

Child Abuse



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Digital Abuse: Keeping Your Teen Safe Online

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Introduction

Information and communications technologies (ICTs) are one of the most important tools used in teaching learning process since past decade. ICT is the best bridge to ensure the continuity of daily activities, such as school, work and communication. Technology allows us to stay connected. Whether you are re-connecting with a lost friend from elementary school, video chatting with a partner that is far away, or making new connections with people that you've never met, technology allows us to reach out and touch people in ways that would have been impossible before these advancements. It proved its effectiveness as an alternative environment for learning during the COVID-19 crisis as it has thrown a new light on perspectives of teaching and learning. The use of ICT has been hiked to the maximum

during pandemic. The pandemic has been especially difficult on our young learners. More than 1.5 billion children have been affected by school closures worldwide. Educational institutions have used more social media platforms for the learners to continue the education. The students have been pushed out of the path of regular education into online learning with the use the digital platforms and social media for the learning. As a result, most of the students especially children became addicted to the use of social media and mobile phones. Social media can be a great place for children to play, learn and connect. Many of these students are now attending classes as well as socializing more on online. In the meantime, abuse and harassment using digital technology has become increasingly common and it can also put them at risk of online abuse. The coronavirus pandemic has led to an unprecedented rise in screen time (Howard Taylor). "School closures and strict containment measures mean more and more families are relying on technology and digital solutions to keep children learning, entertained and connected to the outside world, but not all children have the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to keep themselves safe online." Millions of

children are at increased risk of harm as their lives move increasingly online during lockdown in the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF). Under the shadow of COVID-19, the lives of millions of children have temporarily shrunk to just their homes and their screens. Children are spending more time online than ever before and they're getting there sooner. Around the world, a child goes online for the first time every half second. Moreover, the excessive screen time often affects child's healthy development and results in addiction towards digital technologies.

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet. It can happen across any device that's connected to the web, like computers, tablets and mobile phones. And it can happen anywhere online, including social media text messages and messaging apps emails online chats online gaming live-streaming sites. Spending more time on virtual platforms can leave children vulnerable to online sexual exploitation and grooming. A lack of face-to-face contact with friends and teachers has led to heightened risk-taking such as cyberbullying and sexual violence through (EUROPOL, 2020).

Digital abuse, or the use of technology to harass or intimidate someone, can take many forms. It can occur at any stage of a relationship and to people of all ages, though it is especially common among teens and young adults who use technology more often. It can also occur outside of intimate partner relationships, such as experiencing harassment from someone on a dating website. A child or young person experiencing abuse online might spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting and secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet. Digital abuse can also accompany other forms of domestic violence; 96% of teenagers who experienced digital abuse also faced psychological, physical, or sexual abuse from their partners. Like other types of abuse, digital abuse is about control.

According to UNICEF's report, more than a third of children in 30 countries reported being cyberbullied, with 1 in 5 skipping school because of it. Cyber bullying and

other forms of peer-to-peer violence can affect young people each time they log in to social media or instant messaging platforms. When browsing the internet, children may be exposed to hate speech and violent content - including messages that incite self-harm and even suicide. Most alarming is the threat of online sexual exploitation and abuse. Also, from the report it is clear that 80% of children in 25 countries reported feeling in danger of sexual abuse or exploitation online. It has never been easier for child sex offenders to contact their potential victims, share imagery and encourage others to commit offences. Children may be victimized through the production, distribution and consumption of sexual abuse material, or they may be groomed for sexual exploitation, with abusers attempting to meet them in person or exhort them for explicit content.

In the digital world, any person from any location can create and store sexually exploitative content. Child sex offenders may even livestream sexual abuse from the confines of their homes, directing on-demand abuse of children far away. Internet abuse may also include cyber-bullying or online bullying (Bullying and

Telecommunications Law 2002). It means when a child is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another child using the internet and/or mobile devices. Cyberbullying and other forms of peer-to-peer violence can affect young people each time they log in to social media or instant messaging platforms. When browsing the internet, children may be exposed to hate speech and violent content - including messages that incite self-harm and even suicide. Social networking sites are often used by perpetrators as an easy way to access children and young people for sexual abuse. 80% of children in 25 countries reported feeling in danger of sexual abuse or exploitation online. More than a third of young people in 30 countries report being cyberbullied, with 1 in 5 skipping school because of it. Of teens who are dealing with digital abuse, 96% also face psychological abuse, physical violence, and sexual abuse from their partners. Reports showed that digital abuse increased by 101% from 2019 to 2020.

Signs of digital abuse may include

- a) **Bullying and harassment:** the predator tries to control who you interact with online.

- b) Sharing and production of abusive images of children: the predator sends or posts negative, insulting, or threatening messages
- c) Monitoring and stalking: the predator constantly uses social media to keep an eye on our usage.
- d) Exposure to pornographic images and other offensive material via the internet
- e) Sexual coercion
- f) Possessiveness and control
- g) Cyberbullying
- h) Grooming
- i) sexual abuse
- j) child sexual exploitation.
- k) steals or demands to give password
- l) posts content that you are uncomfortable with.

Indicators of child abuse

- a) changes in behaviour and mood of the child victim
- b) change in attitude towards the use of computer or phone could have their origin in abusive behaviour.
- c) Always prefer to be alone
- d) Always worry
- e) Not eating properly

- f) Not mingling with family and friends
- g) Not to talk to anyone

Addressing a child who is abused digitally

- a) listen carefully to child's saying
- b) let them know they've done the right thing by telling you
- c) tell them it's not their fault
- d) say you'll take them seriously
- e) don't confront the alleged abuser
- f) explain what you'll do next
- g) report what the child has told you as soon as possible.
- h) Report abuse

Effects of online abuse

Online abuse can have long-lasting effects on children and young people. It can lead to:

- i. Anxiety
- ii. self-harm
- iii. eating disorders
- iv. suicidal thoughts.

E safety measures

The following are the e safety measures so that children and young people could be prevented from Digital abuse.

- a) Children should be given awareness about the bad effects of online abuse
- b) They should be advised not to give out personal information, particularly their name, address or school, mobile phone numbers to anyone they do not know
- c) advised not to share any personal information to social networking and online gaming sites.
- d) Children could be monitored by the parents while using social networks,
- e) Children could be made to understand importance of taking a parent or trusted adult with them if they meet someone face to face whom they have only previously met on-line.
- f) Every school should have the provision of e-safety training and for ensuring that appropriate e-safety awareness raising activities are presented to children in school.
- g) Children and young people should be warned about the risks of taking sexually explicit pictures of themselves and sharing them on the internet or by text.

- h) Young people should be given awareness on the legal implications and the risks they are taking.
- i) Tells your teen who they can and cannot be friends with on social media
- j) Monitors your teen's social media accounts
- k) Uses the "check-in" function on social media accounts to monitor and keep tabs on your teen

Online safety advice

The following safety measures can be used to protect children from on line abuse

Parent Info: A website for parents about life online.

Think Know: A website from National Crime Agency's CEOP Command about keeping children and young people safe on the internet.

UK Safer Internet Centre: Promoting the safe and responsible use of technology for young people.

Internet Matters: A site to help empower parents and carers to keep children safe in a digital world.

Conclusion

Digital abuse, just like any other form of abuse, can have serious consequences for both the perpetrator and the victim. If a person is invading your privacy, hurting you, stalking you, harassing you, or doing other similar things, then there could be legal consequences for them. Necessary steps could be taken to give awareness on the consequences of digital abuse among the children and the various safety measures could be adopted for wise use of social media and internet.

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