



How has Internet social networking affected children and their mental health care?



By Dr. Douglas Berger, M.D., Ph D. | **ASK THE EXPERT**



Readers may remember that we had a column in the July 2010 issue regarding being "Hooked on the 'Book." This time we would like to discuss some other aspects of mental health and social networking, some helpful, some not so helpful. For example, we have seen a number of cases of children alienating or bad-mouthing ("cyber-bullying") others, situations where families get hints as to what a child with problems is thinking, and families and therapists can get information about a child or family member's risk for acting out, violence, or even suicide from their social networking sites.

For persons who have completed a violent act or attempted / completed suicide, looking at that person's social media page may help understand what issues the person was dealing with and/or their mental state. It is possible to get a sense of a person's peer group and level of socialization from comments on these pages. Certainly most people have read about law enforcement looking at the Facebook pages of criminals and victims of crimes.

As when use of the Internet itself became widespread, the explosion of social media use is just another aspect of this digital age where an enormous amount of information is available about many people, especially children and adolescents who are both adept and engrossed in using these sites. Warning signs that use of these sites has given the child trouble are when the child is upset about negative comments others have posted about them, when they are rejected or removed from friends lists, etc.

Interventions include ascertaining the child's dependency on using these sites at the expense of direct social interaction, confirming whether there are symptoms of depression or other psychiatric illness, and seeing how the family dynamics play out in the child's feelings of self-esteem and aggravation level at adult society and peer-groups. Professional evaluation should be sought whenever there is a hint that things may not be going well for a child.

The discussions herein are meant as general information and advice only. Each person needs to make their own personal life decisions and to contact a mental health professional for

consultation if deemed appropriate.

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The Meguro Counseling Center provides mental health care for individuals, couples, and families, in both English and Japanese. www.megurocounseling.com

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