

Our Lady's Girls' Primary School

Deanby Gardens, Belfast, B1 14 6NN
Tel: 028 9074 6325
Principal: Mrs E Hughes
www.ourladsdeanby.co.uk



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Dear Parent/Guardian,

SOCIAL MEDIA/GAMING & ONLINE SAFETY

You may have read recently on the news that North Belfast Principals are urging parents to 'consider' their children's use of social media amid concerns about its significant impact on pupil wellbeing.

Our young people are immersed in social media and gaming from a very young age. Life is very different now, from when you grew up. The pressure on children from their own peers is huge and this can impact on their behaviour and self-esteem.

By giving our children good advice and setting parameters for them, we can guide them to cope with life 'online'. Playing games should be fun, but there have been recent reports from children about interactions they have had online where comments have been made. If your children are playing games such as Roblox, please monitor what they are doing and who they are communicating with. Like any online multiplayer games, there is little to no control over the types of people or age limits of those playing some of these games. Despite the fact that strict chat filters can be put in place which block inappropriate words and phrases, children are still susceptible to being targeted by online predators.

Using Apps such as TikTok, Snapchat and WhatsApp can be dangerous and there have been reported issues of inappropriate language and children being offensive to each other. We cannot monitor these situations in school, but you can at home. Many of these Apps are just not suitable for primary school children. The school cannot be responsible for any issues that arise at home. Any worrying activity should be reported to the PSNI.

Recently parents have spoken to me about their children texting each other late at night. This is not acceptable but it's up to you, as parents, to enforce your rules about screen time and to chat

with other parents if problems persist. Research has also shown that although phones/tablets have many benefits to children's learning, too much screen time can have a negative impact on learning and behaviour. We would suggest that you keep screens out of your child's bedroom as they are over stimulating and can interfere with sleep. Monitor your child's viewing and apps to make sure the content is appropriate and talk to your child about the programs and apps she's using. **Remember that you are in charge within your home. Set the rules and stick to them.** Do not believe it when your child tells you that they are the only one that is not allowed to... - this is simply not true.

Protect your child by limiting the amount of time spent on devices. Do you know how to restrict the availability of Wifi in your house? Set times when it can't be used. Your internet provider will be able to help with this. Tell your child that you should be able to look at their tablet/phone at any time. If they are not willing to share what they are doing online with you, then they are probably doing something that they shouldn't be.

Teachers constantly encourage their classes to behave appropriately online. In the run up to Internet Safety Day on the 11th February, KS1 pupils will again learn all about being safe online. In KS2 we are working in partnership with external providers of online safety workshops. The Primary 6 year group have already had an online safety talk before Christmas with BEAM e-Safety. Other programmes are currently being organised for Primary 5 and 7.

Please talk to your daughters about the dangers of the internet and also about showing respect for their friends when playing online games. Talk to them about what they are playing and what Apps they are using. Below are some pointers to help you start this conversation if you need it. We know that you want to keep your children safe and that is why this guidance is so important. Do not leave it until it is too late.

Yours sincerely,
Emer Hughes





National
Online
Safety

7 questions to help you start a conversation with your child about online safety

#WakeUpWednesday



1



Which apps/games are you using at the moment?

THIS WILL GIVE YOU A GOOD OVERVIEW OF THE TYPES OF THINGS YOUR CHILDREN ARE DOING ON THEIR DEVICES, ALONG WITH THEIR INTERESTS. REMEMBER THAT THEY MIGHT NOT TELL YOU EVERYTHING THEY ARE USING, SO IT IS A GOOD IDEA TO ASK THEM TO SHOW YOU THEIR DEVICE, BECAUSE NEW APPS AND GAMES ARE RELEASED REGULARLY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE THIS CONVERSATION OFTEN TO ENSURE YOU ARE UP TO DATE WITH WHAT THEY ARE DOING.

Which websites do you enjoy using and why?

