



Wednesday 27th February 2019

Dear Parents / Carers

THIS IS AN ON LINE SAFETY ALERT

I've had reports about some unpleasant and potentially damaging on line activity and pop ups.

I believe that there is one particular type of chain-letter hyped up by urban myths. There have been no confirmed cases, just rumours and vague details. However, as a result of the media coverage, it is now very possible that content is being created and shared on popular apps to generate fear and panic.

As a result of the recent media coverage and concerns I have contacted other local head teachers and discussed it with all staff so that we are aware of this on the playground and we are ready to be vigilant to support our pupils.

Teachers have carried out an on line safety talk in each class today. This is in response to the many children who came into school talking and referring to a specific sinister app and seem to demonstrate considerable knowledge to one that has recently resurfaced. It is heavily linked with commonly used social media apps, and more worryingly, YouTube Kids, which you may well have assumed is free from damaging images.

I have focused on how to keep yourself safe when something unpleasant pops up. Actions to take:

- close it down,
- find an adult and talk about it
- Report it to the social media platform as a complaint.
- How to stop worrying and feeling scared at night – things to do.

We have talked to the children about what is real and fake / made up. I have explained how at night things can worry us or scare us more and we have listed ways of how to help our minds escape from the scar made by such disturbing images and pop ups.

It only takes a one second pop up to create a long lasting traumatic image in the mind of a young person that will stay with them for a considerable time. This damages their well-being, their sleep, their happiness.

I have encouraged the children to look after each other in our community by not jumping on the band wagon and trying to sensationalise the sites by talking about them as if they are something exciting. The only power we have against these vicious assaults is to close it down and protect each other. One pupil pointed out to me that I seemed cross about it, to which I replied that I am very angry that our lovely children can have their lives spoilt in such ways and that as adults we all feel very protective towards our young people.

Viral scare stories and challenges often contain graphic or distressing imagery which we strongly recommend are not shared with children or parents. Adults (staff and parents) should also be aware that by mentioning specific challenges by name may encourage children to explore something that they were previously unaware of, either out of curiosity, or because they want to feel involved in what everyone is talking about.



If children are raising concerns then it's worth having a discussion with them about scare stories and urban legends, peer pressure and what to do if they see something online that scares them.

Currently most of the concerns reported to me have been where parents have shown the images etc. to their children which has caused the distress, rather than them actually seeing anything.

I have received advice from the Kent Area Online Safety Officer to encourage parents to focus on positive behaviours online, such as critical thinking, blocking and reporting and telling an adult when you see something that makes you feel upset or distressed.

Here are some pointers for fellow parents:

- **Pause and take a breath.** There is so much information out there coming at us so fast. We need to take a breath and not jump to any conclusions—about the subject, the media and especially our kids. In fact, most kids are doing well and many have really healthy relationships with social media.
- **Think out loud together.** If there's a frightening story in the news and your kids are old enough to have social media, sit with them go through their and your feeds with them looking for that story. Comment on how many different articles there are out there and how different the perspectives and coverage can be. Let them know that people will probably be talking about it a lot and a lot of it will be inaccurate. Encourage them to talk with you about anything they see in their feeds that bothers them.
- **If you want to shield them** altogether but are afraid people are going to be talking about it around them, then simply say, "You may hear about something that happened [or is going on] that's very sad. People don't know all the details because the facts about what happened are still coming out. I want you to know I'll be happy to talk about anything you hear and answer any questions you have—or we can figure it out together as best we can."
- **For younger kids.** If your children aren't yet in social media but could hear about scary news stories at school or on playdates, here's what a child psychologist advises: Only answer the questions your child asks, and keep your answers simple and straightforward. Focus more on what helps people deal with the issue than on what scares people about it.

The most helpful on line information link I have seen can be found on: www.nationalonlinesafety.com

I hope you feel reassured that we take the well-being and happiness of all our children as a first priority.

Thank you to all the concerned and community minded parents who have contacted me or talked to me this week and raised this issue – it is our team work that makes us stronger.

I really appreciate your comments and support.

Kind regards
Justine Brown

