

Internet Safety Middle Childhood

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Introduction

From businesses and networking to staying in touch with old friends or far away family, the internet has been super beneficial, however, there is a dark side that comes along with the use of the internet. In the 21st-Century individuals from elementary school to adulthood face the negative effects of social media. Individuals who are still in school can no longer just leave the bullying there, it now follows them everywhere; it comes in forms of text messages, Snapchats, direct messages, posts, comments and much more. Living in the digital age can be very harmful. As social media continues to develop, more and more children are creating accounts and experiencing the harmful effects that many deal with. In this paper, there will be discussion between two peer-reviewed journals that discuss the importance of internet safety and proper social media use, as well as how this new information can guide social workers in this new area of abuse.

Peer Reviewed Journals

Kathryn DePaolis and Anne Williford conducted a peer reviewed study in December of 2014 titled: *The Nature and Prevalence of Cyber Victimization Among Elementary School Children*. This study emphasizes the findings in young individuals under the age of 10. The desire for this study was to see how the internet affects elementary school students due to the rapid rate that these young children are indulging into the digital world. This peer reviewed journal looked at cyber-victimization versus those who are not being cyber-bullied among elementary aged students and the impact it has on their behavior. The information gathered in this particular study comes from a school district in the midwest.

In December of 2014, Onur Dönmez, Işıl Kabakçı Yurdakul, Abdullah Kuzu and Ümit Girgin wrote a peer reviewed journal titled: *Development of a Scale to Address Perceptions of Pre-service Teachers Regarding Online Risks for Children*. This study revolved around the

research on young children's engagement with the internet. The researchers emphasize the online speculations of what the internet really does to young children and adults with overuse of internet access. This journal also emphasizes what role elementary school teachers play in regards to the safety of middle childhood aged kids. The information within this study comes from schools in the European Union with an emphasis on Turkish children.

The Findings

Within these two peer reviewed journals, the researchers both want to understand the underlying effects that will heavily impact young children. It is essential to discover what the impact of internet use is among young children because most of this up and coming generation has unmonitored access to it. In the second peer reviewed journal the researchers emphasize the risks of inadequate e-literacies which meant that "children experienced a variety of online risks, which included under-age social network membership (33%), sharing sensitive information (85%), encountering inappropriate sexual content (13%), sending (4%) and receiving (12%) sexual messages, cyberbullying (3%), making online friends (14%), and meeting online friends face to face (2%)" (2014). This type of exposure can be harmful to the majority of middle childhood aged kids. Some parents choose to keep their children away from inappropriate information on the internet, however, with the internet being second nature to these young children, it is difficult to do so.

Children in middle childhood are just now developing self control techniques. At this age, these kids pick up what they see and mimic it in a more mature way. It is no longer getting your toddler to repeat the word you are saying, but these older children copy words and actions. What they see on the internet captures their interest and they will begin to replicate what they are saying. Piaget calls this the "concrete operational" stage where in middle childhood they

understand situations however, they cannot understand it intimately. These children follow what they see on the internet and repeat what they are seeing. In the second article, they report finding that elementary aged individuals who experience violent behavior on the internet will start acting more violently, as well as individuals who are exposed to sexual information will start acting out in a more sexual manner. What is being shown on the internet is desensitizing elementary aged kids to finding more mature behavior appropriate for them.

Continuing on the self control tendencies, elementary aged children are also developing their own self concept and a large amount of internet access can be harmful to these young individuals self esteem. When they are experiencing cyberbullying the bullying tends to be on the individual's appearance or what they do and do not have. The first article reports that social media bullying is highly connected to the alarming amount of young people who are being diagnosed with depression, anxiety, eating disorders and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Moving forward, a positive that comes from young children using social media in a safe way is how it impacts their communication skill. From the research conducted by both of the peer reviewed journals they present information stating that being online may be beneficial to their understanding of language. The amount of websites that encourage developing good communication skills, mathematical skills, emotional intelligence as well as reading comprehension is a positive that will help these young children develop in their academic excellence.

The Strengths and Limitations

These researchers do a good job at presenting the information that they could with the amount of information they have on this age group. Their credentials and use of sources show that they were dedicated to understanding the impacts on behavior at the given age range. The

limitations to these peer reviewed journals is the lack of evidence it has on the development of the brain. Due to social media being such a new topic, there is not enough information to conduct incredibly strong journals. Another limitation is that these studies are not longitude studies so they only represent a specific time frame of information. Both of these journals were published in December of 2014, meaning that within the last six years, the results could have drastically changed.