AS IN THE TIP ABOVE, ASKING THIS QUESTION WILL ALLOW YOU TO FIND OUT WHAT YOUR CHILD IS DOING ONLINE, AND ENCOURAGE POSITIVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THEIR ONLINE ACTIVITY. ASK THEM HOW THEY USE THE WEBSITES, AND TAKE AN INTEREST IN HOW THEY CAN USE THEM IN A POSITIVE WAY, ALSO ASKING THEM TO SHOW YOU IF POSSIBLE.



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PLAY AGAIN?
YES NO

How does this game/app work?
Can I play?



SHOW A GENUINE INTEREST IN WHAT THEY ARE DOING. WHILST YOU ARE PLAYING A GAME OR USING AN APP WITH THEM, IT MIGHT HIGHLIGHT SOMETHING THAT THEY DON'T NECESSARILY THINK IS A DANGER TO THEM. IF THEY ACT LIKE THEY DON'T WANT TO SHARE THEIR ACTIVITIES WITH YOU, QUESTION WHY.

Do you have any online friends?

CHILDREN CAN FORM POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE ONLINE, AND THIS HAS BECOME MORE COMMON THANKS TO ONLINE MULTI-PLAYER OPTIONS, BUT THEY MAY NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FRIEND AND A STRANGER. YOU COULD MAKE THE QUESTION MORE SPECIFIC TO YOUR CHILD. FOR EXAMPLE: "HAVE YOU MET ANYONE ONLINE THAT YOU LIKE TO PLAY GAMES WITH?" THEY MAY NOT WANT TO SHARE THIS INFORMATION WITH YOU, SO ENSURE YOU TEACH THEM ABOUT HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS.



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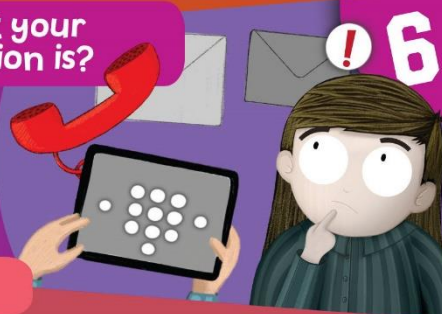


Do you know where to go for help?

ALTHOUGH YOU MAY BE THE ADULT THEY TRUST THE MOST, SOME CHILDREN STRUGGLE TO TALK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS ONLINE DUE TO CONFUSION OR EMBARRASSMENT. BECAUSE OF THIS THEY MAY STRUGGLE TO APPROACH THE NORMAL PEOPLE WHO WOULD HELP, SUCH AS YOURSELF OR A TEACHER. HAVE A CHAT TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT EXACTLY WHERE THEY CAN GO FOR HELP, AND HOW THEY CAN REPORT ANY ACTIVITY THAT THEY BELIEVE IS INAPPROPRIATE ONLINE.

Do you know what your personal information is?

YOUR CHILD MAY ALREADY KNOW WHAT THEIR PERSONAL INFORMATION IS BUT THEY MIGHT NOT THINK ABOUT HOW IT CAN BE SHARED. HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT WHAT PERSONAL INFORMATION IS AND HOW THIS CAN AFFECT THEM IF IT IS SHARED BEYOND THE INTENDED RECIPIENT. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOUR CHILD UNDERSTANDS THE DANGERS OF SHARING CONTACT DETAILS OR PHOTOS, AS INFORMATION SUCH AS THIS CAN SPREAD QUICKLY ONLINE.



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Do you know your limits?

CHILDREN MAY NOT UNDERSTAND THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF DEVICE OR GAME ADDICTION. TALK TO THEM OPENLY ABOUT HEALTHY HABITS AND ASK WHETHER OR NOT THEM SPENDING TIME ONLINE OR PLAYING A GAME IS AFFECTING THEIR SLEEP, PERFORMANCE AT SCHOOL OR IF THEY ARE GENERALLY LOSING INTEREST IN OTHER ACTIVITIES. YOU MAY LEAD ON TO ENCOURAGING ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSING THE INTRODUCTION OF TIME LIMITS WHEN AT HOME.

