**Is social media ruining our kids?**

By Sreedhar Potarazu, CNN Opinion

Updated 8:27 AM ET, Thu October 22, 2015

It is 10 o'clock. Do you know where your children are?

A decade ago, if your answer to that question was, "Yes, at home," you felt comfortable that your children were in a safe and secure place. That's no longer true. Now that kids have smartphones and tablets, they can hang out on a dangerous street corner without ever leaving their room.

A recent Pew Research Center study found that 92% of teens go online daily and that 24% say they are online "constantly." If you think they are on Facebook and you can follow their activities on the site, think again. A survey of American teens reported that only 15% of kids say Facebook is their favorite social network. Thirty-three percent choose Instagram, 20% go to Twitter and 19% pick Snapchat, an app that allows them to post pictures -- including nude ones of themselves -- that disappear after view.

Silicon Valley, we have a problem.

The advent of social technology may bear some responsibility for anxiety and depression in adolescents, teenagers and young adults. Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram -- they are all fun -- until things get out of hand.

The facts are almost as depressing as the conditions themselves. The 2014 National College Health Assessment, a survey of nearly 80,000 college students throughout the United States, found that 54% of students reported experiencing overwhelming anxiety in the past 12 months and that 32.6% "felt so depressed that it was difficult to function" during the same period. The study also found that 6.4% had "intentionally, cut, burned, bruised or otherwise injured" themselves, that 8.1% had seriously considered suicide and that 1.3% had attempted suicide.

Those statistics are horrifying, and we have no one to blame but ourselves.

CNN, which studied the social media habits of more than 200 eighth-graders in partnership with child development experts for its special report "#Being13: Inside the Secret World of Teens," found that some 13-year-olds check their social media feeds 100 times a day. But that's hardly surprising when you consider that 90% of teens have used social media and 75% of them have profiles on social networking sites, according to a survey by Common Sense Media.

Children are growing up now in a world where they expect immediate response, gratification and notification. Their brains no longer have time to evolve; they must adapt to change in an instant, and the results are distressing. The difficulties of growing up have never been so public.

Social technology provides a platform where things can run wild. Imagine the stress of high school -- the competition for popularity, the pressure to fit in, the judgmental nature of social activities -- at an accelerated pace.

We try to protect our children from wandering off into the darkness on their own, and it turns out they are doing exactly that -- online. When they get older and "ready," we send them off to college, where they face more pressures.

So what should we do? We can start by pulling our head out of the sand. The more we promote social technology to our kids as a competition to be the best, the more we fuel disaster. Here are some remedies:

• Create more structured forms of social media that prevent children from going "all in" at the start. How is it that a kid needs to get a learner's permit before he gets a driver's license, but he can hop aboard the Snapchat train with a few clicks on his phone? A graduated mechanism that enables young people to ease into social technology might help prevent the abuses that lead to anxiety and depression.

• Provide a way for parents and administrators to get feedback on their kids' online use without intruding on privacy and alert them to impending dangers. It is likely that such a mechanism already exists.

• Add courses on social technology and responsibility to our school curricula. Many adolescents do not understand that what they do online exposes them to the whole world -- sometimes forever. It will affect their job searches, their choice of a mate and their careers. If we can teach them about drug and alcohol abuse, we can teach them to exercise prudence in their online communications, too.

• Ease up on the pressure. Do we really have to be noticed all the time? Does every second have to be a beauty contest? Our kids need to stop feeling that they have to outperform their peers every minute of every day. They need to know that they don't have to market themselves constantly, and that social media can be a mechanism for fostering collaborative relationships -- not a medium for fueling competition, aggression and irresponsible behavior that contributes to anxiety and depression.

• Pay more attention and provide more awareness. From a mental health standpoint, schools and colleges should stop waiting for symptoms to surface, because then it may be too late. They should offer counseling service.