The Parent's Corner

we're in your corner

Can you believe we've made it past the one-year mark for life during a global pandemic? This year you've practiced flexibility and made plenty of modifications to your everyday life to allow both yourself and your children to thrive despite the circumstances. Socialization has been hard this year! You may have had to resort to old-fashioned "snail mail", FaceTime, ZOOM, and other creative measures. We know that social interaction is an integral part of healthy development for children, and this year's changes to after-school activities/groups (Girl/Boy Scouts, sports teams, camps), absence of birthday parties and play groups, and many children learning online has made socialization much more difficult. Because of this, we've seen an increase in social media and online gaming this year with children, which has brought growing concern to parents.

Are these social platforms all bad?

Definitely not. Many online platforms (even video games!) challenge children to problem solve, work together as a team with friends, or complete a task. Social media platforms can help children stay connected to family members, friends from school, classmates from past schools or sports teams. Learning a new Tik Tok or Go Noodle dance may promote exercise, while watching a favorite YouTube channel may educate your child on a new hobby or idea. On top of this, connecting with others online may give children who are introverted more comfort in initiating or joining in a conversation. Without these platforms, many children (and adults) would have felt even more isolated this year.

What are the downfalls?

While there are many positives to internet/social media usage, we know there are also some pitfalls. It is important for parents to take these steps if they choose to allow their child access to some of these apps or sites:

1. **Educate Yourself.** Technology is ever-changing. Games and apps that children use today are different than what was used even last year! It is wise for parents to first educate themselves on the components of the app or game before allowing their child to partake. This may include an understanding of what the child will have access to and setting up their account from there (for example, setting up a YouTube Kids account or Facebook Messenger Kids rather than an adult account).

2. **Monitor.** Many apps and games allow parents the option of monitoring their child's usage. Setting your child's Tik Tok to private, managing allowed screen time on a child's iPhone, or allowing them to make purchases on apps like the App store or iTunes are examples of this. Most sites have parental-control options readily available, but when in doubt, Google search and find out!

3. **Have the Talk.** Not all children realize the easiness of someone on an app or game lying about their identity, of private information being shared through a post or video, or the dangers of internet bullying. Even if you feel your child has a grasp on this, have a talk with your child about internet safety before allowing usage, and continue to review these things with them periodically.

4. **Be Observant and Listen.** Make note of your child's cues. If they are seemingly more withdrawn, irritable or verbalize friendship conflicts stemming from online interactions, make time to explore this with your child. Rather than jumping directly to punishment, perhaps use this as a social-emotional learning experience for them.

As always, we are in your corner if you need extra support!

SAINT LOUIS
COUNSELING
IMPROVING LIVES SINCE 1955