Social Media and Identity and Self Esteem

We all remember being a teenager and the stress of what our peers thought of us and said about us as we were forming the concept of ourselves. We got our sense of identity from our parents, teachers, other significant adults and to a large extent our peers and this has not changed. What has changed is the potential for comments, negative and positive to be spread exponentially faster and further than ever before through social media, easily affecting the individual's formation of identity and self esteem.

Parents are largely responsible for their child's social and emotional development and there are many ways you can help your child when using social media, to stave off negative consequences and achieve positivity from its use. Facebook is probably the most popular site currently used so we will refer to it in this article.

- If your 13 year old+ child chooses to set up a Facebook account, encourage them to do so, become a "friend" on the site, teach your child not to share their password and the unethically nature of fake accounts
- Teach your child the difference between positive and negative comments, to really think about the perspective of others before posting comments. Ideally, all comments would be positive in nature and remember there is such a thing as oversharing
- Set time limits for use to ensure a balance of activities
- A Facebook page is not a locked diary kept in a safe place in the bedroom. It is a profile and working document that friends and often friends of friends can see. It is not private and all information can be traced
- Your teen should not be on Facebook or replying to text messages instead of sleeping. Many families do not allow electronic messaging devices in bedrooms after an agreed hour
- Make time for family time without the interruption of "electronic others" through modelling this and through expectations
- Talk about social media posts (including YouTube) you feel are inappropriate for them or their friends
- Google Facebook Security to find out more about protecting Facebook accounts, how to avoid scammers and clickjacking and other options for being safe. The first tip they suggest for staying secure on Facebook is to only friend people you know i.e. ignore requests from strangers and another is to log off after use so that one's profile cannot be tampered with by another user of that computer.

It is a privilege not a right to have a Facebook account. Establish and maintain conversations about usage ensuring it is a positive experience for all.

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