How This Connects to Social Work

Internet use within elementary school children has been less studied due to the importance being emphasized on middle school to high school. Now that younger children are being exposed to this new sector faster, it presents a new factor in which social workers need to check in as well. Can the reason a child is acting out be due to the abuse they are being exposed to online? The findings in these journals can help a social worker understand better the social aspect of what can be causing a child harm. Understanding this new way of abuse can be essential in understanding a child's mental health, their behavior patterns, as well as what they could be dealing with at school. Because social media and internet use is such a new topic of interest, it is essential to understand the new factors of what could be playing into the clients wellbeing.

Social workers need training on the developmental ways that social media is being used to harm children. Children's aggression levels going up can be associated alongside the use of violent videos, games, or websites. Another factor that social workers need to know is how the sexual exploitation that these children will be exposed to and how much their brains can comprehend due to their developmental stage. Earlier exposure to sexual content leads to sexual awakenings happening sooner rather than later.

Conclusion

With the internet expanding to the younger generation, it is essential that there is an understanding on what it means for younger children to be on the internet. As the internet continues to expand and younger children continue to have access to social media, it is important to take safety measures to keep the younger children safe.

References

- Dönmez, O., Odabaşı, H. F., Yurdakul, I. K., Kuzu, A., & Girgin, Ü. (2014). Development of a Scale to Address Perceptions of Pre-service Teachers Regarding Online Risks for Children. *EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES: THEORY & PRACTICE*.
<https://doi.org/10.12738/estp.2017.3.0022>
- Williford, A., & DePaolis, K. (2014). The Nature and Prevalence of Cyber Victimization Among Elementary School Children. *Child Youth Care Forum*. DOI10.1007/s10566-014-9292-8

LESSON PLAN

Lesson Title: How to Stay Safe Online

Aim: Teach the individuals how to be safe and secure when online

Instructional Objectives -

1. How to create a safe password
2. Public or Private? What should be shared vs kept private? (Where you live, last name, info about family, phone #) Be more cautious about what you post and who it may affect
3. Online community - Stranger danger*
4. Amount of time spent on social media

Materials/Technology Needed -

1. Quiz on safe info
2. Good Chat/ Bad Chat worksheet
3. Pencils

Procedures -

1. Password suggestions (Animals, fruit, or favorite color)
2. Discuss with parents or teachers about things that are safe to share online about your personal life.
3. Discussion on the Importance of Staying Safe and Not Talking To Strangers
4. Discussing How Much Time is Too Much Time

Evaluation/Assessment/Self Reflection -

1. Students will be able to create a safe password that they can share with their parents
2. Students will be able to evaluate healthy behaviors and actions online (being kind, not sharing too much,
3. Students will be able to discern healthy friendships online and how to avoid getting catfished.
4. Students will be able to discern how much time is “too” much time.

Concept Development -

1. How to Create a Safe Password
 - I will first explain why it is important to have a safe password.
 - I will ask the individuals what they think is a good way to create a password.
 - I will then give examples on ways to create safe passwords.
 - Animals, colors, fruits, states
 - I will emphasize the importance of sharing their passwords with their parents.
2. What Should Be Shared vs Kept Private?
 - I will ask the individuals what they think is safe to share online and what they think should be kept private.
 - I will discuss the importance of keeping private information, private.
 - I will list the things that should be kept private.
 - Address
 - Last name
 - Family information
 - Phone number
3. Online Community -
 - I will explain why this ties into what should be kept private vs public.
 - Online community is important. Only let people you know follow you.

- People online can pretend they are someone they are not. That is why it is important to keep certain information private.
 - I will discuss that it is important to be kind on social media.
 - I will ask the individuals to describe why it is important to being kind on the internet.
4. Amount of Time Spent on Social Media
- I will ask the individuals how much time they spend on the internet everyday.
 - I will ask how much time they spend doing homework or hanging out with friends.
 - I will ask the individuals how much time they spend on the internet.
 - I will then discuss why it is important to not spend so much time on the internet.
 - Sometimes it can affect your mood. If you spend too much time, you can end up being sad.
 - A lot of time on the internet can lead to being jealous of others.
 - Spending time off the internet can make you more “present”
 - You can spend time with others and build better relationships.