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Late nights on social media making primary school students fall asleep in the classroom

Tim Williams, Education Reporter, Sunday Mail (SA)

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PRIMARY school students are so tired from staying up all night on social media or gaming they are falling asleep in lessons on cyber safety and sex education.

A provider of “personal growth” programs in both public and private schools says Year 6 students report being up as late as 4am after spending up to seven hours a night online.

Kidz Biz Education founder Wendy Hill said parents were aiding the addictions of their daughters to social media, and their sons to gaming, by failing to restrict access to smartphones and computers at night.

Ms Hill said parents were also allowing sexting to start at an early age by not banning phones from bedrooms and bathrooms.

And both parents and teachers had their heads in the sand about children’s exposure to violent porn and online predators — often a result of parents giving kids their old phones without activating safety settings, or buying them R-rated games and not realising they depicted sex and rape as well as violence.

Ms Hill said she and her colleagues, who ran workshops for students, staff and parents in about 40 schools in first term, often found children as young as Year 6s with “their heads on their desks” struggling to stay awake.

“When I ask what time are you getting to bed, I am hearing 1, 2, 4 o’clock in the morning,” she said.

Students have reported being up as late as 4am after spending up to seven hours a night online. “I just want parents to be more vigilant about what they do.”

Ms Hill said she and her staff had found:

MORE than half of Year 5s, and almost all students from Year 6 upwards, had seen online porn.

ALMOST none told parents or teachers, even if they came across it by accident, because they feared being banned from the internet.

PRIMARY students wanted to know if it was OK to send pictures of themselves in their underwear and what to do if they walked in on their parents watching porn.

MANY primary teachers naively thought these issues were “high school stuff” and were “gobsmacked” when they heard students raise them in the workshops.

“Many teachers tell me they are shocked at what they are hearing from their students,” Ms Hill said.

“The types of images the children are seeing online is quite rough sex. Once they see it they can’t ‘unsee’ it. It’s quite terrifying for them.”

Boys were at risk of thinking slapping, hitting and choking women during sex was normal because “the girls (in online porn) look like they are enjoying it”, she said.

In September, Ms Hill warned of “little kids simulating sex acts” in the schoolyard as a result of multiple avenues of exposure to porn.

Those included students accessing it at school while searching for cartoon or TV characters as some “pop-up” porn sites got through schools’ internet filters.

At the time, the Education Department said filtering was “rigorous” and staff training in dealing with inappropriate sexualised behaviour was mandatory.