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Grow, Strive, Achieve -Together

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Dear Parents / Carers

BE SHARE AWARE - cleaning up our on-line activity

During the last week or so we have been notified of some of our children entering into serious / inappropriate online activity. Having consulted with some of my Headteacher colleagues I am acutely aware that this is becoming more common amongst younger children.

We all know much about the internet, electronic communication, and the fact that our children are leading the way and want to be at the very heart of connectivity. Naturally we (adults / parents / carers / educators) do not want to discourage children's ability to be creative communicators, or act as kill joys, yet exactly **how conscious are we of the inherent dangers our children are being exposed to and what can we do to protect them?**

FACT: young people communicate and socialise using all kinds of digital media tools and services - apps, gaming, messaging.

FACT: connectivity is seen by young people as an extension to their 'real-world' social lives, as a way of life, giving them greater chances to socialise with their friends.

FACT: there are thousands of social media apps available on smartphones with new ones appearing all of the time.

FACT: socialising is becoming more mobile; young people are ahead of adults in understanding its capacity.

Social media apps perform different functions, for example, texting, micro-blogging, self-destructing secret messaging, and chatting / meeting / dating apps and sites. Often, once purchased, these apps allow free connectivity with unlimited data restrictions making it easier to understand how they have the potential to put a disproportionate view on the world for children whilst glorifying reality.

Social media and networking has become a world phenomenon in recent years and its growth and expansion is set to continue unabated. However, and regrettably, young children are not aware of the potential dangers they are exposing themselves to. The question I would ask is, "As the parent / carer of your child, how aware are you?" We have all seen and heard of the high profile media cases recently and sadly these are real live cases that are going on around us that we as adults are oblivious to.

Allowing 'minor' transgressions now with the use of social networking is teaching children that rules and laws don't really matter. As a school we believe this is the wrong approach; our standard is to teach children to make the right decisions at all times, even when no-one is looking. I feel it is time for us all

(adults / parents / carers / educators) to act before it is too late. We have a duty to prevent our children being drawn into unsavoury online activity as a result of peer pressure and to ensure that they are given the best advice and support on how to use mobile devices. I get a great sense that many parents / carers buy their children these electronic devices, and without knowing or considering the capacity contained within them to connect with a world full of good and bad, literally cross their fingers and hope their child uses them sensibly without coming to any harm. At school there is only so much we can do. As parents / carers you have a duty, for example, to:

- know what platforms and apps your child is using - don't allow them access to age restricted sites / apps / games
- check the level of security of their privacy settings
- adjust and set the content filters to age appropriate levels
- regulate your child's social networking activity with frequent checks of their activity and connections in particular to unknown others
- openly talk to your child regularly about the dangers that exist
- encourage your child to report any misuse immediately
- discuss what you find out
- make those tough parenting decisions telling your child NO!

I am writing this open letter to all parents / carers asking for your support; if you do not already, please consider the following. Firstly can I recommend that you start by increasing your awareness of young children's social networking. Secondly, I implore you, if you have not already done so, to demonstrate a greater level of monitoring / regulating of your child's on-line activity. And thirdly, openly discuss connectivity and networking with your child on a regular basis setting out your expectation for its correct use.

Thank you for your continued support and co-operation.

Yours Sincerely

C McConnell
Headteacher

