

Will cybersafety forum discuss ban on phones?

PANELLISTS from Facebook and Google are to join gardai and children's campaigners at the Government's forum on cybersafety tomorrow – but, it was unclear last night whether they would address the growing calls among parents, guardians and childcare experts for age restrictions on smartphones.

There is increasing alarm over the unfettered access children get to online sites through their phones, following the Irish Daily Mail's campaign and three successive polls showing parents are overwhelmingly in favour of age restrictions.

Leo Varadkar, when asked if he would consider an age

By **Emma Jane Hade**
Political Reporter

restriction for the devices, last month said 'it is definitely something that we will give consideration to'. The Taoiseach told the Mail it would need to be teased out, and if 'anyone has a draft piece of legislation we could examine, I'd certainly welcome that and we'd give it full consideration'.

Communications Minister Denis Naughten is to attend. A spokesman last night confirmed there will be two panel discussions at the event, which will run from 9am to 1pm in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in Dublin tomorrow.

Detective Superintendent Declan Daly from the Garda Síochána will participate in the first panel, alongside Tanya Ward of the Children's Rights Alliance, Ryan Meade who works in public policy for Google, Ana Niculescu of the Hotline.ie anonymous reporting service for illegal online content and Siofra Harkin from the youth advisory panel at webwise.ie.

The second panel includes Niamh Sweeney, who works for Facebook, DIT academic Brian O'Neill, Grainia Long from the ISPC, Antóin Ó Lachtnáin of Digital Rights Ireland, and Cillian Fogarty from the youth advisory panel at Webwise.ie.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Milk of human kindness flows in tough times

AN abiding memory of childhood is that of my grandparents discussing the two World Wars. When, for example, my grandmother added sugar to her tea, she would invariably mention 'the rations'. Even in the Seventies and Eighties, they were still haunted by food shortages and the threat of another war.

That was why they gave thanks for everything they had. Small though their luxuries were, they received them not as entitlements, but as gifts. Indeed, the very idea of entitlement was foreign to their generation.

And, if they loved their neighbours, it was because the wars taught them to value solidarity. You didn't endure the hardships alone but with the support of your community. People took responsibility, not only for themselves, but for each other.

The little they had they shared with family, neighbours and friends. The rationing of food and other necessities made them frugal. Nothing was wasted because you valued whatever you possessed.

I was reminded of my grandparents' way of life when, in the aftermath of Storm Emma, I received a beautiful email from one of our readers. I have never met this person but, through our correspondence, she has become a very dear friend.

With typical wisdom, she wrote: 'Been snowed in for the past few days but, this afternoon, donning boots and gear, I braved my neighbourhood. Have to say, snow brings out the best in people. Everyone I met, as I stumbled along up to my knees in snow, greeted me and were so cheerful. Maybe it takes a crisis for people to come together and help one another. I heard more cheerful words and greetings this day than I have in so long.'

My grandparents lived through two global crises that shaped them for the rest of their lives. The bonds they formed during those years were never broken. It is also why they saw life, and all the gifts of creation, as something sacred.

My friend is correct: crises force us to focus on who and what we value. They sharpen our sense of identity and summon the better angels of our nature. No longer is the emphasis on 'me' and 'mine', but on 'we' and 'ours'.

When scarcity threatens, we

instinctively long to share. We would rather go hungry than see another starve. We would rather put ourselves in danger than leave others to their grim fate.

My grandfather never grew tired of telling me stories of such humble heroism. But these were not tales of bygone times, for I could see evidence of it in the spirit of caring and sharing that knitted those communities together. Theirs was a solidarity forged from the shared sufferings of a painful past.

We all know that this sense of solidarity has, by and large, disappeared.

Yes, we see it in times of mourning or when the storm clouds threaten to break above our heads. But when life returns to 'normal', the bonds fray and we drift apart.

It was dark and the snow must have been a metre deep. But that did not stop one of our neighbours arriving at our door with a carton of milk. 'We're OK,' she said, 'but you have the boys to think of.'

It was such a lovely gesture in the most difficult of circumstances. Immediately, my grandparents, and their forgotten way of life, came to mind. What was once the norm is now the exception.

Crisis do bring out the very best in us. Selflessness, solidarity and neighbourliness are there, but it takes something life-threatening to make them truly shine. When darkness threatens, the people of this island stand together in mutual support.

IF, however, my grandparents had a message for this generation, I have no doubt they would say: 'Keep it going! Don't wait until the next crisis to reach out in solidarity. Remember that no-one is "an island entire of itself". We are, each one of us, "a piece of the continent, a part of the main".'

Put simply, we all belong together even when we think we stand apart.

When all is said and done, we are mutually dependent and reliant on each other.

We shall always have crises to remind us of our interdependence. But wouldn't it be wonderful if we didn't need to be reminded? Wouldn't it be wonderful if, even in the absence of hardship, we could exchange some 'cheerful words and greetings'?

After all, such things can never be rationed – even when everything else has run scarce.

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