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Social Safety

Former intelligence officer develops platform to monitor kids' online activity

By Sarah Sekula

AS AN ARMY INTELLIGENCE officer in Kuwait, Jordan and Syria, Derek Jackson's daily job was to scour social media for any information that could be deemed mission critical. Sifting through online activity of U.S. adversaries and radical insurgents was a daunting job, to say the least, jam-packed with disturbing content.

"There was a particularly tragic video of a reporter's beheading that went viral

and unveiled a scary truth," Jackson recalls. "That video forced me to see that in today's technological world, distance means nothing, and through social media, we are all within seconds of everything."

While he was deployed in the Middle East, he found out that his wife, Kelli, was pregnant; they would soon have a baby boy. He began to wonder what social media would look like for his son, and what he could do to protect him.

"That thought ignited equal amounts of fear and passion in me," he says.

"When I returned home, I spent every free moment learning how to code. I didn't know quite what I would do with that knowledge, but I knew I couldn't do anything about the internet if I didn't understand what was going on under the hood."

He crossed paths with Jeff Gottfurcht, also a concerned father, and the two realized they shared a passion. Together, they founded tech startup Cyber Dive in 2019. Based in Mesa, Ariz., the com-

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pany helps parents keep track of what their kids are doing on social media. Gottfurcht is CEO, Jackson is the chief technology officer, and Kelli, a former Army logistics specialist, is the chief operating officer.

The web application in its early stages worked like this: Parents logged onto cyberdive.co, connected to their child's social media accounts, and Cyber Dive sent updates about the activity. For example, parents would be alerted when their child made new friends online, would see keywords they used that day like "happy" or "sad" and would see when a child "likes" a photo.

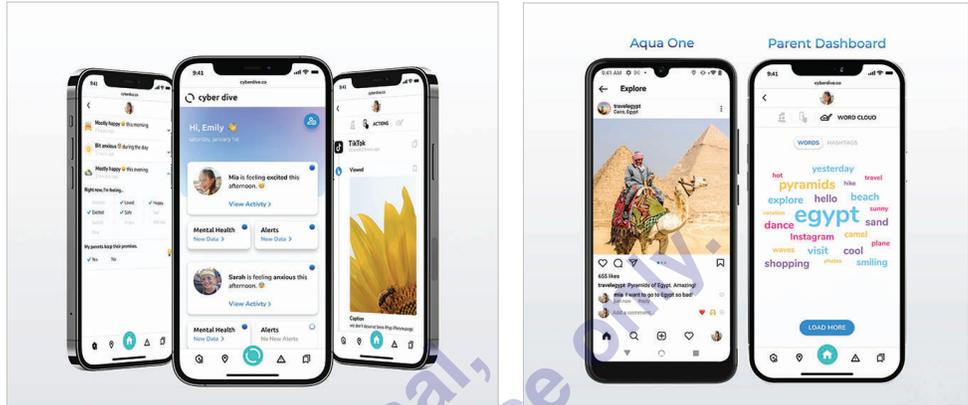
In the next few months, however, the app will look quite different, and Cyber Dive will introduce Aqua One, a fully functional Android smartphone providing unlimited monitoring capability for parents. With a \$69 monthly subscription, Aqua One smartphones offer unlimited nationwide cellular service, access to Cyber Dive's parental monitoring software and unlimited free phone replacements.

The smartphone gives parents a comprehensive view of their children's social media activity. It also has a patent-pending mental health check program that prompts the user to answer age-appropriate questions related to their environment and emotions to provide parents with insight into their child's overall well-being.

"Monitoring a child's online activity gives parents the chance to sit in the passenger seat with their children while they learn how to use social media responsibly," Jackson says. A helpful hint, he says, is to remember the acronym T.H.I.N.K. "When they begin to put their lives on social media, ask them a few questions," he says. "Is it True? Helpful? Inspiring? Necessary? Kind? This checklist is an easy litmus test to use when having conversations about what is appropriate to put on social media."

Equally important: "If you as a parent have unkind or unnecessary content anywhere on your social media, you'll have a hard time convincing your kids to do as I say, not as I do," Jackson says.

On the flip side, if you stay away from social media altogether, your child might think you aren't qualified to be guiding them through that space. "Set the example, start the conversation early and join them in the social-media journey," Jackson says. "If you choose to never touch social media or technology, it will only bring challenges when raising a digitally responsible child."



The Cyber Dive app was developed to help parents track their children's online activity. Features of the upcoming Aqua One smartphone include a mental health check to help gauge overall well-being.



Cyber Dive co-founders
Jeff Gottfurcht and Derek Jackson

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