

Dear Parents,

Our school will help children to learn about staying safe online, but recognises that the primary responsibility for online safety at home lies with parents and carers. Your help is now needed to help your children adopt safe use of the digital technologies at home.

We have recently been made aware of concerns relating to "a challenge" which is a form of cyberbullying that spreads through social media and phones mostly using Whatsapp. Phone users are enticed to contact a user through WhatsApp where they receive graphic threats from the user and are instructed to perform a series of dangerous tasks. Despite claims that the phenomenon was reaching worldwide proportions in July 2018, the number of actual complaints is relatively small and no UK police force has confirmed anyone was actually harmed. The UK Safer internet centre has been aware of this as an issue for UK schools over a year.

It is important that we are all vigilant when children are using devices and act to ensure they are protected from people who may pose a risk to them. Children can accidentally or deliberately be exposed to illegal, unwanted or unpleasant content, comments or activity online and there are steps you can take at home to minimise this risk. It is always good advice to monitor and support your child's online life and to know who they are communicating with. Careful use of privacy settings also helps reduce risks.

We know that new apps and sites appear daily online and it would be unrealistic to ask parents and carers to understand all of them. The sites and services that your child likes to use may change regularly, but the messages they need to keep themselves safe will remain the same - think before you post, be kind online and ask for help if something makes you feel worried, upset or uncomfortable.

At times some unpleasant sites or activities are highlighted on social media, whilst helping to inform parents it unfortunately has the side effect of generating even more hits and drawing even more children's attention to the activity. If you have safeguarding concerns relating to an app or website these should be shared with professionals, (Police or CEOP) and not shared on social media.

If your child wishes to download a new app, then we would recommend considering some of the following points:

#### **Listen**

- Take an active interest in your child's online life and talk with them about how they use technology.
  - Ask your child why they want to use the app? How did they hear about it?
- Discuss with them how they will keep themselves safe and make sure they know:
  - How to block and report other users and content
  - To speak to a trusted adult if they see anything or something happens online that makes them feel worried, upset or uncomfortable.
  - About websites such as ChildLine and CEOP? [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) and [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)

#### **Functionality**

- Make sure that you understand how the app works so you can decide if you are happy for your child to use it. You may even wish to set up an account yourself first.
- Consider:
  - Does it allow video chat or the sharing of images?
  - Does it allow user to communicate with 'random' strangers?
  - Does it allow anonymous chat?
  - Does it allow in-app purchases?
  - Can you restrict access to the content that your child shares?
  - How will your child's personal data be used by the app?

#### **Reviews**

- What do other people (i.e. other parents and carers) have to say about the app?
  - Ask your friends and family members or take a look online. You may be able to find reviews via search engines or using tools such as [www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk) and [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org)

## Age Restrictions

- You can usually find age restrictions within the apps terms and conditions. This is not the same as the app/google store rating.
- The age limit for many popular social networking sites is thirteen. This is due to American Legislation called COPPA. The age limit is not based on suitability of content and instead applies to any website, app or online service which collects, stores or uses children's personal information. Some apps will have age limits of 18+ as they are exclusively designed for use by adults.
- If children use apps that are aimed at an older age group then this may leave them vulnerable to being exposed to unsuitable content (including advertising), as well as being contacted by strangers.

## Safety

- Many popular apps will have 'help' and 'safety' sections, either within the app itself or via its website. Some apps will even have content specifically designed for parents and carers.
  - [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk) has some useful parent guides which highlight safety tools on popular devices, and signpost to report mechanisms.
- Does the app have any privacy settings? If so then help your child to apply them appropriately - for example is it possible to set the app so that only trusted friends can see information they post?
- Explore the block and report features. Can your child block or report concerning users or inappropriate behaviour?
- If the app doesn't have safety or help sections or doesn't provide the ability to report and block then you may wish to consider if it is safe for your child to use.

## Boundaries

- Talk to your child about safe and appropriate online behaviour.
- Consider setting up a family agreement regarding how their internet use will be supervised and how long they can spend online. Resources to help can be found at [www.childnet.com](http://www.childnet.com) and [www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware/](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware/)
- Apply appropriate parental controls to all devices: [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk) and [www.internetmatters.org](http://www.internetmatters.org)
- Discuss your expectations about the types of content and information they should share online, rules relating to adding friends and meeting people in real life.
- Do they understand:
  - That content posted online should never be considered to be private and may be copied and shared?
  - That they should behave online the same as they would in "the real world" and be kind?
  - How to be secure online such as by using safe and strong passwords. You can visit [www.getsafeonline.org.uk](http://www.getsafeonline.org.uk) for more advice

If you are worried that your child is at risk of harm or criminal offence has been committed then you can report your concerns to the Police or First Contact (Durham County Council). Please do not notify suspicious profiles of your actions, as this could enable them to delete material which might be required for any Police investigations. You can contact the Police via 101 or via 999 if there is an immediate risk to a child's safety or First Contact (Durham County Council) on 03000 26 79 79. You can also report online sexual abuse to CEOP by visiting [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk) and using the "Click CEOP" reporting button.

Our Online Safety Lead, Mrs Bewley and I are available to discuss any help you may need or concerns regarding online safety that you may have.

Yours sincerely,



Head Teacher

(Credit for Original letter Kent CC)