SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN

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Social media has a major impact on our lives. The internet is everywhere now days, and everyone has access to it, including children. In a recent study it is shown that they spend nearly 3 to 4 hours a day on social media. They keep themselves occupied online for hours on end either scrolling, sharing, texting etc. But does it have a good or bad influence on them? And how can we help them use the internet in a better, moderate way?

To start I want to point out the good influence social media has on kids. Many children now days lack support offline. Either they have no friends and are being marginalized. Or they have a bad relationship with their teacher or parents, especially when the parents are either emotionally distant or just physically distant, so the children don't feel comfortable getting help from them. And even though therapy is a good solution, many don't feel comfortable sharing with a therapist, either from the fear of being judged or the fear of the therapist sharing their thoughts with their parents or teachers. So, what can a child do in a situation where they do not feel able to freely share how they feel? They tend to get help through social media. Sharing their problems and getting help from people they do not know, knowing that they won't feel judged or exposed to people they do not want to know about their issues. People online can help them overcome their problem with good advice and show them support. Another positive influence the internet can provide for children is "A positive learning experience". The internet is a tool that if put to good use can provide infinite information. There are millions of videos online that can provide help with any task, be it cooking, sewing or even help with the math homework. Can provide any needed books as well, if before when you wanted to read a book you needed to go to the library and pray that the book you needed was available, now you can easily find it online. The social media has so many great videos and tips that can help our children better themselves and their skills.

But just like any other thing, the internet is not all sunshine and rainbows, there is a negative side to it, that sometimes can even outshine all the great possibilities. First, which is a thing many parents complain about, is that social media is a distraction from work, either their chores or homework. Let's be honest, even us as adults chose to procrastinate on our work to have some fun on social media, so how can we expect kids, that want entertainment more than work, choose work over the internet and their friends. Another big problem is that it disrupts their sleep. Just like back in the day when our parents, grandparents chose to read a book under the candlelight at night to have some entertainment, the kids now days choose the same, except instead of a book they are on their phones or computers. Another few big problems that are present are the exposure to cyberbullying and predators. Kids are, which can be both a good and a bad thing, too trusting. They tend to trust people easily, which can attract predators. If

kids think that the person, they are talking to is either nice, or another kid they might accidentally, or not, overshare things about themselves, either their location, school or full name, and things like that can end very badly, be it in sexual assaults, rape, kidnapping and even murder. And cyberbullying is at a fulltime peak now, especially with the rapid evolution of the internet and social media. Let's peek at a recent case that happened, where a 10-year-old girl killed herself after being severely bullied on and offline, with the advancement of AI (artificial intelligence) the bullies made fake porn of the child and made fun of her social media posts as well. This is to show how easy it is these days to bully someone if they are online.

So, as parents or older siblings, how can we protect them? There are a few tips for that. First being by simply setting some rules and limits on their internet consumption. But for that we need to use another tip, which is to be a role model. As the role model of the child, we cannot expect them to respect their limit online, when we ourselves are chronically online and spend any given moment on social media, we must show them how to use it moderately. As parents we also need to monitor their account. Of course, we must respect their privacy, but we also need to make sure they are safe and are consuming content that is for their age. But for that we also need to explain to them what is ok and what isn't. If we tell them what to avoid and what not to do they will know, instead of giving them full freedom and then be surprised when they see or find something unsuitable for them. We should also encourage offline friendships and activities, encourage them to go play with their friends outside or to pick up a hobby such as sports, knitting, reading etc. But the best tip for new or future parents is to simply delay the age of first use. New parents may find it tempting to just give their children a tablet or phone to calm them down and keep them quiet and occupied, but then they are shocked when the child becomes addicted to it.

In conclusion we can see how social media, or the internet per se is a great and amazing tool that can be both helpful or harmful, but what's important is how our children use it and how we monitor them and teach them how to use it.

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