West House School
E-safety Advice for Parents of Boys in Years 5 and 6

E-safety relates to phones, tablets, computers, apps, social media, etc. Issues surrounding e-safety are discussed with boys in Years 5 and 6 at the start of the academic year and addressed through assemblies and PSHE lessons. In so doing, we emphasise the many benefits of the technology to underline the fact that we do want boys to use it – but kindly, and with their eyes open to the potential pitfalls. It would be naïve of all of us to assume that your son will not be exposed to at least some of these pitfalls in the coming months and years.

Social Media
We strongly suggest that you look at your son's phone, tablet and computer with him every few weeks. What apps is he using? What online friends does he have? How is he communicating with them? It is unwise in the extreme for boys of this age to have online friends whom they do not know in real life.

Are you content with your son's choice of games and social media, given the age recommendation for each app? Make a point of reviewing, with your son, the safety and security settings on the main apps or social media that he uses. It is also important for boys to add their parents as 'followers' or 'friends' on their social media apps, so that parents can see the types of conversation that are going on, to ensure their child's behaviour is safe and respectful.

Photos and Videos
The camera facility on their phone is a particular draw for children. However, young people do make some quite serious mistakes, so we say this to boys:
- Only take photos or videos with the permission of the people you are photographing.
- Don't upload photos or videos to online apps / social media – that is so fraught with trouble that at this age it is simply not appropriate.

'Sexting'
Boys must never take photos or videos of people (or themselves) when they are half dressed or naked. Sending such photos as well as texts of an explicit or suggestive nature is called 'sexting' and seems to be a real issue as children approach puberty. Whilst this behaviour would appear shocking to many adults, it is surprisingly common amongst young people and our older boys are approaching an age at which they may be tempted to engage in such activities.

Pupils do need to be aware that sending indecent images of a child (including an indecent 'selfie') is illegal and thus could have serious consequences. Due to the illegal nature of this issue, the school is required to report instances of sexting to the Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board, and to take advice on whether police need to be involved.

Cyber-bullying
We tell boys that what they do and say online must, crucially, be kind, and that one good way to test the appropriateness of what they are doing is whether they would be happy for their parents or grandparents to see it.

Examples of troublesome behaviour would be any unkind, racist or homophobic remarks, or targeting someone, or spreading gossip, or uploading photos/videos that could cause offence or upset. The school will investigate such behaviour, regardless of whether it happens on or off site. Often boys are not fully aware of the effects and consequences of their actions, and when we explain these, problem behaviour can often be resolved relatively easily. Sanctions may be imposed in accordance with the Anti-Bullying Policy.

Stranger Danger

Sadly, we know that paedophiles use the internet and apps, and boys are targets as well as girls. Children are inquisitive, biddable and trusting, and thus vulnerable. We suggest to boys that:

- They do not join any chat rooms or groups on apps or social media. However, it is possible that they will join groups with their friends.
- They need to be aware that it is fairly easy for others who they don't actually know to get into online groups.
- It is important not to reveal their address, mobile number or planned locations via ANY app or social media. They should pass that kind of information in via e-mail, text, phone calls or face-to-face and only to trusted friends.
- If something goes wrong, they should tell a trusted adult.

Use of Mobile Technology at School

Boys are not allowed to bring their own mobile devices, including phones, to school unless specifically given permission to do so. Specific guidance about the use of mobile technology will be given in relation to residential and non-residential trips and visits. It is an expectation of the school that such guidance is followed.

Sensible Limits

Many boys will play games obsessively if allowed to do so. It is important that parents monitor how much time their sons are spending watching television, or playing on tablets, computers and phones. The boys should not have such distractions at bedtime and while they are doing their homework. If they get the balance right it is, of course, perfectly reasonable for them to have a certain amount of 'guilt-free time' when they can engage in the use of such technology.

Prank Calls

Boys should be cautious about giving their telephone number out. When they first get a phone, the temptation is to share numbers and this can precipitate episodes of prank calls. The boys are reminded that such calls cause more annoyance and offence than they realise and that they must not allow this to happen.

Popular Apps and their Dangers

There are a number of extremely popular apps which, in spite of recommended age restrictions, some of our boys use. One such example is 'Clash of Clans'. This is a game, but with a chat facility in the background, meaning that children can and will converse with other users of the app. Many other users are not children and it is essential that the boys are aware of this and act with extreme caution.

Some pupils are already using Snapchat, Instagram and WhatsApp. The necessity to be cautious is equally applicable to these cross-platform messaging apps.

If a Problem Arises

Everyone makes mistakes. We tell boys that if something has gone wrong – either something they have done, or that someone else has done, they should tell a trusted adult. Such adults include parents, form teachers, a member of the Senior Leadership Team, or Mr Gater who is the e-Safety co-ordinator. Children are likely to feel embarrassed, or feel that nothing can be done – when in fact there are helpful steps that we can take.

The Future

The world of technology develops rapidly, and so do pupils as they progress towards their secondary school years. For these reasons, the school holds e-safety lessons with all forms every year to address the latest issues as they arise.

Contacting us

If you would like to discuss any of these issues, please get in touch. You could speak to your son's Form Tutor, Miss Stevenson, Mr Gater or a member of the Senior Leadership Team.