

22 May 2024

Dear Parent/Carer,

Recently, bereaved families whose children's deaths were linked to social media have been sharing their stories in the news (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czrx13jj9p3o>). With this in mind, and with the thought of Mental Health Awareness Week last week, we wanted to take the opportunity to remind you of some simple ways you as parents and carers can help keep your children safe online.

1. **Never** think “it won’t happen to my child”
2. **Never** ignore changes in their behaviour which might indicate a concern they are having
3. **If you allow your child to use their phone in private spaces in the house (like their bedroom),** **ask yourself how you can be sure** that your child is not undertaking risky behaviour such as talking to unknown adults online who might be posing as a teenager to groom them, experimenting with gambling or other addictive pastimes, or sending pictures of themselves to others. Sadly, we deal with students sending “nudes” on occasion. Parents/carers are nearly always not aware, are shocked and then are incredibly distressed at the consequence of their child sending pictures that will live on the internet for the rest of their child's life.
4. **If you allow your child to have their phone in their bedroom overnight**, **ask yourself how you can be sure** thatyour child is not sending and receiving messages throughout the night. We are often shown streams of messages that happen overnight by parents; we as a school cannot be responsible for these messages and ask that you are controlling your child's communication at this time. **Ask yourself how you can be sure** that having their device in their room with access to endless online content is not interrupting their sleep and having a negative impact on their wellbeing. Please be aware that the latest trend is for “couples” to sleep with their mobile video calls on, so they can go to sleep and wake up virtually together…

**Do continue to:**

* Regularly check your child’s phone
* Have open conversations about things they are looking at and people they are communicating with
* Check the settings for WhatsApp so they do not allow people to add them without their permission to groups
* Take advice on how to set up parental controls on mobile devices and tablets
* Speak to your Internet Service Provider on how to set controls on your router to enable effective device management
* Contact the police if you have any concerns or need to report malicious communications/illegal content.

The world that our young people live in is sadly frequented by individuals who are trying to “catch them out” or make them feel unsafe. As trusted adults we must work together to help them navigate the dangers presented to them. This starts in the home.

Thank you for supporting your children and for keeping our community safe.

**Kind regards**

**The Bourne Academy.**