

Back to school: an online safety briefing for staff

With a new school year upon us, it looks as though there are positive changes ahead. At last we're seeing online safety, relationships and sex education and PSHE start to come together, reflecting the world children and young people are growing up in.

Most would agree this has been a long time in coming; while the majority of schools have already been implementing this to one degree or another over the years, the DfE's [draft consultation](#) brings some much-needed clarity. It's very comforting to see 'online' referenced throughout, specifically 'the assumption that teachers will deliver [lessons] in a context that reflects that pupils will be negotiating issues and opportunities in these areas on and off line.'

Even though the paper is only in draft form, I would recommend you read this sooner rather than later as it's going to involve some planning before next school year.

Senior leaders

- **Ensure all staff (including governors) are up to date on the latest risks and trends.** Annually, staff and governor training remain one of the weakest aspects of online safety in schools. Consider setting up a small student group who can inform you of the latest trends, which in turn you can feed back to staff. There's also the completely free, half-termly magazine, [#DITTO](#), that will help you update staff and send out to parents.
- **Give parents balanced, well-researched updates on online safety.** A recent survey by the Internet Watch Foundation and Mumsnet found that many parents are more worried about content such as bad language rather than grooming or sexual exploitation (see Wellbeing below). Parental engagement is generally quite poor, so send out support and guidance on topics that parents want to hear, and embed the important safeguarding topics with that support and guidance to try to raise engagement.
- **Save the date.** [Safer Internet Day](#) is on Tuesday 5 February 2019, and the theme for the day will be announced later in the year.

Curriculum/online safety leads

- **Ensure online safety is not confined to ICT lessons.** There are opportunities to reinforce good messages across the curriculum.
- **Consult with designated safeguarding leads** if you have any outstanding online safety or safeguarding concerns from the previous year.
- **Be very critical of resources you or others are using.** There is [growing concern \(warning: strong language\)](#) regarding the use of certain videos to ‘teach’ young people about the risks of CSE. For some good advice [see here](#).
- **Inform parents about what advice you are giving to pupils.** It is important that positive behaviour is encouraged at home and at school to provide consistency.
- **Give pupils opportunities to voice their concerns.** The concerns of adults don’t always reflect the concerns of children and young people. Give them the opportunity for open discussion and debate.

All staff

- **Ensure you are fully aware of your school’s policies.** If your policy is unclear or out of date, let your senior leaders know.
- **Be mindful of your own digital footprint.** What are you sharing, and on what platforms? Pupils and parents can seek out individual members of staff for various reasons. Remember to keep personal and professional separate.

Wellbeing

Over the last year in particular, it has been interesting to see a change in questions that parents are asking. Questions around ‘safety’ now seem to be few and far between with more parents asking about inappropriate content and wellbeing, particularly screen time. Prior to the summer holidays, the Internet Watch Foundation published some research in conjunction with MumsNet indicating that more parents [worry about bad language](#) than grooming or child sexual exploitation.

The screen time debate is one that has been going on for years with many differing opinions, and there’s no indication of clarity any time soon. It’s likely that parents are responding to [what they are seeing in the media](#), but the fact they are asking more questions should be seen as a positive. For us

professionals on the frontline there is no evidence-based conclusive answer, the advice is always the same: balance, moderation and boundaries.

New and updated apps

The more popular apps such as Instagram and Snapchat are still evolving to introduce new functionality, but unlike last year when we saw developments such as location sharing, there hasn't been anything to evoke significant concerns from these two.

A growing trend over the last year is live streaming; essentially children and young people broadcasting themselves live to an audience. The Internet Watch Foundation [published some research](#) that is a must-read for safeguarding leads, not least due to some very worrying statistics.

As live streaming started to become popular we saw the popular apps such as Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube introduce a live streaming service. However, the one that most people will recognize is Musical.ly. Over the summer holidays this app was shut down and all accounts moved to an app called TikTok. The two apps are very similar in nature, allowing users to sing or dance and share with users. The big difference is that Musical.ly was big in the US and Europe with approximately 100 million active monthly users, while TikTok was dominant in Asia with approximately 500 million active monthly users.

Gaming disorder

Earlier in 2018 the World Health Organization [defined gaming disorder](#) as a mental health condition. This was an interesting and, to many, an unexpected development. Defined as 'a pattern of gaming behaviour characterised by impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences.'

WHO state that gaming disorder has been included in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) based on reviews of available evidence, however several scientists have argued that the [evidence is weak](#) and the classification premature.

Further reading

DfE, 2018: [Approaches to preventing and tackling bullying – case studies June 2018](#)

HM Government, 2018: [Working together to safeguard children – July 2018](#)

Optimus Education, 2017: [Managing your digital footprint](#)