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Back to school and back online: Catholic Charities mental health counselors share tips for parents & caregivers

Submitted on Behalf of Catholic Charities

According to a U.S. surgeon general's advisory issued earlier this year, there are increasing concerns about the impact of social media, both positively and negatively, on youth mental health. With the start of a new school year weeks away, the mental health counselors at Catholic Charities of Buffalo are sharing tips for caregivers to help keep their children and teens safe online.

"With technology commonly used by students as young as kindergarten, and even more so as we have embraced virtual schooling on a larger scale, the Catholic Charities mental health counselors are frequently asked by parents and caregivers at our children's clinics for any tips on how to keep their child and teen safe on the internet," said Michelle Abraham, LCSW-R, assistant director of clinical services, Catholic Charities. "As you would deal with any other issue, talk with your kids and make sure they are comfortable sharing details with you about their online activity, especially if they experience some-

thing hurtful online."

"Our best advice for caregivers is to build a trusting relationship with your child, listen without judgement, and offer compassion instead of lecturing," Abraham continued.

Here are some other tips Catholic Charities mental health counselors recommend:

√ Consider having a family electronics basket and normalize turning in electronics during meals, homework and at bedtime. Even 30-minute increments can be a great start to limit screentime.

√ Be aware of what your child is doing online and talk with them about being safe and not sharing personal information.

√ Caregivers are encouraged to check their child's phone, tablet and computer on occasion, especially if they notice a change in behavior. Let them know that you will randomly ask them and be monitoring their usage.

√ Many cell phone carriers have special safety features parents can use such as turning off the phone after a certain time or tracking location.

√ Use parental controls to restrict access to dangerous or unwanted sites and limit the amount of time the device can be used.

√ Think twice before removing social media, as not only does this risk social isolation, it also doesn't teach them new behavior. Instead, spend time online with your child to teach them about appropriate online etiquette.

√ The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends less than one to two hours of screentime per day for children. While technology may often be needed for homework, try to engage in other "unplugged" activities such as sports, reading, art, music, or just playing outside to limit the time your child spends online, in front of a screen.

Abraham said, "Most importantly, if you notice increased online usage and changing behaviors in your child, consider seeking outside counseling with a trained clinician or speak to your child's school about what mental wellness resources may be available."

Catholic Charities offers individual, children and family counsel-

ing services throughout the eight counties of Western New York. For more information visit, ccwny.org/mental-wellness.

More About Catholic Charities

Catholic Charities has helped individuals and families in need since its founding in 1923. That need is varied and widespread - from emergency assistance to mental health counseling and treatment, and from specialized services for older adults to help with job training and education. Catholic Charities empowers children, families and seniors to achieve meaningful, healthy and productive lives. In all situations, Catholic Charities delivers support to meet immediate needs, and then assesses clients for other needs to ensure long-term success. An excellent steward of the contributions it receives, Catholic Charities earns high ratings from Charity Navigator for transparency and sound fiscal management, and is a Better Business Bureau Accredited Charity. Catholic Charities also receives highest ratings from the Council on Accreditation for quality service. For information, visit ccwny.org.

NYS DCP offers tips to protect older adults from consumer fraud scams

Aug. 21 is National Senior Citizens Day

Submitted by the New York Department of State's Division of Consumer Protection

For this week's "Tuesday's Tips," the New York Department of State's Division of Consumer Protection is offering guidance to help prevent and protect seniors from consumer fraud and scammers in advance of National Senior Citizens Day on Aug. 21.

Financial fraud and exploitation is one of the most prevalent types of elder abuse, and a recent AARP report estimates that the annual loss of victims of financial abuse in the U.S. is assessed to be at least \$28.3 billion.

"Older adults are too often targeted by predators that use a number of ever-evolving consumer fraud scams to steal personal information, money or more," Secretary of State Robert J. Rodriguez said. "To help better protect our loved ones, these tips help to warn older adults

and their family members about the different kinds of fraudulent schemes scammers use so they can avoid falling prey to their tricks."

New York State Office for the Aging Director Greg Olsen said, "Scammers often use seemingly realistic or convincing scenarios to trick people into sending money or providing personal information. Older adults can protect themselves from being defrauded by exercising caution and by not clicking links or providing personal information to a person or organization that has contacted you unexpectedly. If you need assistance, or have a concern about scams, you can find local help by contacting NY Connects at 1-800-342-9871."

New York State Office of Children and Family Services Acting Commissioner Suzanne Miles-Gustave said, "Financial fraud

and exploitation of our elder New Yorkers literally robs them of the resources they need to maintain their independence, provide for their health care and other vital assistance that ensures their well-being. These crimes are often some of the most difficult to prevent and can inflict untold trauma upon the victims and their families. We thank our partners with the Division of Consumer Protection for offering these important tools and tips. You can also contact our bureau of adult services at 1-844-697-3505 for referrals on money management services and other financial programs to help protect these vulnerable New Yorkers."

Some of the most common older adult scams include:

√ Medical Device Scam: Unsolicited prerecorded messages, known as "robocalls," offering free medical alert devices when

the caller provides an address and credit card information.

√ Grandparent Scam: Scammers call or email asking for money while impersonating a beloved grandchild who is in some kind of trouble.

√ Ghosting Scam: Identity thieves obtain personal information about deceased persons from obituaries, funeral homes, hospitals, stolen death certificates and online websites, and use this information to establish credit and open accounts, take out loans, receive benefits, or even collect tax refunds filed under the stolen identity.

√ Jury Duty Scam: Scammers pretending to be law enforcement officers or court officials contact individuals to inform them that they have failed to report to jury duty and must pay a fine by credit card to avoid an arrest.

√ SEE SCAM, continued on Page 5

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PUBLISHER Skip Mazenauer GM/MANAGING EDITOR Joshua Maloni

EDITOR IN CHIEF/SENTINEL EDITOR Terrence P. Duffy WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR Joshua Maloni

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES Colleen Rebmann, Jeff Calarco

ACCOUNTING/OFFICE MANAGER Kim Stacharczyk

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT Jennifer Walowitz

PRODUCTION MANAGER/ GRAPHIC DESIGNER Wendy Juzwicki

CLASSIFIED MANAGER Wendy Puffer

CIRCULATION Kim Stacharczyk

SENIOR REPORTERS Michael J. Billoni, Patrick J. Bradley, Alice Gerard, Karen Keefe

CONTRIBUTORS Timothy Chipp, Kevin and Dawn Cobello, Michelle Blackley Glynn, Wayne Peters, Elijah Robinson, Lauren Zaepfel

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1859 Whitehaven Road Grand Island, N.Y. 14072

Phone 716-773-7676 Fax 716-773-7190

Editorial:

Dispatch@wnypapers.com Sentinel@wnypapers.com

Advertising:

NFPDesign@wnypapers.com

Classifieds:

NFPClassifieds@wnypapers.com

Circulation:

NFPcirculation@wnypapers.com

Legals:

legalnotice@wnypapers.com

Website:

wnypapers.com

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