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Dear Parents and Carers,

Staying safe and well on apps, sites and games

Once children start secondary school, their use of digital technology and social media increases significantly. Nearly half of teenagers are using YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram, often unsupervised, to connect with peers and maintain friendships. Sadly, these platforms expose teenagers to inappropriate content and harmful online interactions with other users (e.g. peer pressure, commercial advertising, AI chatbots and adults posing as children or young adults with the intention to groom or exploit them). Furthermore, addictive algorithms can make it harder for them to take a break and maintain a healthy balance between time on and offline. This can feel daunting as a parent, so to help you start those key safety conversations and support their wellbeing, here are some useful tips.

The key thing to remember is that you do not need to be a tech expert to help your child stay safe online. It's ultimately about communication, staying informed and being proactive:

- **Stay involved** – make time to communicate, talk about what they are doing online. What do they enjoy? What makes them laugh? Has anything upset or frightened them? This can help you to better understand their online activity and any potential risks.
- **Don't quiz them** – instead have regular conversations. What's their favourite app? What is the best site to learn new things from? Have they come across anything worrying?
- **Join in** – why not watch them play a game and join in. Who are they playing with? Do they know the other players outside of the game?
- **'Show me how...'** – you could ask their advice to help you with your privacy settings, who you should add as a friend, are there any risks? This could be a good opportunity to talk about accepting friend requests or talking to people who they do not know offline.
- **Lead by example** – children learn as much from watching as they do from being told not to do something, so model good behaviour, e.g. time spent on your device, or asking their permission before posting pictures of them. This helps them better understand what imagery (photos & videos) is appropriate to share, and consider the importance of gaining consent.
- **Reassure them** – tell them that they won't get in trouble if something worrying happens, and that you and the school are always there to help.

If you need further support, have a look at [parentsafelgfl.net](https://www.parentsafelgfl.net) for guidance around parental controls as well as addressing online harm and key topics.

Remember giving your child access to online technology is your choice – don't let others (including your child!) dictate when the right time is to use tech. Having regular conversations to clarify how much time you can spend on devices and establish shared expectations like no phones at mealtimes or in the bedroom at night-time will reduce arguments and keep everyone safe & healthy. You can use this [digital family agreement](#) to help you with this – and there are some sample statements to help you get started.

If your child is worried about something online - remind them to talk to you or to any staff at school. They may feel more comfortable talking anonymously to Childline (0800 1111). And as a parent, you can also contact the NSPCC advice line on 0800 800 5000.

Thank you for your support. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. There is lots more information available about online safety on [GHS Online Safety Website](#) and via parentsafe.lgfl.net.

Yours sincerely

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