Heathfield Primary and Nursery School

Thriving Together
Knowledge • Nurture • Enrichment

Scotland Road Campus
Scotland Road
Basford
Nottingham
NG5 1JU

0115 9155725

Kersall Drive Campus
Kersall Drive
Bullwell
Nottingham
NG6 9EU

0115 9794304

Contact Us

✉ admin@heathfield.nottingham.sch.uk
🐦 @heathfieldpns

▶ heathfieldprimary.org.uk
💬 +44 0115 8240505

Co-Headteachers: Miss J Dickens & Mr G Hicks

Dear Parents/Carers

Do you know what your child is doing online or on their phone?

From recent research, news articles and discussions with children and parents, there is a worrying National increase in incidents of cyber-bullying. It would appear that many adults do not know the extent to which children are accessing, interacting with or posting content online or via apps. We, therefore, ask for your support. **Please take time to know more about what your child is doing online and on their phone.**

Many apps that the children talk about using are not for children of Primary school age. Please read the information attached which details key features of Whatsapp, Snapchat and TikTok.

Cyberbullying can include:

- sending threatening or abusive text messages
- creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos
- trolling – the sending of menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games
- excluding children from online games, activities or friendship groups
- shaming someone online
- setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child
- encouraging young people to self-harm
- voting for or against someone in an abusive poll
- creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name
- sending explicit messages, also known as sexting
- pressuring children into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual conversations. .

Ofcom research (2022)

Older children in the UK are more likely to be bullied on a screen than in person, Ofcom has found.

Their latest study into children's media and online habits shows that four in 10 children aged 8-17 (39%) have experienced bullying, either on or offline. Among these children, the bullying was more likely to happen on a device (84%) than face-to-face (61%).

The most common way for children to be bullied via technology was through text or messaging apps (56%), followed by social media (43%) or online games (30%).

Two thirds of parents worry in general about their child being targeted by online bullies. Among parents of children who game online, over half were concerned about being bullied during gameplay (52%).

Most children (93%) say that they would tell someone if they saw something upsetting or nasty online. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to *always* tell someone about something worrying that they had seen (62% vs 56%).

If you are enabling your child to use these apps underage then you should set boundaries to ensure they are safeguarded and not causing anyone else distress through their actions.

[Use Parental Controls to Keep Your Child Safe	NSPCC](#)		[Helping Children Deal with Bullying Cyberbullying	NSPCC](#)	

Our current policy on mobile phones is: children who are walking to or from school **unaccompanied** by an adult can bring their phone to school but these must be switched off at the gate and handed immediately to their teacher until the end of the day. If a phone is seen on or not handed it it will go to the office for an adult to collect. This is under review following the [recent changes in guidance from the DfE](#).

We have appropriate filtering and monitoring systems in school to flag any content or messages which may indicate bullying or abuse so we ask you take time and precautions to monitor this at home too.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about
SNAPCHAT

AGE RESTRICTION 13+

CENSORED

Snapchat is a photo- and video-sharing app which also allows users to chat with friends via text or audio. Users can share images and videos with specific friends, or through a 'story' (documenting the previous 24 hours) visible to their entire friend list. Snapchat usage rose during the pandemic, with many young people utilising it to connect with their peers. The app continues to develop features to engage an even larger audience and emulate current trends, rivalling platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.

CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

Even if your child only connects on the app with people they know, they may still receive friend requests from strangers. Snapchat's links with apps such as Wink and Hoop have increased this possibility. Accepting a request means that children are then disclosing personal information through the Story, SnapMap and Spotlight features. This could allow predators to gain their trust for sinister purposes.

EXCESSIVE USE

There are many features that are attractive to users and keep them excited about the app. Snap streaks encourage users to send snaps daily, Spotlight Challenges give users the chance to obtain money and online fame, and the Spotlight feature's scroll of videos makes it easy for children to spend hours watching content.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some videos and posts on Snapchat are not suitable for children. The hashtags used to group content are determined by the poster, so an innocent search term could still yield age-inappropriate results. The app's Discover function lets users swipe through snippets of news stories and trending articles that often include adult content. There is currently no way to turn off this feature.

CAUTION

#NOFILTER

SEXTING

Sexting continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat. The app's 'disappearing messages' feature makes it easy for young people (teens in particular) to share explicit images on impulse. While these pictures *do* disappear – and the sender is notified if it has been screenshotted first – users have found alternative methods to save images, such as taking pictures with a separate device.

DAMAGE TO CONFIDENCE

Snapchat's filters and lenses are a popular way for users to enhance their 'selfie game'. Although many are designed to entertain or amuse, the 'beautify' filters on photos can set unrealistic body image expectations and create feelings of inadequacy. Comparing themselves unfavourably against other Snapchat users could threaten a child's confidence or sense of self-worth.

