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Vulnerability and safeguarding: the social work 'trump cards' for the digital age

Conference or Workshop Item

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"Vulnerability and Safeguarding":
the social work trump cards

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Contemporary social work

Waterhouse and McGhee (2002)

- Sound childcare decisions

- Effective inter-agency working

- Inter-disciplinary collaboration

- Child's best interests is to have paramountcy at all times

Challenges of the Internet and social media in social work

- **Fostering**
  - Fursland (2011)
  - Community Care article (2012)

Challenges of the Internet and social media in social work

- **Adoption**
  - Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (2012)
  - Oakwater (2012)
  - Post Adoption Resource Centre, Australia (Adams, 2012)

The reaction by the social work profession

- polemic
- tsunami effect

Michael's story

- 13 years of age

- posts a nude picture of himself on Facebook

- Michael's foster carers are alerted to the picture by his grandmother

- Michael offers no explanation as to why he posted the picture

- Michael on the verge of being excluded from school

Michael's story

- Social Worker's solution is to encourage the foster carers to set up a false Facebook account and monitor Michael.

Michael's story

"It's about the foster carer protecting the privacy, because that privacy can be compromised by other people, because Facebook is quite dangerous, other people can get in touch and I'm not saying we have done this with every case, but in those cases where the children are vulnerable.." (Social Work Practitioner)

Michael's story

- Michael performing for his peers (boyd and Marwick, 2011)

- Michael engaging in developmental tasks (Hill, 1983)

- Michael exercising impression management (Goffman, 1963)

Monitoring and management

Pew Internet Project (Madden et al. 2012)

- – 50% of parents of adolescent children use parental controls to monitor activity online
- – parents forge connections on social media with their adolescent children as part of passively observing their behaviour
- – Parents worried by;
  - reputational damage
  - stranger danger
  - personal disclosure of a sensitive nature

Monitoring and management

– Adolescents are reluctant to be 'friended' by their parents (boyd and Marwick, 2011)

Risks posed by surveillance

- Adolescents ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of both the online and offline worlds

- Breeds a culture of mistrust

"Uncertainty over parenting roles and children's independence….is resulting in a tactical dance between parents and children. Parents' attempts to control their children's use of the Internet and children's attempts to evade control (Livingstone, 2005)

Ethical dilemma

- Surveillance (active or passive)
  - Misinterpretation of communication

- Active mediation

Issues of power

- Adults are not able to access the content of communication being shared (Buckingham, 2007)

- Young people do want to exercise control (boyd and Marwick, 2011)

- Children's right agenda and social work practice (Articles 12, 13 and 16)

Fostering Network

"You wouldn't expect children to cross a road without teaching them how, and the same applies to the web. However, you wouldn't ban children from crossing the roads because of the dangers, nor make them feel that every time they do they are likely to get run over, a positive and safe approach is what is called for" (Fostering Network, 2011)

Questions