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Gen Alpha, Please Don’t Have Unrestricted Internet Access like Us Gen Zers Did

During my experience at the park, I was stunned to hear what came out of the mouths of the children nearby. Playing on the playground to rekindle my inner child with my friends, I enjoyed myself immensely. Near the end of my experience at the park that day, my friend sat on a spring rider, which was clearly incredibly small for her. Teasing her, I also took a seat behind her. Of course, the spring rider was unable to fit both of us. Dying of laughter, we took a photo to memorialize the moment. All of a sudden, we heard children, who were likely still in elementary school, insult us. Using internet slang I never expected them to use; the children called us gay in an obscene fashion. Traversing the internet at an early age, children adopted crude mannerisms from the internet.

Despite the hateful comments, I was not offended. Instead, I simply laughed since I never expected to have insults thrown at my friend and me at the park. Despite finding the situation staggering and hilarious, I found myself concerned for the children. My main concern lies with the parents never taking any measures to discipline their children and how the children learned the slang in the first place. Based on the slang the children likely learned from TikTok, I discerned the children were exposed to inappropriate content and an obscene online environment due to a lack of online supervision. Therefore, after my experience at the park, I felt concerned about excessive screen time and the lack of online supervision.

Allowing children to roam the web without restriction or supervision negatively affects their behavior. When children freely roam the web without supervision, they inevitably stumble across inappropriate content. Witnessing inappropriate content, children imitate and exemplify the behaviors of the perpetrators behind the inappropriate content (Syam Nasution et al. 5). In my experience at the park, I deduced the children absorbed offensive slang from the web based on my experience surfing through TikTok comment sections. Witnessing offensive slang repeated by others on the internet, the children believed inappropriate behavior was acceptable since they observed multiple others repeating the slang. Believing such behavior was acceptable, the children regurgitated the slang at complete strangers having fun at the park. Without guardian supervision over their children’s online activity, children have difficulty assessing whether the behavior they observe online is appropriate or not. Thus, children end up regurgitating the content they see online.

When children adopt obscene manners from the inappropriate content they encounter online, parents possess an obligation to discipline their behavior. Contributing to my shock at the park, the children’s parents never took any measures to stop or discipline their children’s behaviors. Instead of correcting their children’s behavior, the parents were seemingly not affected by their children’s behavior. By neglecting to pay attention to their children when they insulted my friend and me, the parents affirmed their children’s behavior. Similar to how mice will play when the cat is away, children will feel encouraged to bully others when they lack the attention of their parents (Syam Nasution et al. 5). In my experience at the park, the children believed insulting my friend and I was acceptable since their parents never interfered. Without correction from their parents, children will continue unacceptable behavior. By correcting unacceptable behavior, parents discourage such behavior. Parents should always supervise their children’s behavior, correcting their behavior when necessary.

Online supervision is equally essential as in-person supervision. Monitoring children’s online activity and limiting their screen time is imperative in ensuring children’s morality is not negatively swayed online, which spills into their manners in person. Supervision falls to the parents, who “…play a vital role in the impact of social media usage by limiting hours on the computer and also monitoring sites visited,” (Ante-Contreras 19). When parents monitor their children’s online activity, parents possess the ability to control what content their children encounter online. In addition to monitoring the content children witness online, limiting screen time controls how immersed children become in the online environment. Limiting online immersion limits the children’s exposure to offensive manners, such as the slang the children at the park threw at my friend and me.

By being restricted from immersing in an online environment at an early age, children will look up to their authority figures’ behaviors. Authority figures in children’s lives have an obligation to encourage compassion and empathy. By encouraging both compassion and empathy, children will adopt kinder manners. Ideally, many children would practice compassion and empathy on a mass level. Instilling compassion and empathy in most children would cause them to find acceptance from their peers in a healthy manner. While “the American Academy of Pediatrics found that acceptance by and contact with peers is an important element of adolescent life,” fitting in with peers also plays a crucial role in a young child’s mind (Ante-Contreras 19). At the park, the children specifically used internet slang since they would fit in with the online environment they were exposed to. On the other hand, if the children stayed away from an obscene climate online, they would adopt kinder manners from their authority figures and peers. By adopting kinder manners from authority figures on a mass level, children will have a healthier manner of fitting in.

Immersing themselves in an online environment at an early age, children absorbed ill manners from the web. Lacking online supervision, children encounter inappropriate content online. When children encounter inappropriate content online, they end up imitating the behaviors they witness online. Ensuring their children do not imitate inappropriate behavior from the internet, parents should monitor their children’s online activity. Limiting online immersion decreases the chance of children imitating inappropriate behaviors online. Turning to their authority figures, since their online immersion is limited, children will imitate their behaviors. Therefore, parents and other authority figures in their lives should encourage positive behaviors, such as compassion and empathy. Raising children in an environment surrounded by compassion and empathy instead of an unrestricted online environment, children will practice those values toward others. Ideally, children will cherish compassion and empathy when they grow into adults. If these children cherish compassion and empathy, they will positively contribute to society in various ways.

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