



Dear Parent/Carer

As the summer holiday draws near, this is a reminder to parents & carers to take into account the additional screen time pupils will be spending on their devices. Now is the time to sit down together and get to know what your child likes doing online. Join in with the games they like to play and ask them to show you some of the sites and apps they are using.

If you need a few conversation starters the [UK Internet Centre](#) has some useful suggestions. There is also a family agreement you may wish to use.

Here is some information for pupils and parents to consider:

Online messaging and group chats – e.g. WhatsApp

Keeping in touch with friends over the summer holidays can be beneficial to some pupils and their mental health. However, there are a few things to consider;

- ✓ Check that the privacy settings are up to date on your child's phone. By default, Group Chat Privacy settings on WhatsApp are set to everyone. **This effectively means that anyone with your child's phone number can add them to a group without their permission.** Change this to either 'my contacts' only or 'my contacts except...'
- ✓ As most online chat groups are 13+, you can expect some of the content shared to be for those over 13 as well. **Of course, if your child has signed up with a different date of birth (if under 13), they will start receiving 18+ content much earlier.**
- ✓ Only sign up to chat groups if you know the people in the group and there is a need to be in it. Recently there has been an increased number of online challenges encouraging people to sign up to groups and 'add everyone'... **Often these groups can contain inappropriate images/videos, dares, offensive language, contact with strangers and much more.**
- ✓ If your child does see upsetting or harmful content, then they should exit the group and report it. Here is a useful link to manage your safety settings and report messages or leave groups on WhatsApp. [How to stay safe in groups on WhatsApp | WhatsApp Help Center](#)

Online Gaming

There is much more free time now for your child to take part in online gaming. Once again, spending some time playing with friends online can be very beneficial for staying in touch. However, it is important to think about how much time we want our young people to be playing online for.

- ✓ Consider setting times for them to be online and also plan activities for them to do offline.
- ✓ Ensure they have regular breaks and devices are turned off at a reasonable time of night.
- ✓ Remind them about the potential dangers of talking to people they don't know online and be wary if they ask them to join a private group or share their contact details.
- ✓ If at any time they feel worried or uncomfortable they should leave the game and tell an adult. They can block the user or report them to the online platform.
- ✓ Talk about the game they are playing, maybe even join in with them and get to know what features it has. You can always disable certain features such as chat.
- ✓ All games have a PEGI rating which suggests the age group it is suitable for.

For more information about the different games, their features and possible content they will experience and setting up parental controls visit <https://askaboutgames.com/>.

Video Streaming/Reels

Watching videos on platforms such as YouTube, is extremely popular. It can be an enjoyable way to learn new skills and techniques for our hobbies and cheer us up. Once again, however a balance of screen time needs to be considered as we can easily be drawn in to watching just one more.

- ✓ Check the privacy settings of the platforms they are using to help mitigate inappropriate content being seen and make sure they are aware of how to block and report to the platform they are using.
- ✓ The platform's algorithm looks at the content the user has viewed and liked. It also takes into account their profile and age, and what similar people that have viewed that content have also watched. As a result, they will receive more of the same content. **Watching more of the same content or following particular influencers, can prevent users from having a balanced viewpoint on what they are reading or seeing and can lead to developing narrow minded views on particular topics and events.**
- ✓ YouTube Kids is an ideal alternative to YouTube for pupils aged 12 and under. You can select from 3 age categories which has categorised the content by age.
- ✓ Live streaming of events happens in real time, ultimately there is a risk that things may go wrong, or something unexpected may happen. People may also do dangerous challenges in order to try and obtain likes and more views.

Reminders for pupils to remember when going online:

- ✓ Remember to ask for permission before posting images and videos of other people. Don't add them to a group chat without their permission.
- ✓ Think about the information you are sharing. Is it personal information you shouldn't be sharing or may it cause offence or upset someone if you post, comment or share that content?
- ✓ If you see something that upsets you or a friend, tell a trusted adult to help block the user and report it.
- ✓ Information can be deliberately misleading (disinformation) or inaccurate (misinformation). Don't believe everything you see and read. Stop and question if it is real.
- ✓ Artificial intelligence and software in apps can easily create new images or changes to existing images.
- ✓ If someone you don't know in real life asks to meet up through a game or message, inform an adult immediately. If you receive a notification request to click on a link or reset your password, question the motive behind it. Could this be a trick to obtain my information or install a virus on to my device.
- ✓ If the app being used doesn't require access to your photos, microphone and GPS location, then make sure this is turned off.
- ✓ It is okay to say **no** to joining in with challenges and some online activities.

Additional guides for parents

Wifi settings for phones and broadband - <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/broadband-mobile/>

Social media privacy guides <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/social-media/>

Gaming and live streaming guidance <https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/apps-guide/social-gaming-and-live-streaming-apps/>

Thank you in anticipation of your engagement with your children on this front. Being healthily vigilant over your child's online activity is always recommended and I am sure you will reinforce the messages around safe internet use that we promote at our school.