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Staying safe (for all of us) and being a good friend on apps, sites and games

Our children are having to spend much more time on devices than ever before during this lockdown – some of this because of learning from home on Google Classroom. And of course, what do they want to do to unwind after doing their school work? Well, go on social media to interact with their friends, or play on their online games, or watch Youtube, Netflix or other shows.

Please do not worry too much about screen time - think instead about screen quality, balance and mental health. The Children's Commissioner has provided a framework called the 'Digital Five a Day' with five things to think about each day to help put that into practice.

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/digital/5-a-day/>

One of the most well received parts of what is being set on Google Classroom is that opportunity to connect with the class teacher either on the Google Meets or by posting messages in the 'stream'.

Outside of this children are meeting and chatting online through different platforms. Which is great and so important for their well-being. Please help us reinforce some key messages about appropriate behaviour to keep everyone safe and happy.

A text message can never replace personal contact as messages can often be taken the wrong way and, as a parent, it can be difficult to keep a track of the conversations between friendship groups. Globally this has opened up the possibility of cyberbullying on chat apps and children feeling isolated from group chats. This can usually be avoided if we remind children and young people to look out for their friends, not say anything that they wouldn't like to hear themselves, and always stop or stand up for others if someone gets upset.

In the same manner that we should take care with the messages we send, we should also remind children to think about the photos that they may take, post & share. If they are taking photos of others they should always have their permission, especially if they intend to share them with others. Remember that anything posted on social media can be shared by others and will remain available for others to view indefinitely.



Please remind your children never to share scary or rude images, even to complain about them. If they do see something that worries them or that might be wrong, all they need to do is ask for help from a trusted adult. They could talk to you or to us, or they may feel more comfortable talking anonymously to Childline – 0800 1111. If you or they are concerned about an adult's behaviour towards a child online, report them to CEOP (Child Exploitation & Online Protection - <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>) . As a parent, you can also contact the NSPCC - 0808 800 5000.

One more thing – please make sure that when you are talking virtually to others through Facetime, Zoom, Google Classroom etc think about what others may see on their screen and ensure that your clothing & background are appropriate for the call. Most importantly when the conversation is over ensure that apps are not running in the background, technology is shut down and stored away appropriately.

Some of the online platforms children communicate on may open them up to talking to strangers too. Regular conversations with your children can help them to know how to manage themselves online at all times.

Finally, the most important of the digital 5 a day is for us all to **be mindful**. Being mindful means paying attention to how something makes us feel. Children will be online more during lockdown. We must manage our concerns about this, and explain why they may be allowed this currently but why screen time will be regulated by the adults in the house. Importantly, when they are not online, are they able to do something else? If all they think about when they are not online is about being online, what can we do to allow them to disconnect? Daily walks, games together that are not online, mindfulness colouring in, conversations may all help. Different ways for different people.

Keeping up with all that is being asked of us, as adults, is adding a lot of stress and anxiety to our lives. We must all try to learn what worries us, and to speak to people you we trust and to ask for help when we feel we need it.

Sometimes we can't reach out to those friends for help. But there are other places where we can and must turn to.

For particular concerns there is the National Domestic Abuse Helpline. You can call 24-hours a day, for free - and in confidence on 0808 2000 247. If it is difficult to pick up the phone. You can now chat to them online, live: Monday – Friday, 3pm – 10pm. <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/>

Or there is another person you can turn to (on the end of the line) via the Samaritans. Whatever you're going through, a Samaritan will face it with you. Call 116 123

Thank you for your support, and for all that you are doing - do let us know if you have any questions or if we can help, or support in any way. Most importantly, lets make sure we are all able to stay safe throughout these times.

Kind regards

Mr Ward