15th July 2024

E-safety Newsletter End of the Summer term 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

As we go into the long summer holidays, we would like to share with you some more of the useful online safety guides and information that we share with our staff team to keep us all as up to date with our children and teenagers as we possibly can.

We have been made aware of a trend of children being added to a WhatsApp group called 'Add Everyone' on which indecent images and inappropriate content have previously been shared. There have been concerns that some of the participants may be adults. Parents & carers may want to take this into account along with the additional screen time pupils will be spending on their devices over the summer holidays. 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, Tik Tok and Instagram 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.

Please also be reminded of the advice from our Local Safeguarding partners (Essex Safeguarding Children's board): Parents need to be made aware that they not only have a duty of care to supervise their children, to protect them from exposure to potentially harmful content online, but they should also be aware that they are responsible for any online activity that takes place within their home (parents will be held personally responsible, even if the activity is happening without their knowledge). This means that if your child is left unsupervised and accesses harmful content online and then shares that content, or becomes involved in harmful online activity, you would be held legally responsible for those actions.

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.

If your child has expressed concerns, that you would like advice or support to address, please do not hesitate to let us know; we will be more than happy to support and advise you, or signpost you to further advisory services.

I hope that you and your children have a lovely and safe summer exploring all the positive and safe experiences you can have in the virtual world as well as the real world.

Yours sincerely

Sharyn Ailara, Deputy Head Teacher
BSc (Hons), PGCE, SENDCo Accreditation

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about
ONLINE TROLLING

BOO!

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

The term "Trolling" refers to sending hurtful or provocative comments – often done anonymously online – to provoke a reaction or cause emotional distress. Anonymity can embolden people into saying things they wouldn't dare say in person. Euro 2024 and other tournaments tend to put an emphasis on this, with the abuse of both players and fans often increasing during such events.

LOSE

ESCALATION

Many trolls begin with silly, banal comments before moving on to a broader pattern of offensive messages and posts. They can also turn their attention very quickly to a new target if they grow bored with an existing one, which makes engaging with one fruitless at best – and potentially dangerous at worst.

HIDING BEHIND A SCREEN

Because trolls tend to use anonymous profiles, they enjoy a lack of accountability. This also means they'll often have multiple profiles, potentially switching between them regularly or posting across several of them at the same time, making a target feel as though there's no escape. After all, once you block one account, what's to stop them reappearing elsewhere?

24/7 CONTACT

The internet has given us the ability to remain in contact at any time, from almost anywhere in the world. A troll having the ability to reach you whenever they want can leave you feeling like their abuse is unavoidable. While they don't see you in real life, they can message you at any time, reach out to your peers online and even try to discover your personal information to scare you.

HATE SPEECH

Sadly, many trolls resort to spewing racial slurs, homophobic attacks and awful stereotypes, as these often stand the best chance of causing emotional harm. This can add a hefty degree of weight to their attacks, moving from what might charitably be described as "teasing" into a genuine hate crime. After Euro 2020, three England footballers were racially abused, resulting in several prison sentences.

IMPACT ON VICTIMS

It's not uncommon for the victims of trolls to shut down their accounts, disappear from public life, and try to stay out of the crosshairs for a time – with some even leaving social media forever. This can have a severe impact on children and young people's connections to friends and the world at large, and may not even actually stop the troll. The victims' families, for example, may have online profiles that trolls can still access.

NORMALISATION OF TROLLING

It is, regrettably, inevitable that some people will go too far in their criticisms or comments, both online and in the real world. This can lead to many people seeing trolls and their abuse as part and parcel of social media – an inherent risk of interacting with others online. This doesn't mean, however, that it should be considered "normal" or even tolerated.

Advice for Parents & Educators

USE PARENTAL CONTROLS

While social media platforms (where most trolling tends to happen) aren't always helpful when responding to abusive behaviour, parents can set up screen time limits, so children only get to use certain apps at certain times. There's always the potential for trolling to occur anyway – such as friends showing screenshots to one another – but this would minimise the likelihood of children seeing it.

DON'T ENGAGE WITH ABUSE

A well-known adage on social media is "don't feed the trolls". Fundamentally, if a child identifies a potential troll online, it's best not to engage with that individual directly. Instead, consider setting up a log to gather evidence for reporting them later on, including screenshots and quotes where possible.

ENCOURAGE EMPATHY

While every professional athlete aspires to maintain high standards, it's important to separate the player from the person. A player's performance doesn't make them worthy of abuse, and that can often be forgotten by younger children who simply see the colour of the shirt without considering the person wearing it. For all the rivalries between teams, it's essential children understand that players are still human beings, with families and lives outside of sport.

BLOCK AND REPORT

While anonymous accounts make it difficult to block trolls permanently – or even for very long – it's still good practice to help children learn to control who can engage with them online. It's not worth "feeding the trolls", and it's more helpful to block them, report them, and try to move on. Blocking and reporting is an anonymous process, too, so there'll be no indication of who specifically blew the whistle.

Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is the Editor in Chief of GGRecon, and has been working in the gaming and tech industry for five years. A long-time fan of Arsenal, he's a parent who understands the importance of online safety. He's also a tech and fitness writer whose work has been published on sites including IGN, TechRadar and many more.

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