SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

Social Media Concerns

Most social media apps have a minimum age rating of 13+. Whilst there are benefits, this newsletter discusses some of the potential risks of using social media.

Risks of Social Media

- **Inappropriate content** - social media may expose children to content that is no appropriate for their age, including sexually explicit content or content that promotes harmful behaviours such as self-harm.

- **Cyberbullying** - this can take may forms, including sending nasty or hurtful messages, leaving unkind messages, sharing photographs of somebody else without their permission or impersonating somebody with a fake account.

- **Excessive Screentime/Addiction** - too much time online can affect mental health and disrupt sleep patterns.

- **Contact from strangers** - there is a risk of stranger contact, which can lead to an increased risk of grooming.

- **Challenges** - children may not have developed the skills and ability to critically analyse what they see online. Whilst some challenges are fun and provide no risk, there will be challenges online that are risky/dangerous.

- **Algorithms** - algorithms influence what we see on social media platforms to keep us engaged on the platform. This can lead to 'echo chambers' where users are only seeing content that relates to their opinion rather than seeing a balanced viewpoint. It can also lead to a user being exposed to large amounts of content about one topic/theme, which may not be helpful is it is negative.

How can I help make it a safer environment?

⇒ Check the age rating of each app and restrict access until they reach that age.

⇒ Set up age-appropriate parental controls, for example set content restrictions and screen time limits.

⇒ Chat to your child about what they are doing online, including who they are following and interacting with online.

⇒ Restrict devices in their bedrooms.

⇒ Show your child how to use any reporting and blocking tools.

Further Information

You can find out more from the following:

- https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/social-media-smarts.html

- https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/social-media

Screentime

Screentime is classed as any time spent in front of a screen, so it includes everything from watching tv to completing homework on a laptop. Whilst there is no recommended screentime (except for under two, which is zero), it is important that we find balance.

Screentime can obviously be beneficial, both for educational and entertainment purposes, however it is important to be aware of the risks, such as:

- Eye strain

- Disrupted sleep

- Less time for other activities and being outdoors

- Affects our attention

Further information

Childnet discusses what is screen time and how much screen time is enough in this useful article:

https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/screen-time-boundaries-parents/

Group Chats

Is your child part of any group chats? This could be on social media, for example on WhatsApp or within game such as Fortnite. If so, it is important that you are aware of the potential risks, which include:

- **Inappropriate content** - there is often a lack of moderation within chat facilities, so users could be exposed to content / language that is not suitable for their age.

- **Bullying** - there are many instances where inappropriate / hurtful comments are shared within groups, this could take the form of name calling or body shaming. Bullying can also be in the form of excluding others from the group. These issues often overspill into 'real life'.

- **Strangers** - your child could be added to groups with people they do not know or even with someone that they have previously blocked.

- Conversations can be shared / screen shot - make sure your child is aware that anything they share within a group can be shared with others outside the group.

- **Sharing personal information** - remind your child to be aware of the information they share with others including images and location.

How can I help to make group chats safer?

- Check the recommended age rating and adhere to them. If we all did this, peer pressure would be reduced.

- Set up age-appropriate parental controls and set screen times limits.

- Show your child how to use any reporting and blocking tools.

What else can I do?

- It is crucial to have regular conversations with your child about the risks outlined above and about what they are doing online.

- Talk about who they are chatting with, encourage them to think carefully about the messages they send and how they might be perceived by others. Talk about positivity and not saying anything hurtful. Ask them to think about whether they would say what they are messaging, face to face.

- Devices should be used in the family rooms so you can monitor what they are doing and who they are interacting with.

- Finally, make sure to model good digital behaviour yourself, s children often learn by observing the adults around them.

Further information

Childnet have created a Group Chat Guide for parents following consultation with the Childnet Youth Advisory Board and Digital Champions:

https://www.childnet.com/resources/cheat-sheet-group-chats/

Did you know some Emojis have a double meaning?

For those that have watched Adolescence, you will now children and young people may be using emojis to mean something completely different. For example, the kidney bean may be used to identify as an incel. It is important that you are aware of how emojis can be used and keep up to date with the way in which they can be used as their meanings are changeable. You can find out further information here:

https://www.bark.us/blog/emoji-slang-guide/

Vodafone: The Rise of the Aggro-rithm

Vodafone released a short video last year, titled 'The Rise of the Aggrorithm'. It highlights the harmful algorithms targeting young boys. It's certainly worth a watch as well as learning about the terrifying statistics accompanying it:

https://www.vodafone.co.uk/newscentre/press-release/ai-aggro-rithms/

3 things to consider before giving your child a smartphone

Wayne Denner has published the three things that parents wished they had considered before giving their child a phone.

Read the article here:

https://www.waynedenner.com/3-things-parents-wish-they-had-considered-before-giving-their-teen-a-smartphone/

Problematic smartphone use

According to the Ofcom report 'Children'sMediaLives2024', children are spending between 6-8 hours a day on social media, through their smartphones or other devices. This is an increase from 12 hours a week in 2014.   Unlike the content that used to be watched directly on the TV, young people are often unsupervised, leaving them thinking that everything they are seeing is real and true to life.

There are many reasons that social media is so addictive and keeps our children on their phones:

- Social media provides instant feedback through likes and comments allowing them to feel social validation and approval.

- The latest trends are showcased on social media leaving young people with a fear of missing out. This increases the drive to check their feeds obsessively.

- Every notification or positive interaction triggers a release of dopamine, the feel good hormone. Young people are exposed to versions of others' lives on social media which seem faultless. This leads to comparisons and the desire to project a
similarly perfect image of themselves.

- Social media provides a place to connect with others who they might not meet in real life. It also provides communities
connected with hobbies.

Proposed smartphone boundaries

Implementing boundaries can be challenging once a child has become accustomed to unrestricted smartphone usage. However, once you have made a connection with your child (see image, right) around the reasons you must keep them safe on their smartphone, it is advisable to put boundaries in place. Here are some suggested boundaries:

Parent access:
* Shared passwords
* Parent and child regularly review social media and
  messaging apps together

Screen limits:
* Daily limits
* Phone-free activities

Phone-free areas:
* No devices in the bedroom or bathroom
* Devices to be stored away in a central charging
  area 30 minutes before bed

Conduct:
* Honesty about how the phone is used
* Respect and kindness shown to everyone you are
   communicating with

Top tips:
* Occupy your child during phone-free times, or support them to occupy themselves.
* This will be a challenge but you are doing it to protect your child.

Talking to your children about their smartphone use

1. **Where and when?** Take advantage of opportunities to connect while participating in daily tasks such as driving, shopping, or doing chores together.

2. **How to make a connection** Relate your concerns to real life situations. Mention examples you have seen on the news or in TV shows.

3. **Start to ask questions** When discussing real life examples, ask gently about the experiences of their friends. Avoid asking them directly about their own experience.

4. **Discuss boundaries** Ask what things you should be doing, as their parent, to make sure they are kept safe on their phone. Give your suggestions too.

5. **Implement boundaries** Agree on one or two boundaries and try for two weeks before adding others. This may include some non-negotiables.