



SAFETY MATTERS

BISHOP WORDSWORTH'S PASTORAL AND SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER



It seems like only yesterday that we were returning from the long summer holiday, when our new Year 7 students were standing in over-sized blazers and we were all filled with nervous anticipation of what was to come. And now, in the blink of an eye, the term is over and we can reflect on what has been an incredibly busy and fruitful term. Much has changed, and I doubt that anyone foresaw the unexpected change that has enveloped us recently. However, that same sense of anticipation and forward momentum that we embraced in September has not left us, and the School continues to feel like a well-oiled machine moving steadily forward to enhance and improve our offering and outcomes. The aim of this newsletter is to give some gentle and, I hope, welcome advice on pastoral and safeguarding matters that may be pertinent to you and your loved ones over the holidays. I reflect on some of the issues we see appearing regularly in School and direct you to some useful sources of information, should you come across anything similar during the holidays.



ONLINE SAFETY



This time last year I wrote that “one of the greatest, if not **the** greatest risks to a child’s safety and well-being come from their devices.” My view on this has not changed. A large number of pastoral, behavioural and safeguarding concerns that we investigate in school feature a device of some sort, and the vast majority take place outside of school. Our ban on the use of phones and devices in school can only reduce the problems while they are here and anyone intent on doing something wrong online or on social media will do so as soon as they can access their device. There has been a great deal in the media recently about phone usage, including proposed bans on smartphones for children in Australia and the significant rise in the number of parents not allowing their children to have smartphones, fuelled by the movement Smartphone Free Childhood. The government will soon be implementing the Online Safety Act 2025, though I am a little sceptical about whether this will go far enough to keep our young people safe. In preparing for the launch of the Act, the Secretary of State for Technology has produced 5 priorities for online safety, which you can read here www.gov.uk/government/news/new-online-safety-priorities-for-ofcom-and-launch-of-study-into-effects-of-social-media-on-children

As parents, you must decide for yourself whether you think a smartphone is a necessity for your child, or whether you think (as I do) that the risks outweigh the benefits. I see, almost on a daily basis, the upset and hurt that smartphones cause to our students, and the risks of harm which arise from being online unsupervised. I understand that parents want to be able to contact their children when they are out and about, but urge you to consider whether a ‘dumb’ phone would allow you to do that without the added concern of social media and unsupervised internet access. My advice would be not to give smart phones to under 13s, and to over 13s only with firm parental controls.



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Check you have safety features and parental controls set up.

Do not assume that, because an app or website is regularly used by children that it is safe. Many companies get round the need to apply safety restrictions by adding an age limit to their app, yet they have no method of verifying age. Even where age limits are imposed and upheld, they are almost exclusively lower age limits and do not prevent or monitor older adults accessing apps and games intended only for younger children, which carries obvious risks. The Internet Matters website www.internetmatters.org has plenty of excellent advice, as does the Ineqe Safeguarding group who have a page of set-up advice [here](https://oursafetycentre.co.uk). (<https://oursafetycentre.co.uk>) Devices will not come prepared with safety features - you will need to add them yourself to any new device.

SMART PHONES

BBC AND CHANNEL FOUR DOCUMENTARIES



There has been a great deal in the media recently about smart phones, whether we need them, what the risks may be and whether our children should have them. Both the BBC and Channel Four have aired documentaries which I encourage you to engage with.

The BBC Panorama documentary, 'Can We Live Without Our Phones?' was aired in September and can be found at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0022n0f>

The Channel Four documentary, 'Swiped: The School That Banned Smartphones' follows a group of Year 8 pupils at an Essex School who gave up their smartphones for three week. It can be found at <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/swiped-the-school-that-banned-smartphones>



Another excellent source of information around the risks of smartphones and how you may start to reduce your child's usage can be found at the Smartphone Free Childhood website.

<https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/resources>

HOLIDAY SUPPORT

Everyone needs a little support from time to time. If you feel like you, or anyone you know, might benefit from some external support, below is a list of organisations that can help. **If you are at urgent risk, you must ring 999**

For children suffering harm and seeking support for themselves:

Childline - www.childline.org.uk 0800 1111

NSPCC - www.nspcc.org.uk 0808 800 5000

For children seeking mental health advice and support

Young Minds - www.youngminds.org.uk

Mind - www.wiltshiremind.co.uk

For adults seeking family support, including support for domestic violence

Refuge (for women) - www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk 0808 2000 247

Respect (for men)- www.mensadviceline.org.uk 0808 8010 327

For adults seeking mental health support

Mind - www.mind.org.uk

Mental Health Foundation - www.mentalhealth.org.uk

For families seeking financial support and help with food/shelter

A list of foodbanks can be found at www.adults.wiltshire.gov.uk

Citizens Advice - www.citizensadvicewiltshire.org.uk

For those caring for others:

Carer Support Wiltshire carersupportwiltshire.co.uk

Wiltshire Young Carers - www.wiltshire.gov.uk/children-young-people-young-carers

