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This weekly bulletin for parents and carers shares the practices that are shaping our successful journey as a school. Each week will see a different focus covering aspects such as teaching & learning, curriculum, assessment, pastoral care, attendance, careers, wellbeing, personal development and much more.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE USING SOCIAL MEDIA

As a parent and/or carer, we appreciate it is a tough balancing act granting your child independence online, while also ensuring that they remain safe at all time. The pandemic has meant that we all, not only children, are heavily reliant on mobile devices and other technology. It is important that we work together to ensure that all students have the knowledge, awareness and skills, in order to make the right decisions when using social media.

The Thought Report has gathered insight and guidance for parents and carers who want to know more, with much of the information found by clicking this link: <https://about.kooth.com/pgtsm2/>

TOP TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

EMPATHISE: Empathy is imagining your child's feelings. For this to happen, every parent/carer needs to take the online world seriously. Empathising isn't easy. It's a skill that gets better with practice. Try to put yourself firmly in the shoes of your child.

LISTEN: Empathy can't happen if you don't listen. Listening sometimes requires a lot of self-control, but is worth the effort and energy. If your child is upset because of an interaction on social media, it is not the time to remind them of the screen-time rules you all agreed to. Harder still, it's also not the time to rescue them from their pain. Let them feel, understand and learn from it. Then empathise and listen.

BE ACCEPTING: This is not the same as agreeing or colluding. It is accepting that feelings are feelings and that they change. It's worth remembering that young people have never faced the all-encompassing sense of judgement, observation and pressure that they can feel today. The older generation did not have to grow their sense of self in a virtual chamber, but they have to learn to do this, often under immense pressure. It's important to acknowledge that you are not agreeing with any negative aspects of social media by accepting how your child feels about it. Instead, you're being open to their experience and thus promoting a connection rather than a pushing away.

ASK YOUR CHILD WHAT APPS AND WEBSITES THEY USE: It can be easy to feel that you don't understand the latest technology, apps or social media that your child is using. But don't use this as an excuse not to get involved. Ask your child to teach you and show you there about their favourite apps, games or websites. This will help you understand how they work so that you can talk about the positives and whether you have any concerns. If you think anything your child is accessing is not appropriate for their age, be ready to explain why you think this. Wherever possible, make it a joint decision with your child, so they understand the reasons not to use something and will stick to it.



SET BOUNDARIES – BUT BE REALISTIC: The boundaries you set for internet use will depend on your child's age. Whatever their age, it's a good idea to sit down together with your child to agree some rules about how much time they spend online. For example, you might want to agree that they shouldn't go online just before bed or use any devices at night, because this can affect their sleep. You can often set timers on devices to limit internet use – but try to help your child manage this for themselves as well.

REASSURE THEM THAT THEY CAN ALWAYS TALK TO YOU: You can also set up parental controls to stop your child from accessing harmful content online, but your child may well learn how to get around these. That's why it's important to make sure your child is able to make good decisions for themselves. Research suggests that most children are actually more cautious than adults online, and that most are good at navigating the internet safely. Often when they do come across upsetting content, it's not because they've gone looking for it, but because they've found it by accident, or because someone's sent it to them. It is a good idea to reassure your child that they can always talk to you.

- Ask them if they've seen anything online that they are not comfortable with. (They might have seen things like nasty comments, sexual content or violent images.)
- Tell them that you won't overreact if they tell you about something they've seen, that you'd much rather that they talked to you, instead of keeping it to themselves.
- If they are upset or worried about something they've seen, talk about how they feel, and how they can avoid seeing them again in future.
- If necessary, help them to report or block content they find disturbing.
- Whatever happens, stay calm if you find they've come across something you don't approve of.

TALK ABOUT PERSONAL INFORMATION: Help your child to understand what's meant by personal information, so they can develop an awareness of why it's significant and why they should be cautious about sharing pictures of themselves or information online. Some things for your child to know:

- What you put online stays online. Even things you delete can be saved or screenshotted – including those Snapchats meant for just one friend.
- Online strangers are still strangers. Forums and group chats can be a great way to connect over things you wouldn't say face to face, but don't feel pressured to share more than you feel comfortable with.
- Privacy is possible. You can change your settings to make your account private so that only people you know and trust can see your updates.
- Don't hesitate to block anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable and talk to someone you trust about it if this happens.

TALK ABOUT CYBERBULLYING: Bullying isn't okay, whether it happens at school, at home or on the internet. If your child is receiving nasty messages, or people are posting unwanted things about them, or they feel harassed, they should do something about it.

- Encourage them to talk to you. Even if it seems like a small thing, it can really help to talk things through with you about what to do.
- Make sure they understand how to block and report the people involved, and to use the privacy settings to limit what people can see on their profiles.
- Help them understand that they are responsible for what they post. They should remember to think about what effect their posts might have on others, and that they probably shouldn't say anything online that they wouldn't say in person. That means not writing nasty things about people you know – but it also means not posting abuse to celebrities, who are real people too.

Finally, you know your child the best and will recognise if something is wrong. It's important to act on the warning signs if you start to feel concerned, contacting school for support, advice and guidance if needed.