Facebook joins South African fight against cyberbullying

TMG Digital | 29 November, 2016 11:34

Global social media giant Facebook and a South African non-profit organisation are collaborating with government and civil society on a digital parenting initiative to combat cyber threats for children, including bullying.

The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) and Facebook today hosted more than 40 members of government, academia, civil society and private sector at the Jozi Hub, 44 Stanley Avenue, in Johannesburg to discuss the findings of a new study about Digital Parenting and Online Safety in South Africa.

The study on Digital Parenting, supported by Facebook and launched by the CJCP, looks at how South African parents view their children's use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and provides insight into parents' experiences of their children's digital activity and interactions.

It focuses on ways in which parents can mediate their children's online use in a way that helps keep them safe, while at the same time doesn't take away from potential opportunities.

"There are clear knowledge gaps and challenges around digital parenting in South Africa," says Patrick Burton, Executive Director of the CJCP.

"That's why we are mobilising resources to explore the issues, reveal where the problems may lie, and start formulating solutions that are designed to cater to South African society. Our discussions with key stakeholders at our event will help plot a way forward for developing effective strategies and policies that balance children's online safety with their continued access to online opportunities and rights," says Burton.

"For Facebook, making the world more open and connected means giving people the power and tools to safely share some of their most important moments with others," says Ebele Okobi, Public Policy Director Facebook, Africa. "We are excited to work with stakeholders in industry, government and education to showcase ways that parents can help their children maximise the benefits of digital tools while safeguarding them from risks such as cyberbullying and inappropriate content."

The study reveals that many parents have limited digital literacy and their children are often more advanced in their digital knowledge and skills. These parents go to their children for help when they need to do something online.

While most parents recognise both potential risks and opportunities their children may encounter online, they remain unaware of effective strategies to balance the two. Interacting with their children around ICTs and social media is challenging for most of these parents.

Recommendations based on the findings of the study include:

- Expand education to parents to provide them with the necessary skill and knowledge which will allow them to help their children when it comes to their digital and online activity.
- Increase parental knowledge regarding the use of technologies being used by their children, by learning with them, and allowing their children to teach them and help them understand the online tools they are using.
- Discussions about appropriate online behaviour should take place between parents/caregivers and their children.
- A mixed-method approach combining active mediation with direct intervention might help parents protect their children from severe online risks, while also helping to empower them through online engagement and learning how to manage good and safe online conduct.
- Children should be encouraged to take on responsibility for their own online safety as much as possible, focusing on empowerment, responsible behaviour and good digital citizenship.

"As this responsibility of online safety is increasingly placed into children's hands, internet safety messaging should look to build up confidence, resilience and responsible digital citizenship skills among them," the survey authors state.

Parents, meanwhile, "need to have open and honest relationships with their children, making it easier for them to trust their parents and speak to them about their online use".

http://www.timeslive.co.za/scitech/2016/11/29/Facebook-joins-South-African-fight-against-cyberbullying