VISIBLE LOCATION

My Places lets users check in and search for popular spots nearby – such as restaurants, parks or shopping centres – and recommend them to their friends. The potential issue with a young person consistently checking into locations on Snapchat is that it allows other users in their friends list (even people they have only ever met online) to see where they currently are and where they regularly go.

Advice for Parents & Carers

TURN OFF QUICK ADD

The Quick Add function helps people find each other on the app. This function works based on mutual friends or whether someone's number is in your child's contacts list. Explain to your child that this feature could potentially make their profile visible to strangers. We recommend that your child turns off Quick Add, which can be done in the settings (accessed via the cog icon).

CHAT ABOUT CONTENT

Talk to your child about what is and isn't wise to share on Snapchat (e.g. don't post explicit images or videos, or display identifiable details like their school uniform). Remind them that once something is online, the creator loses control over where it might end up – and who with. Additionally, Snapchat's 'Spotlight' feature has a #challenge like TikTok's: it's vital that your child understands the potentially harmful consequences of taking part in these challenges.

CHOOSE GOOD CONNECTIONS

Snapchat has recently announced that it is rolling out a new safety feature: users will receive notifications reminding them of the importance of maintaining connections with people they actually know well, as opposed to strangers. This 'Friend Check Up' encourages users to delete connections with users they rarely communicate with, to maintain their online safety and privacy.

KEEP ACCOUNTS PRIVATE

Profiles are private by default, but children may make them public to gain more followers. Your child can send Snaps directly to friends, but Stories are visible to everyone they have added, unless they change the settings. If they use SnapMaps, their location is visible unless 'Ghost Mode' is enabled (again via settings). It's prudent to emphasise the importance of not adding people they don't know in real life. This is particularly important with the addition of My Places, which allows other Snapchatters to see the places your child regularly visits and checks in: strangers, bullies and groomers could use this information to engage in conversation and arrange to meet in person.

TALK ABOUT SEXTING

It may feel like an awkward conversation (and one that young people can be reluctant to have) but it is important to talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting. Discuss the legal implications of sending, receiving or sharing explicit images, as well as the possible emotional impact. Emphasise that your child should never feel pressured into sexting – and that if they receive unwanted explicit images, they should tell a trusted adult straight away.

XXX

BE READY TO BLOCK AND REPORT

If a stranger *does* connect with your child on Snapchat and begins to make them feel uncomfortable through bullying, pressure to send explicit images or by sending explicit images to them, your child can select the three dots on that person's profile and choose report or block. There are options to state why they are reporting that user (annoying or malicious messages, spam, or masquerading as someone else, for example).

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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#WakeUpWednesday

TikTok is a video-sharing social media app available on iOS and Android which lets users create, share, and view user created videos in a similar manner to Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. Its main draw, however, is that users can record and upload bite-sized looping videos of themselves lip-syncing and dancing to popular music or soundbites, often for comedic effect, which can then be further enhanced with filters, emojis and stickers. TikTok has been designed with the young user in mind and has a very addictive appeal. At the beginning of 2019 it skyrocketed in popularity and has featured near the top of download charts ever since. Estimates suggest that it now has anything between 500 million and over 1 billion monthly active users worldwide.

AGE RESTRICTION

12+

If under 18, supervision of a parent or legal guardian required.

What parents need to know about TIKTOK
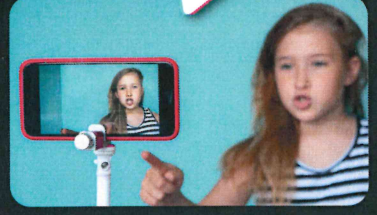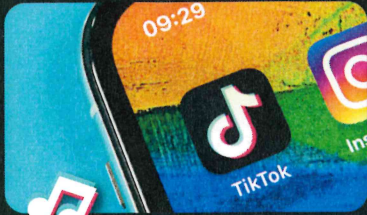
AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

On the iOS store, TikTok is listed as 12+. On the Google Play Store it is rated as 'Parental guidance recommended'. When signing up to the app, it's possible to lie about your age without any form of verification. As children scroll through their feed, most of the videos they're likely to come across are light-hearted or designed to make people laugh. However there have been a number of videos reported for featuring drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm and young teens engaging in sexually suggestive content. More recently, suicide-themed related videos have been widely circulated. Given the deluge of material uploaded to TikTok every day, it's impossible to moderate everything and it can be common to come across explicit and age-inappropriate content on the 'for you' feed when logging into the platform.

