

Digital wellbeing

“Children see, children do!”

There is a legitimate reason behind the adage — children not only mimic, but also develop their social mannerisms, ways of interaction and behavioural traits by observing and acquiring information from the adults around them.

Thus, it is of paramount importance that adults be mindful about their own behaviour and conduct around children.

Take a moment to think— how frequently do you check your phone for notifications? How many times do you open WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook, or Instagram even while you're with your children?

Most people do it as a force of habit, or even just as a result of temporary boredom, after all, smartphones are now our chief source of entertainment. But this seemingly innocuous habit has its downside. Parents using mobile technology around young children may be unconsciously causing tension, conflicts and negative interactions with their kids.

Technology is a big and important part of modern life, and it is everywhere. A little thought would reveal that even given the real importance of it; we do indulge in more screen time than necessary.

Living with added internet exposure
During this pandemic, the one thing that became reality is that our children, and for valid reasons, were allowed much more screen time than their fair share. As a result, they have become fully conscious of what lies beyond the four walls of their homes and also what the virtual world has to offer.

Some good things came out of it, amongst a handful of negatives. Though devices have taken the place of schools, libraries, cafes and playing fields, our children learned many things we could not even dream about at their age. We know this is an important positive impact of technology.

For the purpose of education, the use of the Internet and various devices does not have a negative impact, except maybe the closure of schools that has deprived the children of the camaraderie of being in the classroom, running about during breaks, the actual act of writing and being able to hug a friend, and honestly, adults too miss that.



However, the pandemic has caused for most children to become homebound, increasingly limited to their screens for all sort of uses, like education, fun, connectivity, etc. This means that almost all activities of their lives have taken a digital turn, and their reliance on devices has inadvertently increased. Now that's all good, but let us throw some light on the negatives and the urgency for parents to keep up with their children's pace of being technologically savvy.

Life in the new normal

For the very young, like toddlers or children under 5 years, too much screen time can actually have more harmful effects, because their idea of normal life becomes warped. Speech development could be slow or affected, or lead to issues like learning distorted languages. It has become very common to see children stuck to screens while they eat, screaming for YouTube videos, not wanting to speak to actual people, avoiding personal contact; and all these despite a range of physical stimuli being present in the toddler's surrounding. At that age when the child is too young, it remains the adults' responsibility to engage them in activities, create routines and expose them to age-appropriate content only.

What about young children, the pre-teens and teens? Their world is much more diverse and complicated than just screaming for YouTube videos while eating.

Many of today's adolescents and teenagers are much more technology savvy than their parents or guardians. This does lead to a gap in timely monitoring, in case there is trouble brewing like addiction or access to unhealthy sites, games that encourage addiction, constant interaction, bullying.

Children are often unaware of the complicated nature of online interactions where the seemingly anonymous is not truly anonymous and virtual security threats to the person can become real

threats quickly. Parents have thus gained an added burden of monitoring and explaining this new side to growing up, and just as usual, children will assume that they know better instead. Also phishing, virus and other dangers are often disguised as harmless, and children can easily stumble across pornography online.

To get the best of screen time, parents have to consider its dangers and equip against them.

To quote a working mum, "As a parent I feel like I need to be more of a friend to my sons than a mother. This ensures that they share everything with me, from digital space to real life experiences. I have also synced my devices with my children's, so that when they are watching anything or reading anything, I am aware. I have enabled Google kid's protection. Plus, their email addresses have protection, that is under family link, where the kids and parents' phones are interconnected. So, I can remotely control their phone, set usage timings, and also check how long he is spending on which app, check history and keep the phone with me when they sleep. If they use the mailing address for any activity, I get notified. I frequently counsel our kids about the downside of the Internet. It is very important. Also, I try to plan other activities like field sports and drawing, listening to music. There's no private screen time, everything happens in a central location so that I can keep tab on their activities. Finally, I have already informed my preteen about the warning signs to bullying and sexual harassment. So that anytime he comes close, he recognises the red flags and informs us immediately."

Another important measure to consider is to get the time to reconnect with children and spend more offline time with them. Be in the moment with them, and do the stressful tasks later, when you're not with your children.

Mental exhaustion

Young adults are often impatient and can

have overtly emotional response to a lot of stimuli on the Internet. Many a child or young adult are already struggling with the hints of sadness or even natural mood swings, which are a part of normal growing process. They seek or attract others with similar concerns, and while it could make them feel like it is normal, it could also increase the feelings of hopelessness. In essence, constant connectivity can overly enhance and worsen the children's outlook of the world.

On the positive side, communication helps build networks and friendships, and allows for sharing the burden and thus also boost happiness.

Overuse of Internet can create fatigue, and it leads to mental exhaustion, and harm children's mental health and their capacity to consume and absorb the content being provided, be it educational or recreational.

The new generation is growing up playing games online, accessing websites (sometimes harmful websites), chatting



online on Facebook, sharing photos on Instagram and Snapchat and so on. It doesn't mean that spending time online is all bad, but spending too much time online can really weaken the bond between the parents and the child, and the child's development regarding social interactions and skills. It can lead to common problems of sedentary lifestyles, overuse of mobile devices reduces sleep quality and sleeping less means that we're depriving our brain of its essential need to recuperate for peak performance during the day.

Some solace

One way to help children be safe online is to use parental controls and Internet filtering tools to select the content they are able to access or even block browsers for as long as you consider it is appropriate.

Use Parental Control App to balance your child's screen time and constantly counsel them about the etiquettes of browsing. Spend more time offline and remember, the new buzz word is "digital wellbeing."

— RBR

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