DIGITAL PARENTING
(mobile phones, social media, online safety and all that!)

Whatever your feelings about helping your child navigate the world of smart devices and the internet, it is an area that will have a huge impact on your child's teenage years, for better or for worse. At school, we spend days each year unpicking the fallout from messages sent via social media, and children using the internet and social media in ways that pose risks to themselves and others. However, we are also optimistic and enthusiastic about the potential these tools have for helping your child to learn, succeed and thrive. **We need you to partner with us in helping children develop healthy digital lives.** Here are four great principles from *Parent Zone*.

1. **Building a child's digital resilience will keep them safer than blocking or filtering.** There will come a point when you can no longer monitor what your child is doing online. Studies show that those children who can self-regulate their internet and social media use, were able to cope better when they encountered potentially harmful or inappropriate content online. Avoid the 'easy fix' of blocking apps and instead help them to make good decisions. (This needs to be balanced with point 3 below!)

2. **Don't limit the talk you have with your child to 'the online safety conversation'.** Talk about things that interest your child online (even if you think it's boring or quirky). Talk about what the whole household is doing online (when you pick up your phone, occasionally vocalise what you're doing so others know what you use your phone for). Make sure that if your child does tell you about a mistake they've made, you are supportive rather than just putting sanctions in place otherwise they might not tell you next time.

3. **Don't be afraid to set boundaries.** Set expectations about behaviour online. Focus on the behaviours you expect (e.g. be kind, exercise is important, don't speak about people behind their back) rather than the specific apps. And set household/family agreements about mobile phone usage. Discuss boundaries around sharing and taking images, whether they are allowed them in their bedroom and if so, when they need to leave them outside. (Phones have a huge impact on healthy sleeping for children and adults.) Are they allowed them at meal times? And model good habits. Practice what you preach!

4. **Concentrate on how children use digital media rather than for how long.** There is no 'one size fits' all, and *time on screens* isn't anywhere near as important as *behaviour on screens.* Think about giving more independence as they get older, how active their online behaviour is (e.g. there's a big difference between watching and doing yoga whilst watching YouTube and watching gaming tutorials again and again). The internet can encourage children to be more active and creative too. And, again, adults need to model balanced and healthy digital lives themselves too.

Recommended websites

There are many good websites that help you to decide how to help teach and guide children to be safe online. NSPCC's Online Safety site is a good place to start and helps you to think about how you speak and engage with your children on these matters. There are many, but the following websites are a good place to start.

- Net Aware, NSPCC (https://www.net-aware.org.uk/) – *Great for guides on apps, games and social media sites*
- Parent Zone (https://www.parents.parentzone.org.uk/) -
- Think U Know (https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/)
- UK Safer Internet Centre (https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers)

What happens when it all goes wrong?

There may be days ahead when if feels like everything has gone wrong in relation to a child's online behaviour. They may have shared an inappropriate or indecent image or video, which has then been shared without their consent, or a conversation on a WhatsApp group may turn nasty and result in cyberbullying. We are always happy to support you and your family if these things happen, but are also passionate about pointing families in the right direction where they can receive support and guidance.

The websites at the bottom of this guide are a good place to go, but here are some websites for specific situations.

Reporting harmful content: https://reportharmfulcontent.com/

This website covers impersonation, pornographic content, self-harm or suicide content, bullying and sexual advances online among other harmful content online. It provides a short definition of what these things are and how to report and deal with it. It includes links to specific websites (YouTube, Instagram etc.) where these things can be reported directly.

Concerned about online sexual abuse: https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/

If you are worried about online sexual abuse, or the way someone has been communicating online, CEOP want to know. They are experts in this area and will support you via their Child Protection Advisors.

Where next?

You can always get in touch. Your child's House Student Support Assistant is a good place to start, and they will be able to advise you further, or point you in the right direction.