 and March 2020 around 764,000 children, in the U.K. aged between 10 and 15 reported at least one instance of cyberbullying, and that has only increased since the pandemic.

Young girls can be targeted for their appearance, beliefs, or behavior, leading to feelings of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. In fact, online bullying data has shown that up to seven out of ten children who were bullied online were emotionally affected by the experience.

**Sleep Disturbances**

The blue light emitted by electronic devices can interfere with sleep patterns, leading to sleep disturbances and insomnia. Lack of sleep can have a negative impact on young girls' cognitive function, mood, and emotional regulation, which can affect performance in school, and in some cases lead to a mis-diagnosis of ADHD.

**Addiction**

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat and Tik Tok account for the majority of online addiction in teen girls, triggering the same neural circuitry seen in gambling and recreational drugs. This can lead to excessive use and a lack of self-control. Addiction to social media can have a negative impact on academic performance, social relationships, and emotional well-being.

**Counteracting the Negative Effects of Social Media on Young Girls**

Despite the potential negative effects of social media, there are many simple and effective positive strategies that we as their parents and educators can use to counteract these harmful behaviors and belief patterns. Here are some examples:

**Promote Mindful Social Media Use**

As parents and educators, we can actively encourage young girls to use social media mindfully. By promoting self-awareness and emphasizing the importance of meaningful connections, we can empower young girls to cultivate positive growth online - “Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?”

This can involve encouraging them to limit their time on social media and focus on building relationships with people they know and trust.

**Emphasize Face-to-Face Interactions**

While social media can be a valuable tool for communication, it cannot replace the value of in-person connections. By encouraging young girls to participate in group activities and team-building exercises, we can help them develop social skills and confidence, which can translate to both their online and offline interactions. This can involve promoting extracurricular activities such as sports teams, community clubs, and positive personal development groups, where young girls can meet new people and develop their social skills.

**Encourage Healthy Coping Mechanisms**

Social media can be a source of stress and anxiety, particularly if you are the victim of cyberbullying or feel pressure to conform to a certain standard. By equipping young girls with healthy coping mechanisms, resources and tools, such as yoga, meditation, or journaling, we can help them manage stress and negative emotions. By promoting emotional regulation and self-awareness, we can empower young girls to develop healthy habits and support positive growth.

**Build Confidence and Self-Esteem**

Positive self-talk is essential for building confidence and self-esteem. By encouraging young girls to set goals, engage in positive affirmations, and engage in self-reflection, we can help them recognize their strengths, values, and achievements. By promoting a healthy sense of self-worth, we can empower young girls to resist the harmful effects of social media and develop a positive sense of self.

**Model Healthy Social Media Use**

Parents and educators play a significant role in modeling healthy social media use. By being mindful of our own social media habits and emphasizing the importance of real-life relationships, we can help young girls develop healthy online habits. This can involve setting limits on our own social media use and prioritizing in-person interactions with our children and students.

**Encourage Positive Engagement**

Social media can be a powerful tool for positive engagement and advocacy. By encouraging young girls to use social media to raise awareness about important issues, connect with like-minded individuals, and share their ideas and experiences, we can help them develop a sense of purpose and agency. This can involve highlighting positive role models and influencers who use their platforms to promote positive change.

**Promote Digital Literacy**

Digital literacy is essential for navigating the complex world of social media. By promoting critical thinking skills and media literacy, we can empower young girls to become savvy consumers of online content. This can involve discussing the dangers of fake news and promoting fact-checking and critical evaluation of online sources.

### In conclusion, social media has been proven to have harmful effects on young girls, affecting their development and leading to negative behaviors and belief patterns. However, there are so many ways that we, as their parents and educators, can counteract these harmful effects and promote positive growth. By encouraging mindful social media use, emphasizing in-person interactions, encouraging healthy coping mechanisms, building confidence and self-esteem, modeling healthy social media use, supporting positive engagement, and promoting digital literacy, we can help our young girls develop healthy habits and resist the harmful effects of social media. By working together to empower our next generation, we can help them develop into confident, resilient, and successful individuals ready to take on the world to create positive change and growth.