Thursday 24th April 2020

Dear Parents & Carers,

<u>**Online Safety Information about 'House Party' app**</u>

It has come to our attention that the social media app 'House Party', which is being used by many of our children and families during this time, poses some safeguarding risks of potential 'unwanted people' joining video calls. Therefore, we have put together some information about the app to help you, as parents and carers, to put the most effective parental controls in place to ensure that your child/children are safe when using it.

The following information and advice has been taken from www.internetmatters.org. This website is a very useful resource when finding out about the most suitable games, apps and online programmes our children could have access to.

## What is the Houseparty app and how does it work?

Houseparty is a video-focused social network app with the founders of the app recently joining the Epic family – creators of Fortnite. The app can bring together people to create social reactions with up to 8 friends (and friends of friends) at the same time, via live video and texts allowing only users to add people they already know via Facebook or their device's contacts list. Creating an account with Houseparty is simple, all is needed is a username and you can also add your phone number to give the app access to your contact list. This automatically allows you access to anyone on your list, but entering your phone number is optional. Users can also manually enter the Houseparty username of anyone they wish to chat with. Chat requests are sent out to friends via notifications through the app or through text messages. As soon as a friend responds, the video chat is ready to begin. The real-time accessibility of this app allows friends to enjoy each others' company as though they were all in the same room.

## Is the Houseparty app safe for young people and children?

The app has an age rating of 12+, however, it is easy for kids younger than 12 to enter any age when signing up. Our research found that 60% of Houseparty users are between the ages of 16 and 24.

Although it appears Houseparty's advertising only features young people in their 20s, the app is popular among children under 18.

Some of the language and images Houseparty uses may be impressionable to very young children, particularly those that are vulnerable. So it's important to monitor what your child is using the app for and who they are communicating with.

## What are some concerns raised about the app?

Although the app is relatively secure as users can create "rooms" and pick only specific names of the people to talk with, if a child doesn't "lock" their chat room and choose private settings, others can pop into the video chat. So it's important to show and sit down with your child to switch privacy filters and other controls on when video chatting. This keeps video chats private and secure.

*www.bishopaldhelms.poole.sch.uk*
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note: because there's no screening and the video is live, there's always the possibility of inappropriate content for kids. The biggest risks are communicating with people children don't know well, sexting, pictures and screenshots getting shared around, and spending too much time in virtual hangouts.
Parents should also note that users can send links to their profiles on the app via a text message to anybody.

## What are Houseparty's safety and privacy features?

Since Houseparty is a video chat app, it can be used by sexual predators to communicate with minors, for example, making it a concern for parents. Houseparty has created a few security features making it harder for sexual predators to use the app:
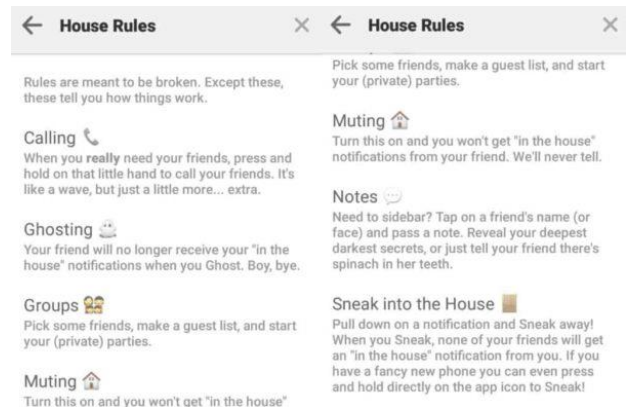
**House Rules** – under the 'House Rules' section in the app, Houseparty has a list of "rules" that it states are not meant to be broken. In reality, these are features that the app offers to help provide a better user experience and more security.

**Room lock** – users can also lock the 'room' using a lock button on the bottom left side of the app's home page. This prevents anyone from joining the room, including preventing other users from joining the room per invite from anyone else.

**"Stranger Danger"** – Houseparty advertises a feature called "Stranger Danger", which alerts users when individuals they may not know, enter their room. It warns against strangers, but also suggests strangers might be a reason for "party time!"

**Location sharing** – is an option to add other users who are nearby using a location-based "Near Me" option. This location-based searching can be turned off.

**Private mode** – you can enable this feature so every 'room' you're in will be locked. Even when you're alone.

## Advice for parents

- Make sure they 'lock' their chat room.
- Advise your young person to use a password different to others they are currently using.
- Discuss with your teen the dangers of adding people they don't know or accepting requests from people they don't know.
- Always check with your teen about who they are chatting with and what types of conversations are taking place.
- Set up parental controls on their devices to control the level of security.
- Talk to your child about building up their digital resilience and critical thinking – as another way to highlight the need to help them cope with whatever the online world throws at them.

# Safety Card: Houseparty

Houseparty is a face-to-face video messaging app that lets you instantly connect with friends and family across the world. The app is simple, effective and easy to use, alerting you via push notification that your friends have logged on and are "in the house".

Stay safe on Houseparty using the instructions on privacy, blocking & reporting below:

## Privacy

**Set your account to private using these simple instructions:**

> On the top left corner tap on the 😛

> Tap on 🔴

> Scroll to **Private Mode** and swipe the tab right.

> Select **Enable Private Mode**.

## Block

**Block a user using these simple instructions:**

> Tap on the user's name and then tap on 🔴

> Tap on **Block**.

> Tap on **Block** again.

## Report

**Report a user using these simple instructions:**

> Tap on the user's name and then tap on 🔴

> Tap on **Yes**.

> Tap on **Start**.

> Answer the different questions and submit.

For more apps visit:
oursafetycentre.com