

The dark side of digital

By  Antoinette Pombo

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It's their 'world in their hands', an existence driven by instant access to information, laced with a plethora of social connections.



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Young people interact using their cellphones for an average of about four hours per day. That's plenty of time to discover the world through these 'virtual extensions of themselves', but unfortunately it's also more than enough time for cyber predators to ruin lives.

Internet safety is no longer just about parental intervention in the form of blocking inappropriate content. It's also about ensuring young people don't fall prey to the dangers lurking online by continually reminding them of the potential risks.

These are some of the dangers prowling on social media sites:

- **Cyber-bullying:** It's not just strangers you have to worry about when it comes to social media, 42% of children experience some form of cyber-bullying and 57% of them don't tell their parents about it, according to Action Alert. Cyber bullying includes harassment, threats, insults or any form of torment delivered online. Unfortunately many a vicious, embarrassing or hurtful message has ended in suicide or even murder. It's important for young people to feel like they can discuss their concerns with their parents. And, for parents to help guide their children so that the bullying doesn't lead to depression or retaliation. A parent will be able to determine whether it's serious enough to report it to the school or open a police case.

- **Catfishing:** This involves internet predators who fabricate online identities and social circles in order to gradually trick people into emotional or romantic relationships. Young people should check their own online persona on social media sites to make sure they are not being used by fraudsters to lure victims. Anything can be used against you so

even innocent posts can fuel a threat if it lands in the wrong hands, so posts should be tempered down.

- **Phishing:** A close relative of Catfishing, phishing involves conning people into revealing personal information or financial details that could lead to identity theft. It needs to be strongly impressed upon young people that they should not reveal anything online that they wouldn't mention out loud in public.
- **Sexting:** Sending messages of a sexual nature online holds a very good chance of landing in front of the wrong eyeballs at some point... Even the nicest boyfriends or girlfriends can turn.

A big part of keeping young people safe incorporates helping them apply self-control online.

ABOUT ANTOINETTE POMBO

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