

Dear Parents

Safeguarding children is a highest priority for all schools. Whilst we make our students aware of the positive possibilities of the internet, we also encourage them to be fully aware of the potential dangers, particularly of social media.

It is extremely important that we work together on this, so in this letter, I have set out hopefully useful information that will support you. The digital world moves very fast, and there may be further updates across the year.

OVERVIEW

In PSHE, we teach children and young people of all ages about the four “Cs”. This provides a useful framework for thinking about the areas of potential harm.

Content: being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful material; for example pornography, misogyny, self-harm, suicide, anti-Semitism, fake news, racist or radical and extremist views.

Contact: being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users; for example peer to peer pressure, commercial advertising as well as adults posing as children or young adults with the intention to groom or exploit them for sexual, criminal, financial or other purposes.

Conduct: personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes, harm; for example making, sending and receiving explicit images (e.g. consensual and non-consensual sharing of nudes and semi-nudes and/or pornography, sharing other explicit images), or online bullying.

Commerce: risks such as online gambling, inappropriate advertising, phishing and or financial scams.

GAMING – AGE RATINGS

Many children are using online games and I thought it would be helpful to clarify some of the age ratings:

Minecraft – Age 8	Halo5 – Age 16
Roblox – Age 10	Call of Duty – Age 18
Fortnite - Age 13	Grand Theft Auto – Age 18
Battlefront – Age 16	Fallout4 – Age 18

PORN SITES

In 2020 Porn sites received more traffic than Amazon, Twitter and Netflix combined. It is important to note that the minute they get a smart phone with data on it, children of all ages can have access to porn, and pop-ups advertising porn.

SEXTING

According to CEOP - nearly 40% of all teenagers have posted or sent sexually suggestive messages. Sending semi-nude or nude photos is more common among teen girls and 15% of teens who have sent/ or posted nude/semi-nude images of themselves send these to people they have never met but know from the internet.

CYBER GROOMING AND SEXTORTION

About 60% of children who experience sextortion actually know the perpetrator. Sextortion refers to a category of sexual exploitation in which threatened release of sexual images or information is the means of blackmail. Cyber grooming is the online practice of establishing an emotional bond with a child for the express purpose of physically or sexually abusing them.

DO YOU KNOW THESE NEW APPS?

If your child has any of these apps it is always worth downloading them yourself and playing around with them. Knowledge is key and getting skilled up on features such as privacy settings will allow you to guide and support your child through the risks of an online profile.



OnlyFans is an online platform and app where people can pay for content (photos and videos, live streams) via a monthly membership. Content is mainly created by YouTubers, fitness trainers, models, content creators, and public figures, in order to monetise their profession. According to the OnlyFans policy, users must be 18 years or older.

The site has become increasingly popular for people who have become unemployed due to the coronavirus pandemic, but also, it's popular amongst sex workers. A recent BBC documentary – #Nudes4Sale investigated the rise of under 18's selling explicit content on not just OnlyFans but Twitter and Snapchat Premium. The documentary found that a third of Twitter users advertising explicit images with hashtags "nudes4sale" or "buymynudes" are under 18. Worryingly, many underage creators use social media to sell nudes in exchange for money and gifts.



Monkey markets itself as 'an alternative to *Omegle*, with a *TikTok* vibe'.

This app allows users to have video calls with strangers and it contains large amounts of inappropriate, disturbing, and harmful content transmitted via web cameras. Users can talk to strangers from all over the world via webcam. Once a conversation is finished, or one user wishes to leave the conversation or talk to someone else, they click 'next' and are presented with a new user who could be from anywhere in the world. Users are asked to select their gender before meeting people.

The website states that all users must be over 18, but there is zero age verification. Users only have to tick a box to confirm that they are over 18. The app is currently only available on Android devices.



Houseparty is a video chatting app that's pretty open. Friends can communicate with each other through live video and texts in chat groups. It has become particularly popular throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as a way for tweens, teens, and adults to stay in touch and hang out while maintaining physical distance.

There's no screening and the video is live, so there's nothing to keep users from inappropriate content. Users can send links via chat and even take screenshots. There's also nothing keeping friends of friends joining groups where they may only know one person



ASK FM allows users to interact in a question-and-answer format — with friends, peers, and anonymous users alike. The app is rated ages 13+. Some teenagers have used the app for hurtful cyberbullying that has been linked to suicides. It has been used in several cyberbullying

incidents in the UK, and has very loose regulation and a lack of monitoring. In response to the uproar the site added a button where users can report abuse, but some parents feel it's too little, too late.



Voxer is a walkie-talkie PTT (push-to-talk) app allowing users to quickly exchange short voice messages. They can have chats going on with multiple people at a time and just have to tap the play button to hear any messages they receive. Although it largely has an adult following, including some people who use it

for their job, it's becoming popular among teens who enjoy its hybrid style of texting and talking.

For more information on all these apps have a look at Netaware [Net Aware: Your guide to social networks, apps and games \(net-aware.org.uk\)](https://www.net-aware.org.uk). Some more apps to know about are:

Chat Master
Big O Love
VSCO
Yolo

Among Us
Kik
Whisper
You Tube

Banuba
Snapchat
Look
Musically

TikTok
Instagram
Omegle

SOME USEFUL TIPS

- It is **essential** to discuss security settings with your child and set them up to ensure their safety online.
- Many social media sites allow children to have an account when they are 13 years old but it's important to think about the maturity of your child and their ability to understand what having a social media profile really means, eg: people could see everything they are doing, and that strangers could speak to them and vice versa. Even at 13 you may feel it's not the right time for your child to have an account.
- If you do decide to let your child use social media, it's vital to speak to them about being safe online, as well as letting them know they can talk to you at any time if they have a question or they think something weird is going on.
- Many apps now have automatic online maps where your child can be identified and located so checking settings is vital.
- Common Sense Media is a brilliant resource for parents with detailed information about apps, games and everything to do with the online world for children with reviews of apps and recommended age restrictions. The link is <https://www.commonsensemedia.org>. Another excellent website is Digital Awareness UK <https://www.digitalawarenessuk.com/>
- CEOP also offers parents an excellent online resource with all the latest information on apps and websites that may be of concern and also tips on how to set appropriate security settings on your child's devices. We provide a link to CEOP on the school website for students should they have concerns about online activity for themselves or their friends. For parents – their website is: <https://parentinfo.org/>

I hope this information is useful and please let me know if you have any questions.

Regards

Tracy Preston - Designated Safeguarding Lead