

The Mental Health Impact of Online Learning

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ICT In Education – A Caribbean Forum

Socio-cultural Considerations

Caribbean Telecommunications Union In Partnership With UNESCO And ITU



By Way of Definition...

Mental Health refers to a state of well being in which a person can:

realize one's potential and abilities,
cope with normal life stress and
contribute meaningfully to the community.

It involves the presence of emotional, psychological & social well-being, and not just the absence of disease.

- source: World Health Organisation (WHO)



What Children and Adolescents Need for Their Well-being

External Developmental Assets:

- ▶ Caring and Supportive Family and School Relationships
- ▶ Boundaries and Expectations
- ▶ Constructive Use of Time
- ▶ Empowerment

Internal Developmental Assets:

- ▶ Commitment to learning
- ▶ Positive personal values
- ▶ Social competence
- ▶ Positive identity (Self esteem)

Source: Developmental Assets framework

By Way of Definition...



Online learning...

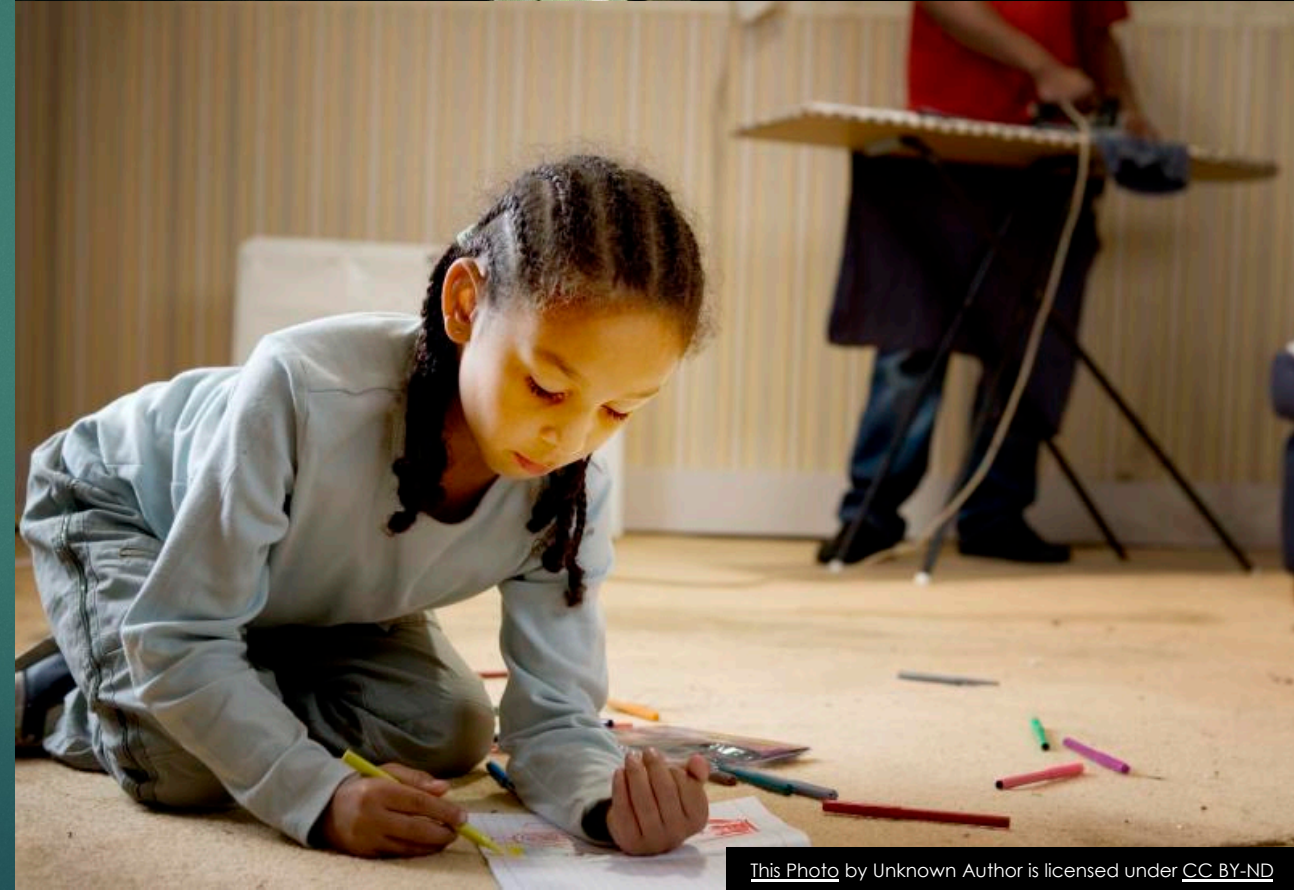
- ▶ Is education that takes place over the internet, and not in the traditional classroom.
- ▶ Can offer users autonomy, flexibility, organization and access to a variety of educational resources.
- ▶ Boosts user motivation, self-efficacy, competence, freedom and independence.
- ▶ BUT...
- ▶ Lacks the social connection and context important for learning
- ▶ Feels like a step down alternative to f2f learning

Online learning in response to a global pandemic is **ACTUALLY**
Emergency Remote Learning.

In emergency remote learning, it is the most vulnerable children who are at the greatest risk of poor mental health, further economic disadvantage, abuse/neglect and more negative outcomes overall.



