COVID-19: Social Media, Technology and Young People

During the uncertainty, lockdown restrictions and School/College closures as a result of COVID-19; many children and young people are spending more time outside of their normal routine, with social media being a common go to for many to 'pass the time'. This article will explore some considerations around social media use in young people for you to be mindful of to ensure it does not impact their physical or mental wellbeing adversely.

Why is social media use in children and young people such an important topic to talk about? Well, many data sources suggest that more than 2.8 million children in the UK own a smart device with the usage of children on social media tripling in recent years, with use to increase greatly during the Coronavirus lockdown. Gaming is the most common smart device activity in children aged between 8-15 years old and young people are accessing online content in private instead of amongst company like friends or family.

You may be surprised to hear that the average age a child receives their first smart phone is 10. With the average age a child starts their first social media account 12. To provide some context the minimum age for a facebook profile is 13.

During times like the current situation we find ourselves in now as a result of COVID-19, the average of social media and technology by children and young people is likely to increase dramatically, so it is going to be really helpful to recognise that and be mindful of how we can maintain positive mental and physical wellbeing for all at this time.

Before we look at the potential adverse impacts social media, or shall we say, overuse of social media, let's look at the many positives. Social media and technology can be a useful tool for our children:

- Contact during emergencies
- Track location
- Connect with others
- Monitor what content they are accessing
- Access information for studies and learning

Though there are many positives to social media and technology, there can be worries or impacts to our child's wellbeing and safety if we use social media or technology too much, or use it for the wrong reasons, or in the wrong ways. Some of these worries or impacts can be:

- Online grooming
- Cyber Bullying
- Addiction (such as social media or gaming addiction)
- Social isolation
- Accessing inappropriate or distressing content
- Poor physical health
- Costs of replacing expensive devices

Here are some top tips for you to consider to help manage and monitor your child's time spent accessing social media and technology during lock down:

- Set WIFI limits or exclusion times at home

- Speak to your network provider about setting age restrictions when accessing content

- Speak to your network provider about setting data use limits

- Be mindful that filters and parental controls can differ from WIFI to WIFI as well as when using Data

- Encourage physical activity and exercise breaks

- Openly talk to your child about who they speak to online and encourage blocking or reporting of accounts or messages they receive

- Depending on your device, there are Apps which can monitor what your child is accessing and often set permissions for app purchases and downloads. For example on Android devices there is an App called "Android Parental Control"

You may find the following resources useful in obtaining additional information from this article:

- www.kidsmart.org.uk

- www.thinkuknow.co.uk

- www.cybermentors.org.uk

- www.getsafeonline.org.uk

- www.beatbullying.org

Why did we create this article?

- 87% of children do not have parental restrictions on their smart device

- 21% of children reported having accessed unsuitable content via their phone

- 6% of 15 year olds admitted to bullying others via their phone

- 12% of children had been a victim of bullying via their phone

- 38% of 10 year olds had received unwanted messages or calls on their phone

- 46% of parents say they are unaware of the safety tools to protect their child's phone