INAPPROPRIATE MUSIC

TikTok revolves around creating music videos through lip-syncing and dancing. Inevitably, some of the music featured by users will contain explicit or suggestive lyrics. Given the undeniably young user base, there is a risk that children may look to imitate the explicit language they hear or the suggestive actions they see when viewing others user's videos on the app.

TIKTOK FAME

TikTok is very image focused and there is a notable preoccupation with appearing cool and attractive. Many teenagers now attempt to go viral and become what's known in-app as 'TikTok famous'. TikTok (and its predecessor musical.ly) has spawned its own celebrities – social media stars Loren Gray and Jacob Sartorious have been catapulted to fame through their initial exposure on the app. Obviously, most budding influencers looking to become the next big thing will be disappointed, but this may have the knock-on effect of making them go to more and more drastic lengths to get noticed.

ONLINE PREDATORS

As a social network, TikTok makes it easy to connect with other users. This includes the ability to comment on and react to other user's videos, follow their profile and download their content. Be aware that by default, any user can comment on your child's video if their account is set to public. Most interactions are harmless enough but as an app, TikTok is prone to predators because of the abundance of younger users.

ADDICTIVE NATURE

Social media is designed to be addictive and TikTok is no different. It can be fun and hugely entertaining. However, it is also because of this that it can be hard to put down. In addition to the short, punchy nature of the looping video format, the app's ability to keep you guessing what will come on screen next makes it easy to turn a five-minute visit into 45-minute visit.

IN-APP PURCHASES

Aside from the content, there's also the option to purchase in-app extras called 'TikTok coins'. Prices range from £0.99 for 100 coins to an eye-watering £93.99 for 10,000 coins. TikTok coins are used to purchase different emojis to reward content creators that a user finds funny or entertaining. In the iOS version of the app you can disable the option to buy TikTok coins but this sadly doesn't seem to be a feature in the Android version.

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Safety Tips For Parents

TALK ABOUT ONLINE CONTENT

Assuming your child is above the age limit to use TikTok, make sure you take the time to talk to them about what they are seeing on the app. Have an open dialogue, get them to give you their opinion on what is appropriate and model the correct behaviour. Go over why they shouldn't give out private information or identifiable photos and be positive and understanding. In the long run, getting them to think critically about what they're seeing goes a long way to keeping them social media savvy.

USE PRIVACY SETTINGS

Undoubtedly, the easiest way to safeguard your child on TikTok is to make sure their account is set to private. This means only those users your child approves can view, like, and follow their content. Setting the account to private may clash with your child's goal of social media superstardom, but it will keep their account secure from strangers. This setting can be enabled under the privacy and safety menu by pressing the ellipsis in the 'me' tab of the app. To be extra safe, there are additional controls available to toggle such as who can send comments and messages, among other options.
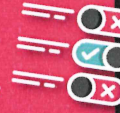
ENABLE RESTRICTED MODE

In the digital wellbeing section there's the ability to turn on restricted mode using a PIN. Restricted mode filters out content that is not age appropriate although it should be noted that this isn't always 100% fool proof. When enabling restricted mode, parents should still be vigilant to what their child is watching and take note that the algorithm moderating content is not infallible.

MONITOR VIEWING HABITS

Even if it doesn't make you popular, keep a close eye on what your child is viewing and sharing on TikTok. Whilst the app has moderation tools, videos can still slip through the net so it's important to regularly check in on what they're watching. Understanding and learning the app yourself is a great way to get to grips with it. You could then even watch some videos with your child, turning it into a bonding opportunity also.

LEARN HOW TO REPORT AND BLOCK INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

With the proper privacy settings in place, TikTok can be a relatively safe space for your child to express themselves. However, in case something does manage to slip through, make sure your child knows how to recognise and report content that isn't appropriate and get them to come to you about what they have seen. TikTok allows users to report offenders and comments within the app. You can also block individual users by going on their profile.

MODERATE SCREEN TIME

As entertaining as TikTok is, you can help your child moderate their time on the app by making use of the digital wellbeing section. Under the screen time management option, you can limit the daily allotted time allowed on the app in increments ranging from 40 to 120 minutes. You can also lock this preference behind a PIN number which has to be inputted in order to then exceed the daily time limit. This way your child can get their daily dose of memes without wasting away the day.

Meet our expert

Pete Badh is a writer with over 10+ years in research and analysis. Working within a specialist area for West Yorkshire Police, Pete has contributed work which has been pivotal in successfully winning high profile cases in court as well as writing as a subject matter expert for industry handbooks.

FAMILY SAFETY MODE

TikTok Family Safety Mode allows parents to link their own TikTok account to their child's. It's a great way to oversee your child's digital wellbeing by giving you direct control over their safety settings and being able to remotely turn features on and off. This includes managing screen time, the ability to send and receive direct messages (and with whom) and the ability to restrict the appearance of content that might not be age appropriate.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know About
WHATSAPP

16+ in UK & EU; 12+ rest of world.

WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging service, with around two billion users exchanging texts, photos, videos and documents, and making voice and video calls. The app offers end-to-end encryption, meaning messages can only be read by the sender and the recipient(s). Not even WhatsApp can read them. Updates to its privacy policy in 2021 reportedly caused millions of users to leave the app. But the new policy was widely misinterpreted: it only related to WhatsApp's business features, not to personal messages.

'Prize' Scams

WhatsApp users occasionally receive messages from unauthorised third parties or fraudsters pretending to offer prizes – encouraging recipients to click a link to win. A common scam involves a warning that someone's WhatsApp subscription has run out: aiming to dupe them into disclosing payment details. Other scams include instructions to forward a message to earn a gift or reward.

Enabling Fake News

WhatsApp has unfortunately been linked to accelerating the spread of dangerous rumours. In India, some outbreaks of mob violence were reported to have been sparked by false allegations shared on the app. WhatsApp itself took steps to prevent its users circulating hazardous theories and speculation in the early weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Connections with Strangers

To start a WhatsApp chat, you need the mobile number of the person you want to message (they also need to have the app). WhatsApp can also access the address book on someone's device and recognise which of their contacts use WhatsApp. If your child has given their mobile number to somebody they don't know, that person could then use it to get in touch via WhatsApp.

Disappearing Messages

With 'disappearing messages', users can send messages that vanish from WhatsApp after seven days. A new feature also erases photos and videos from chats after they've been viewed. These files can't be saved or forwarded on, making monitoring what children are discussing problematic – and if someone sent your child an inappropriate message, it would be difficult to prove. Content can be reported to WhatsApp, however: ensure your child knows how to do this.

'Only Admins' and Cyberbullying

Group chats and video calls are great for connecting with multiple people in WhatsApp, but there is always the potential for someone's feelings to be hurt by an unkind comment or joke. The 'only admins' feature gives the admin(s) of a group control over who can send messages. They can, for example, block people from posting in a chat, which could make a child feel excluded and upset.

Live Location Sharing

The 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, allowing friends to see their movements. WhatsApp describes it as a "simple and secure way to let people know where you are." Indeed, it *is* a useful method for a child to let loved ones know they are safe. But if your child is in a chat with people they *don't* know, it means they will be exposing their location to them, too.

Advice for Parents & Carers

Report Potential Scams

Advise your child not to engage with any message that looks suspicious or too good to be true. When your child receives a message from an unknown number for the first time, they will be given the option to report that number as spam. They can also report a contact or a group as spam by tapping on the contact or group name to open their profile and scrolling down to 'report spam'.

Create a Safe Profile

Even though someone would need your child's phone number to add them as a contact, as an extra precaution it's worth altering your young one's profile settings to restrict who can see their photo and status. The options are 'everyone', 'my contacts' and 'nobody.' Choosing one of the latter two ensures their profile is protected.

Use Location Features Sparingly

If your child needs to use 'live location' to show you or their friends where they are, advise them to share their location only for as long as they need to. WhatsApp gives 'live location' options of 15 minutes, one hour or eight hours. However, your child can manually choose to stop sharing their position at any time.

Explain about Blocking

If your child receives spam or offensive messages, calls or files from a contact, they should block them. Communication from a blocked contact won't show up on their device and stays undelivered. Blocking someone does not remove them from your child's contact list – they would also need to be deleted from the device's address book. The option to block someone is on their contact info screen.

Leave a Group

If your child is part of a group chat that makes them feel uncomfortable, or has been added to a group that they no longer want to be part of, show them how to use the group's settings to leave. If someone exits a group, the admin can add them back in once; if they leave a second time, it is permanent.

Delete Accidental Messages

If your child has posted a message in the wrong chat or sent a message that they immediately regret, they can delete it. Tap and hold on the message, choose 'delete' and then 'delete for everyone.' WhatsApp allows seven minutes to delete a message after it's sent – but it's important to remember that recipients may have seen (and taken a screenshot of) a message before it was deleted.

Fact-Check Messages

You can now fact-check messages that have been forwarded at least five times in WhatsApp, by double-tapping the magnifying glass icon to the right of the message. From there, your child can launch a Google search and decide for themselves whether the message was accurate or not. It's a good way to encourage young people to question things they see online.

Meet Our Expert

Parven Kaur is a social media expert and digital media consultant who is passionate about improving digital literacy for parents and children. She has extensive experience in the social media arena and is the founder of Kids N Clicks: a web resource that helps parents and children thrive in a digital world.

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