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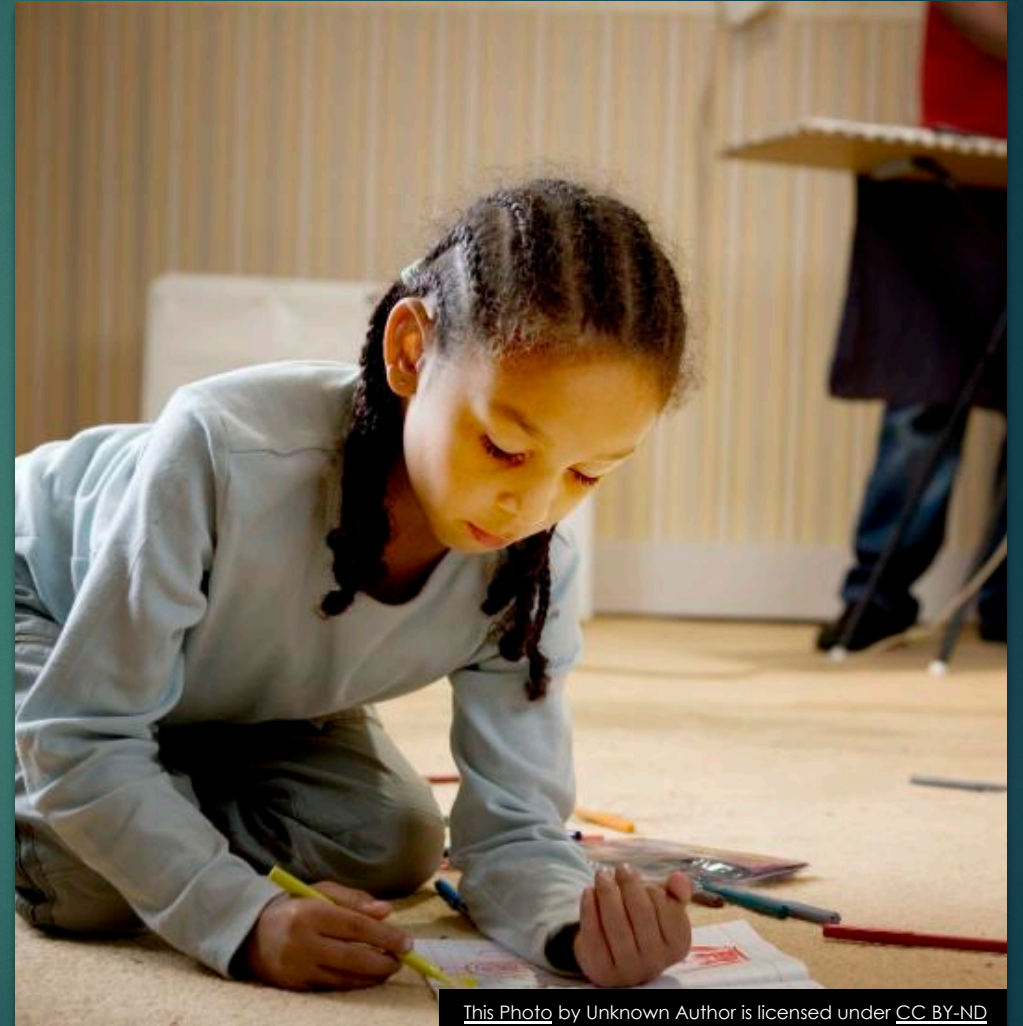
Impact #1. Learning Disrupted by Socio-Economic Factors

Limited Access:

- ▶ Inequity in access to devices, electricity and connectivity
- ▶ Poor physical environments not conducive to learning
- ▶ Poor student engagement due to hunger, lack of materials, working

Poor Parental Supervision or Support:

- ▶ Poor mental health/psychiatric or medical illness
- ▶ Need for supervision/care of younger siblings
- ▶ Work stress/WFH/Unemployment



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Impact #2. Increased exposure to online dangers

Grooming by
adults on social
media/gaming
platforms

Inappropriate
or harmful
content

Oversharing of
personal
information

Cyberbullying –
“school yard
bullying on
steroids”

Online
addictions and
compulsive
behaviours

Impact #3. Developmental Challenges

In preschoolers and toddlers:

- ▶ Underdeveloped language, social and motor skills,
- ▶ Lack of sensory stimulation and
- ▶ Social isolation – no developmental play
- ▶ Resulting in delayed functioning.

In early teens ages 11-14 years:

- ▶ Loss of interest in socializing at home/too much screen time
- ▶ Disinterest or overwhelm with online learning
- ▶ No social connection to “new” classmates they’ve never met.
- ▶ Leading to unseen gaps in adolescent development



Impact #4.

Emotional and Psychological Distress



- ▶ Increase in cases of anxiety and depression
- ▶ Body image concerns and Social Anxiety
- ▶ Social Isolation and Disengagement
- ▶ Traumatic symptoms from loss of “life as we know it”
- ▶ Increase in suicidal ideation and self-harm
- ▶ Increased risk of child sexual abuse and teen pregnancies

“Clinicians are seeing severe anxiety, addiction to games, exposure to porn, somatic complaints, depressive moods, anger and irritation, hyperactivity in primary school students.”

– Mental Health professional, Trinidad & Tobago

What Can Be Done?

Prioritize Mental Health * Advocate for physical school * Support Families *

- ▶ **Build** in easy online access to mental health support
- ▶ **Equip** educators to teach emotion regulation, SEL.
- ▶ **Listen** to your users: students, parents, and educators
- ▶ **Collaborate** to help vulnerable families - CSR
- ▶ **Empower**/educate parents in ICT
- ▶ **Boost** user flexibility, competence and agency
- ▶ **Facilitate** the safe return to in-person classes
- ▶ **Encourage** innovation, scholarships, internships etc.

