

"New Cyberworries and Solutions"

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Dear Ryan: "I've heard there are new Cyberworries. Can you give us more information and some solutions, please?"

Sincerely,

Concerned Adults

Dear Concerned Adults:

I am glad you are concerned about new cyberworries that are popping up daily. Hopefully I can provide you with some helpful tips that will allow you to get some more sleep. Awareness is the key to learning and learning leads to knowledge. And knowledge is power so they say. Einstein once said, "if you can't explain it to a six year old, you don't understand it yourself." There are many six year olds out there explaining cyberdevices and cyberpractices to adults. Let me help flip the equation for you.

Currently there are areas of the Web 2.0 that are hidden from adults but that are actively being used by youths. Such areas include, image boards, social media sites for self promotion, sites dedicated to gossip and bullying and image blogs promoting self harm, eating disorders and suicide. There is a virtual playground free from adult oversight in the palm of our youths hands.

First I should give a brief explanation of what Web 2.0 means. There has been a shift in how the web is being used. This slipped past me slowly because I was using the web daily. But stepping back it's a little easier to see the larger picture over the last few years.

Looking at this chart may help you to see the change that has occurred. (see below)

With this change in how youth think, act and interact I want to highlight a few of the top conveyances that they are using to share themselves with the world. It needs to be noted that these apps can also be on your child's iPod and accessed through wi-fi.

Charts are helpful so I'll add another.

<http://origin.library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1101442788765-40/Chart+2+-+Newsletter.pdf>

With these top apps, I often see many concerning things that are being posted. I see youth talking about normal topics such as dating, school and normal teen angst, but I also see youth talking about issues that should be discussed with parents or a therapist. Youth are discussing, depression, eating disorders, self injury and suicide. With the apps that have image or video sharing, youth are sharing pictures of their bodies when struggling

with eating disorders. They share pictures of their scars or active bleeding cuts. They share stories of suicidal thoughts or attempts. I've even witnessed youth saying they have taken an overdose of pills or that they will commit suicide on an identified date. Other youth rally to "save" them and talk them out of committing suicide. Others watch not knowing what to do. On all of these apps besides Facebook, there is not good way to report this. None of these apps have real connections to these kids besides an email account that they use to log on with. None of these apps have an ability to contact the parent. It would be difficult to contact the police if the teen doesn't have any identifier to their name or location.

I've given you an abridged version with the most concerning information up this point. So now I must offer you some suggestions to help keep your kids safe. Back to Einstein's quote. "If you can't explain it to a six year old, you don't understand it yourself." You need to get informed. I invite you to use this discussion to be the open door to walk through to get started in knowing how the world is changing and what youth are embracing while you are resisting. Stop resisting and get on board. At very minimum, get a Facebook account. I know you've been saying that you don't want to talk to anyone from high school. And you don't have to. Talk to your kids on Facebook. Friend your kids on Facebook and friend their friends. Keep in the loop. Be a cool and understanding parent online. Not an overbearing one. If you see a post that your child makes that's concerning, talk to them in person about it, not on Facebook. Don't be the helicopter parent on Facebook for everyone to see.

Download a couple of the apps above. If you are extremely resistant, then only download Instagram. Set up your profile and just observe what's being said and posted. Search hashtag words like #cut, #cutter, #blithe, #suicide, #ana, #mia, #thinspo. Look at those posts and see what other words kids are hashtagging and connecting to that picture. This is a very easy way to learn about how they are connecting and sharing. This will quickly open your eyes to the culture that is happening with kids that have mental health concerns.

By downloading these apps and becoming educated, you are completing the "A" in the mnemonic device "ACE" that will help you stay on track. The "A" stands for awareness. If you are not aware of what youth are doing on their phones and iPod touch's, then you can't be part of the solution. Reading this should be your first step into becoming aware. The "C" is for communicating with your children. You should communicate with youth and ask questions about what apps people are using and what kind of stuff they see on the apps. Ask if they ever see anything that upsets or concerns them. Open the dialogue. Finally "E" is to help remind you to educate your youth about healthy and safe posting on these apps. There is no way to keep kids off these apps and sites. They will find a way. The best practice is to teach them how to behave on these apps safely.

Someone at a conference once asked me if there was a website that had information about all of these apps posted. I told them that I have not found one that has this information all converged. I've found this information through my research, having the apps myself and talking to teens connected to my family. I am passing along my findings so that you can start your own insight into the life of your teen. It's a rocky road to travel but well worth the destination. Good luck.

Ryan Klingensmith, LPC, NCC

Ryan Klingensmith has worked with children and teenagers with mental health concerns since 1994. He has held roles such as therapist, supervisor and clinical director in several residential and outpatient settings. He currently works as a Prevention Specialist with Addiction Medicine Services through WPIC and works closely with several schools in Allegheny County providing support and direction for the Student Assistance Programs (SAP). He does cyberbullying and social media safety presentations for students in middle and high schools as well as for parents and teachers. Part of his presentation will be based upon the work of Sameer Hinduja, PhD and Justin Patchin, PhD at the Cyberbullying Research Center.

Ryan will conduct a workshop at the May 2014 STAR-Center Conference on the topic of "Teen Social Media and Mental Health Usage Trends for Professionals". This will be a 2 ½ hour session, allowing him to offer a more in depth presentation/discussion on this topic. Watch for our full conference program that will be available on our web site in early January.

Chart 1

Web 1.0 (first generation)		Web 2.0 (second generation)
Downloading	→	Uploading
Consuming	→	Creating
Corporate	→	Personal
Separate Media	→	Converged Media
Static	→	Interactive

<i>Our Generation</i>	<i>Our Kid's Generation</i>
Decorated our lockers and bedrooms	Decorate their webpage
Wrote diaries	Write blogs
Had yearbooks	Have Facebook
Had reality	Have reality TV
Friends were our buddies in our neighborhood	Friends are defined by Facebook
Talked on a phone connected to the wall	Have a phone in their pocket they don't talk on
Talked to our friends with full sentences	Text their friends in fragmented verse
Shared stories of what happened	Take a video and post to YouTube what happened
Looked at pictures in picture albums	Look at pictures on their phones/ipods/iPads etc
Played video games on an Atari (if you had one)	Play video games on the bus on their phone

Wrote notes to love interests

Text “Ur a QT” or “I think ur hot” to love interests