Resource for Parents/Caregivers: Protecting Identity

Protecting and Valuing Identity

We may not realise it, but our identities have value. They have an intrinsic value to us, that once devalued can take a long time to restore. But aside from that value to us, they have a value to others. The type of value to others can be measured only by our relationship to the external party and by their motives.

As we move forward into a tightly inter-connected world, we vastly expand the boundaries within which we reveal our identities to external parties and hence increase the risk that our identity may be tarnished or used in other inappropriate ways.

A major issue that we face as a culture and society is that we seem unwilling to completely acknowledge and accept that the world beyond our own schemas may well be a bleaker place than our own. For example, when we choose to use online tools such as FaceBook or Windows Live Messenger and reveal the intimate details of our daily lives, we do so with the belief that the intent and context within which we shared those details will be maintained.

If we were to consciously accept that our innocent sharing of thoughts, feelings, photos, and videos might be taken outside the scope of our expectations, then we might think twice about sharing them with the world.

Instead, what we seem to be accepting is that it is ok to take the sorts of conversations and sharing of experiences that used to go on in our living rooms, over the lunch room table, or in the bedroom and broadcast them to the world via online or electronic communication tools.

Valuing Identity: Continued

By expanding the audience to include a vast number of people whose motives we can never fully conceive of, we devalue and put at jeopardy our identity. We cannot predict the future values that our identities might have for others, but as of now they include the following:

1. **Sexual predation**. It has been a long known fact that online and electronic communication has vastly enhanced the capabilities of sexual predators to find and groom their victims. Revealing parts of our identities and personalities helps sexual predators strengthen the bonds that they seek to forge with their victims.
2. **Employability**. Employers are utilising online background checks as part of their employment process.
3. **Sexting**. Sexting involves the distribution of naked photographs of oneself utilising electronic communication tools like camera equipped cellular phones. This is a significant issue in the United States of America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.
4. **Identity Theft**. Social networking sites like FaceBook are combed regularly to extract the basic information about an individual required for purposes such as acquiring credit, buying online etc. This generally has a significant impact on the individual's ability to purchase goods on credit due to the damage to their credit rating.
5. **Real-world theft**. Knowing when people are away and for how long (as well as where they live) is a gold mine for burglars.

Now whilst these represent risks to both us and our identities, they don't take into account the emotional damage done. Becoming better at reducing the audience with which we share our identities is therefore something we must all learn.

To learn more about online safety with John Parsons view his TV and Radio interviews here

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