

22nd October 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Social media advice for schools and parents

As Budmouth Academy staff, parents and children prepare for the school break over the half term, social media and networks will replace many of the more typical communications exchanged between school friends, work colleagues and parents.

Children are at greater risk over a school break, especially with potential COVID restrictions in place as they are not always under the direct supervision of parents. We are also concerned that some students are using social media accounts inappropriately in, before and after school.

Social networking sites are a huge favourite with children because they allow them to stay in touch with friends in chat rooms, meet new people with similar interests and share photos and videos. Used appropriately, social networks are an excellent place for young people to demonstrate their creativity and, in certain respects, avoid isolation as they enjoy a sense of belonging.

To keep children safe when they're using and exposed to social media and networks, there is a level of knowledge required by those of us responsible for their care.

What you ought to know about social media and networking for children

The more you know about the kind of social networking sites your children belong to and what information they like to share, the more likely you'll be able to keep them safe. Many Year 7 and Year 8 students are too young to use social media. At school we have been instrumental in alerting parents to potentially harmful, pornographic and predatory content on social media accounts belonging to students, some of them as young as 11. Below is a guide to the age restrictions for some popular social media sites:



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- Many sites include an instant message function that allows private conversations between site members. In some cases we have discovered adults, often strangers, are members of such groups.
- You can create 'privacy settings' on most social networking sites, so only close friends can search for your children, tag them in a photograph or share what they post.
- Most social networking sites have an app, which means your children will have access to the social network from their (or your) smartphone or tablet.
- Facebook, for example, has a setting that allows your children to approve or dismiss tags that people add to their posts.
- Information shared between friends can be easily copied and may spread widely.
- It isn't easy to take back information once it's online, and it can be impossible to recover after someone has shared it.
- Not everyone your child meets online will be who they say they are
- Chat rooms and forums are one of the places that online groomers visit to connect with children; they can also be places where people use a lot of sexual language and engage in online flirting.

What are the risks that children may need to deal with?

Unless used appropriately, children are at real risk of exposure to the following:

- Violent, sexual and pornographic content
- Inaccurate or false information, and extreme views
- Harmful behaviours, including self-harm, anorexia and suicide
- Oversharing of personal information
- Bullying, intimidating or frightening behaviour, including actively or unintentionally getting involved in this conduct
- Fake profiles that people use for mischief-making, sexual grooming, stalking, blackmail, extortion, identity theft or hacking.

How such exposure could affect children

Children will be affected in many ways, but here are the most common:

- Fearing they will miss out, which may lead to excessive use
- Getting upset by things they have seen and being uncertain what to do about it
- Engaging, or being pressurised into engaging, in more risky behaviour
- Developing unrealistic ideals of body image and gender
- Being subjected to peer pressure that is difficult to handle
- Creating an online reputation, which may create problems in the future.

How we can help you?

At Budmouth Academy we have occasionally asked students to delete content on social media, particularly if it is inappropriate, harmful or relates to school or cyber-bullying. We continue to ask students under the age of 13 to delete accounts if they are being misused. Parents will always be informed when this happens. In some cases we have alerted the Safer School Police Team, who support specific students with safer practices online.

Should you need to discuss any of this information, advice and guidance with a member of our pastoral team, get in touch either by telephone on 01305 830500 or emailing mhoffmann@budmouth-aspirations.org.

Yours sincerely

Mike Hoffmann
Vice Principal