



St. Philip's
RC Primary School

Thursday 22ndth October 2026

Online Safety, Appropriate Language and Healthy Sleep Habits

Dear Year 6 Parents and Carers,

It has recently come to our attention that there have been incidents involving children using WhatsApp to send unkind messages to one another, including swearing and homophobic language.

We would like to ask for your support in speaking with your child about the importance of behaving respectfully online and making appropriate choices when communicating with others.

Please remind your child that the words they use online can have a significant impact on others and that messages shared digitally can be saved, forwarded or seen by a much wider audience than originally intended. Once a message has been shared, it can be very difficult to take back. Language that may seem like a joke to one person can be upsetting, offensive or hurtful to someone else. Homophobic language is particularly concerning and is not acceptable, even when children claim it is used as a joke.

We ask that you discuss with your child the importance of treating others with kindness and respect, both face to face and online, and help them understand the consequences of their choices and the impact these can have on others. I have also included a information poster for parents about group chats overleaf.

We would also like to remind parents and carers that **WhatsApp has a minimum age requirement of 13**. As many children in Year 6 are below this age, please consider carefully whether this is an appropriate platform for your child to be using. We encourage you to review the apps your child has access to, monitor their online activity and ensure they understand how to communicate safely and respectfully.

We have also noticed that a number of children are appearing particularly tired during the school day. It has come to our attention that some children are communicating with one another online late into the evening, which may be affecting their sleep and their ability to concentrate and engage fully in lessons.

As the children approach the end of Year 6, it is important that they develop healthy routines and are ready to learn each day. We would therefore encourage parents and carers to remove or switch off devices at bedtime, establish clear boundaries around screen time and monitor when children are using messaging apps. Ensuring devices are kept out of bedrooms overnight can help children get the rest they need.

We recognise that online communication can be difficult to manage at this age, and we appreciate your support in helping children make safe, responsible and respectful choices. By working together, we can reinforce the importance of positive relationships, appropriate online behaviour and healthy routines.

Thank you for your continued support and cooperation.

Kind regards,

Miss McNamara



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At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many issues which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about GROUP CHATS

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WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

BULLYING

Unkind comments or images which are purposely aimed at an individual can be shared freely in a group chat – allowing and often encouraging others to join in the bullying behaviour. If this content is shared in a group of their peers (especially a larger group), it serves to amplify the hurt, embarrassment, anxiety and isolation that the victim feels.

EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION

This common issue with group chats can happen in several ways: starting a new group, for instance, but deliberately excluding a certain child. Likewise, the chat may take place on an app which one child doesn't have access to, meaning they can't be involved. A child can also feel isolated when a group chat is used to discuss or share images from an event that everyone else but them attended.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some discussions in group chats may include inappropriate words, swearing and unsuitable images or videos. These could be viewed by your child if they are part of that group, whether they actively engage in it or not. Some chat apps have a disappearing message function, so your child may be unable to report something they've seen because it can only be viewed once or for a short time.

SHARING GROUP CONTENT

It's important to remember that – while the content of the chat is private between those in the group – individual users can easily share a message, photo or video with others outside of the group or screenshot what's been posted. The risk of something your child intended as private becoming public (and potentially going viral) is higher if there are people they don't know well in the group.

UNKNOWN MEMBERS

Within larger group chats, it's more likely your child will be communicating with people they don't really know. These strangers may be friends of the host, but not necessarily friendly toward your child. It's wise for young people not to share personal details and stay aware that they have no control over the messages and images they share after they've put them online.

NOTIFICATIONS AND FOMO

A drawback of large group chats is the sheer number of notifications. Every time someone in the group messages, your child's device will be 'pinged' with an alert: potentially, this could mean hundreds of notifications a day. Not only is this highly distracting, but young people's fear of missing out on the latest conversation results in increased screen time as they try to keep up with the chat.

Advice for Parents & Carers

CONSIDER OTHERS' FEELINGS

Group chats are often an arena for young people to gain social status. This could cause them to do or say things on impulse, which could upset others in the group. Encourage your child to consider how other people might feel if they engaged in this behaviour. If your child does upset a member of their group chat, support them to reach out, show empathy and apologise for their mistake.

PRACTISE SAFE SHARING

In any online communication, it's vital for young people to be aware of what they're sharing and who might potentially see it. Discuss the importance of not revealing identifiable details like their address, their school or photos that they wouldn't like to be seen widely. Remind them that once something is shared in a group, they lose control of where it may end up and how it might be used.

GIVE SUPPORT, NOT JUDGEMENT

Remind your child that they can confide in you if they feel bullied or excluded in a group chat. Instead of responding to the person who's upset them. Validate their hurt feelings and help to put them back in control by discussing how they'd like to handle the situation. On a related note, you could also empower your child to speak up if they're in a chat where others are being picked on.

AVOID INVITING STRANGERS

Sadly, many individuals online hide their true identity to gain a child's trust – for example, to gather information on them, to exchange inappropriate content or to coax them into doing things they aren't comfortable with. Ensure your child understands why they shouldn't add people they don't know to a group chat – and, especially, to never accept a group chat invitation from a stranger.

BLOCK, REPORT AND LEAVE

If your child is in a chat where inappropriate content is being shared, advise them to block the users sending the material, report them to the host app or platform and exit the group. If any of this content could be putting a minor at risk, contact the police. Emphasise to your child that it's OK for them to simply leave any group chat that they don't feel comfortable being a part of.

SILENCE NOTIFICATIONS

Having a phone or tablet bombarded with notifications from a group chat can be a massive irritation and distraction – especially if it's happening late in the evening. Explain to your child that they can still be part of the group chat, but that it would be healthier for them to turn off or mute the notifications and catch up with the conversation at a time which better suits them.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing Internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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