



Safeguarding Newsletter

Issue 15 - 2.5.25

Nothing is more important to us than the safety and welfare of our pupils.

We are fully committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of our children and young people within our school. We work closely with families and a range of professional external agencies to secure this and follow Dudley Safeguarding policies and procedures within our school.

We hope you find this Safeguarding Newsletter useful and aim to send at least one each half term.

Adolescence

People of all ages use emojis in their digital communications. In addition to adding humour or emphasis to messages, for some communities and peer groups, these symbols can form a language of their own. This is particularly true of young people and teenagers, who sometimes use emojis as a code to disguise their true intentions from adults. This was highlighted in the recent Netflix drama, Adolescence. The link below takes you to an article that includes a guide to potentially hidden meanings of popular emoji's.



<https://smoothwall.com/resources/the-hidden-meanings-behind-emojis>

Young Minds

Young Minds is a mental Health Charity that offers a wealth of advice and guidance on a number of topics that may be affecting the young people in your family. Below is a link to just one of the topics 'A to Z Mental Health Guide' from here you can access a number of other helpful resources.

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/>

Bereavement Support

Sadly, losing a loved one is something that everyone faces at some point in their lives, but for children the loss of a special person can be very confusing, and children grieve in a different way to adults. Winston's Wish is a charity that offer a wealth of free resources and support at this difficult time. You can also make a direct referral for online bereavement support for a young person. There is no right or wrong way to grieve but this charity will help you navigate the stages your child may go through.

<https://winstonswish.org/supporting-you/support-for-parents/>

They also have a great reading list of books that may bring understanding and comfort to your child.

<https://winstonswish.org/suggested-reading-list/>

Group Chats

We continue to pick up on issues resulting from pupil group chats out of school that are spilling over into the classroom and playground. The suggested age for WhatsApp is 13.

Can we please request that if you are allowing your child to be part of a group chats, that is being used in a way that is not causing distress or as a tool to share inappropriate content. The WhatsApp guide for further support is attached to this newsletter.

Peters Hill Primary School

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Vault Apps

Have you heard about hidden apps? They're also called [vault apps](#), and they can be used on phones to hide things like photos, files and even other apps. So, why would a child have a vault app? They're usually used in situations when someone like a parent or guardian is doing spot-checks for anything out of the ordinary. Because many vault apps look completely harmless — a lot are designed to look like calculators — they often get overlooked.

If this worries you, here's how to find out if your child may have a vault app, as well as what you can do to help prevent them.

Signs Your Child May Have a Vault or Hidden Apps

- Having multiple apps of the same type, like two calculators, installed on their phone
- Turning off a device or hiding the screen when you enter a room or get close
- Refusing to hand over passwords or let you look through their phones

Or, being very willing to hand over their phone (knowing you probably won't look for vault apps)

If you haven't already set up parental controls on your child's devices, you may want to see if they have any of these hidden apps already on their phones first. Visit the App Store on their phone and type in "vault app" or "hide photos" or "secret app." If any of them have "OPEN" next to them (instead of "GET"), it means the app has already been installed on their phone.

If you discover that any of those hidden apps are installed, you can try to open them to see what's hidden there, or you can have a conversation with your child about them later.

Below are a few popular vault apps. However, these hidden apps are constantly changing, and may only be available for a short time and are then taken off the market, making them even harder to discover.

- AppLock
- Vault
- Vaulty
- SpyCalc
- Hide It Pro
- CoverMe
- Secret Photo Vault
- Secret Calculator
- Calculator Photo Vault

EE launches Age Guidance

EE is taking a significant step to safeguard children in the digital world by introducing age-specific guidance for smartphone usage. The initiative comes in response to growing concerns among parents about screen time, online safety, and how digital device usage can affect child wellbeing.

The company will classify device use into three groups based on age suitability: under 11's, 11-13, and 13-16. EE recommends that children under 11 should use non-smart devices with limited capabilities, such as feature phones, ensuring they can make texts and calls but restrict access to social media or inappropriate content.

For children aged 11-13, advises that if a smartphone is to be used, they should have parental controls enabled, as well as a family-sharing app in place such as Google Family Link or Apple Family Sharing, while restricting access to social media.

The move has been backed by charity groups, including Internet Matters, a leading child safety organisation. Internet Matters CEO Carolyn Bunting said: *"This initiative is timely and much needed. Parents and guardians want their children to be able to stay connected with them and to experience the benefits of digital technology, but they are also concerned about online safety and wellbeing. Our recent research showed that parents want to make their own decisions about their children's use of technology, but that many would value guidance to help them in doing so. It is fantastic that EE is supporting parents with age-specific advice to support children's diverse technology needs."*



Could you delay when your child is given a smartphone with Smartphone Free Childhood?

