



October 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Social Media, Sleep and Health

You may be aware that there is much discussion about children and young people's use of social media and the negative impact it can have on their wellbeing, self-esteem and relationships. We thought it would be useful to share some of the most up-to-date expert guidance, to help you manage social media and screen use at home.

Part 1) Managing social media use and screen time

Talking helps: Talk with children about using screens and what they are watching/sending. A change in behaviour can be a sign they are distressed – make sure they know they can always speak to you or another responsible adult if they feel uncomfortable with screen or social media use.

Talk about sharing: Talk about sharing photos and information online and how photos and words are sometimes manipulated. There can be unwanted explicit images which young people are under pressure to share.

Age guidance: The age limit companies set for having a social media account with Snapchat, Kik, Instagram, TikTok (formerly Musical.ly), Facebook, and YouTube is 13. For WhatsApp, it is 16. Children can easily access highly inappropriate material on YouTube unless 'Restricted Mode' controls are set.

Use helpful phone features: Some devices and platforms have special features – try using these features to keep track of how much time you and your children spend on screens or social media. For example, when Apple released iOS 12, they made a giant leap in supporting families with the release of their new Screen Time feature. With this you can set your limits and restrictions across all devices linked to your iCloud account, including family members. There are other Apps such as 'Ourpact' help parents to set limits on usage and access. NSPCC has excellent resources for online safety here: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1489/share-aware-parents-guide.pdf>

Helpful Tips:

- Leave phones and other screens outside the bedroom at bedtime.
- Use of any screen like a laptop, computer or phone an hour before going to bed has been shown to make sleep more difficult.
- Aim for regular routines around bedtime and waking up, which helps the body to develop a strong internal rhythm, promoting sound sleep.
- Ensure your child has been active during the day and has had time outside. Exposure to daylight supports good sleep.
- Ensure bedrooms are not too hot and have dimmed lights which helps to signal to the brain that it is time to sleep. Reading before bed is an excellent way for children to wind down.
- NHS guidance states that 14 year olds need 9 hours sleep per night.



Part 2) Making sure your child/children take part in a range of healthy activities

Exercise: NHS guidance is that to maintain a basic level of health, children and young people aged 5 to 18 need to do at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. Being active for at least 60 minutes a day is linked to better general health, stronger bones and muscles, and higher levels of self-esteem.

Keep moving: Everyone should take a break after a couple of hours sitting or lying down using a screen. It's good to get up and move about and important for children to develop healthy habits which will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives. It is recognised that some young people have conditions which mean exercise is difficult for them.

Family time: Different families have different routines and expectations around the time they spend together. Family time is vitally important for all young people and parents are encouraged to plan time for face to face conversations, with adults giving their full attention to children. Screen-free mealtimes are one way of doing this but there are many other ways to connect and talk such as reading together at bedtime and finding activities which all the family can enjoy.

Sleep matters: Getting enough good quality sleep is very important, particularly for growing children and adolescents whose brains are dependent on sleep for normal development and learning. Sleep deprivation has been linked to increased risk factors for diseases.

Safety when out and about: Advise children to put their screens away while crossing the road, or doing an activity that needs their full attention.

There is excellent advice in the 5 to Thrive model for good wellbeing: <https://fivetothrive.net>. Some of the above may already be familiar to you and you may feel that you don't need to change any of your family's routines. However, if you do want to change routines it is usually helpful to sit and talk that through with your family members so that everyone is clear: some prompts are available at: <https://www.childnet.com/blog/family-agreement>. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection command is another helpful site <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

Please also view the internet safety page on the school website;
<https://www.sohamvc.org/page/?title=Internet+Safety&pid=1036>

We hope you find this useful and supports you in helping our students to use social media responsibly.

Kind regards,

Mr M Daybell
Head of Year 7

Some discussion questions for families have been produced by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-12/rcpch_screen_time_guide_-_final.pdf

There are also some pointers to additional sources of information at this website:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-council-for-internet-safety>