Mental Health and the Internet

Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board

TEA-BREAK GUIDE

Overview

With technology moving at such a rapid pace there is now more than ever before a greater need to keep people safe online. The internet is a rich resource and provides an array of benefits but also poses a number of risks to people. We must remember that "Technology is not the problem. It is how we use it". With social media being part of our everyday lives the level off addictiveness can cause distress, anxiety, rising concerns around body image, self-esteem, poor sleep and cyber bullying. However it is important to remember the relationship between the internet and mental health is complex.

What's the concern?

Statistics taken from the RSPH Social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing plus the Children's Commissioner 2018 "life in likes report"

- Social media has been described as more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol;
- Young people posting about self-harming or self-harming and posting the images;
- 7 out of 10 young people have experienced cyberbullying;
- Rates of anxiety and depression in young people have risen by 70% in the past 25 years;
- The average young person takes 12 selfies before finding the right one;
- The average young person wants 30 to 40 likes on each photo posted on Instagram and will find techniques to make sure they get a high number of likes; and
- Girls feel pressured to look 'pretty' online lads feel pressured to look 'cool'.

What can professionals do?

- **Remember to challenge online behaviour and not technology. E.g. Snapchat does not send out bullying messages or sexting images by itself.**
- Building a child's digital resilience is vital. A child needs to understand when they are at risk online and to know what to do, to keep themselves safe.
- From an early age teach young people to problem solve for themselves. Making decisions for children and wrapping them up in "cotton wool" can fuel anxieties.
- Now more than ever do young people need to think critically online. A lot of what we see online is not real. Always check the validity of the author or source online, look for facts not opinions, social media and YouTube is often full of opinions, check the date of when the article, vlog, blog or website was written or published and check the information on websites matches up to other sources online.
- Remind adults and children regularly that comparing yourself, relationships and lifestyle to online friends or celebrities is very un-realistic and people only put the best parts of their lives online. Try and get children to focus on other attributes rather than their appearance.
- Encourage young people and adults to have breaks or time outs from social media. Go into settings on the phone or tablet and turn off notifications for social media.
- From as young as possible children need time limits on devices, technology and bedrooms need to be digital free zones.
- When posting or vlogging go with quality over quantity. The more you post the less likely you are to comments or likes.

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