The premise behind this movement is that all parents/carers of a class all agree not to give their children smartphones (therefore the level of peer pressure is reduced) for a set time or until a specific age:

<https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/>

Able Futures

Mental Health Awareness Week (MHAW) takes place from **12th–18th May**. One of Dudley's partner services, Able Futures (working with Health 2 Employment), will be offering free online and phone consultations throughout May to support mental health.

Able Futures provides in-work support for up to 9 months to help individuals manage their mental wellbeing, aiming to ensure more good days than bad.

Eligibility criteria:

- Aged 16+
- In employment or self-employment
- Reside in England, Scotland, or Wales
- Have a mental health condition (can be self-diagnosed)

Book a consultation here:

[Access to Work \(Mental Health\) – Book an Appointment — Health 2 Employment](#)

Meet our Safeguarding Team

Tracy Curnin	Simon Duncan	Hayley Owen	Ellen Foxall	Karen Bridgwater
				
DSL	Deputy DSL	Deputy DSL	Deputy DSL	Safeguarding Officer

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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about WHATSAPP

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

WhatsApp is a free messaging service owned by Meta which allows users to send text and voice messages, make video calls, share multimedia – such as images, videos, documents and polls – and have group chats. WhatsApp messages are encrypted, meaning only you and the recipient can view what is sent. While this privacy may sound attractive on paper, this app unfortunately comes with several risks that must be considered – especially for younger users.

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

EVOLVING SCAMS

WhatsApp's popularity makes it a lucrative hunting ground for scammers. Recent examples include posing as the target's child, requesting a money transfer because of a spurious 'emergency' and even cons where fraudsters trigger a verification message by attempting to log in to your account, then, posing as WhatsApp, call or text to ask you to repeat the code back to them, giving them access to your private messages and personal information.

CHANNELS

Channels let users follow interests without sharing their phone numbers or sending direct messages, allowing only votes on polls and reacting to posts with emojis. However, fraudulent channels can impersonate legitimate organizations, tricking people into sharing personal data and even spreading misinformation or hate speech. Additionally, WhatsApp may collect details about followed channels and sell this information to third parties, raising data privacy concerns.

FAKE NEWS

WhatsApp's connectivity and ease of use allows news to be shared rapidly – whether it's true or not. To combat the spread of misinformation, messages forwarded more than five times on the app now display a "Forwarded many times" label and a double arrow icon. This makes users aware that the message they've just received is far from an original – and might not be entirely factual, either.

CHAT LOCK

Another new feature named 'Chat Lock' allows users to store certain messages or chats in a separate 'locked chats' folder, saved behind a passcode, fingerprint or face ID authentication. While this usually functions as intended, it can potentially be exploited by younger users to hide conversations and content that they suspect their parents wouldn't approve of – such as the sharing of age-inappropriate material.

DISAPPEARING MESSAGES

Disappearing messages are useful for sharing personal or sensitive information, but young people may have a false sense of privacy regarding the content they share. These messages disappear after anywhere from 24 hours to 90 days – depending on the user's preference – or can even be set to be viewed one time only. However, the recipient can 'keep' the message by bookmarking or screenshotting it, making them not as private as they may first appear.

VISIBLE LOCATION

WhatsApp's 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, which can be helpful for friends meeting up or parents checking that their child's safely on the way home, for example. However, children are able to share their location with anyone in their contacts list or a mutual group – potentially letting strangers identify their live location.

Advice for Parents & Educators

EMPHASISE CAUTION

Encourage children to treat unexpected messages with caution. Get them to consider, for example, whether it sounds like something a friend or relative would really send them. Make sure they know never to share personal details over WhatsApp, and to be wary of clicking on any links in messages. Setting up two-step verification adds a further layer of protection to their WhatsApp account.

THINK BEFORE SHARING

Help children understand why it's important to stop and think before posting or forwarding something on WhatsApp. It's easy – and all too common – for content sent to one user to then be shared more widely, and even publicly on social media. Encourage them to consider how an ill-judged message might damage their reputation or upset a friend who sent something to them in confidence. Real-life friendships are far more important than likes, after all.

ADJUST THE SETTINGS

It's wise to change a child's WhatsApp settings to specify which of their contacts can add them to group chats without needing approval. To do this, go to Privacy, then Groups. You can give permission to My Contacts or My Contacts Except ... Additionally, if the child needs to use Live Location, emphasise that they should enable this function for only as long as they need – and then turn it off.

CHAT ABOUT PRIVACY

Have a conversation with youngsters about how they're using WhatsApp, emphasising that it's for their own safety. If you spot a 'Locked Chats' folder, you might want to talk about the sort of messages that are in there, who they're with and why a child might want to hide them. Also, if a young user has sent any 'view once' content, discuss their reasons for using this feature.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian Government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



Source: See full reference list on guide page at: <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/whatsapp-2025>

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