



# WHYTRIG MIDDLE SCHOOL

One of the Seaton Valley Federation of Schools

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26 February 2021

## Online Safety

Dear Parent or Carer

Online safety is an important part of keeping children safe at Whytrig Middle School. The use of technology, the ability to stay connected online and have information on demand is a common part of everyday life. This has been highlighted further during the pandemic over the past year, as this has been often the only way family members have been able to stay in touch and see each other. Children's learning across the Country has been delivered to a much greater extent than before in this current lockdown, which is the case in our own school as we use Google Classroom to deliver lessons and other 'virtual' school activities. Online safety is taught to all pupils at Whytrig and our curriculum helps pupils to understand how they can stay safe and behave appropriately online but we also need to work together with you to ensure this is fully effective.

Your help is needed therefore, to talk to your children about how they can keep themselves safe and behave appropriately online. It's important that we are all vigilant when children are using the internet and act to ensure they are protected from people who may pose a risk to them. For example, the Google Classroom platform we use for school is an appropriate online environment for our children to do their work and communicate with school safely as it is administered and monitored by our IT team. However, when children are able to freely use the internet, without supervision, they can accidentally or deliberately be exposed to illegal, unwanted or unpleasant content, comments or activity online. For example, this week we have been made aware of inappropriate images children in Key Stage 2 happened upon when they were in the online chat website Omegle. Therefore, there are steps at home you can take to minimise this. The following basic principles can be followed to help keep your child safe online:

- Discuss together as a family how the internet will be used in your home.
- Consider what information should be kept private (such as personal information, photos etc)
- Decide rules for making and meeting online friends.
- Ensure your children know the risks of accepting friends' requests (and the potential from strangers online).
- Make sure you know what your child is doing online as much as you would if they were offline.
- Discuss using strong passwords with your child so they understand how they can protect their online accounts- talk about keeping passwords safe e.g. not sharing them with anyone or use the same password for several accounts. If your child's account is "hacked" or compromised then make sure they change their password and report any concerns or suspicious activity.
- Consider installing monitoring software because internet usage can not always be supervised due to the mobile and handheld nature of most modern devices. You can research different parental control software and tools available for your home and select the tools which are most suitable to you, your child and the technology in your home. Always remember that parental control tools are not always 100% effective and sometimes unsuitable content can get past them, so don't rely on them alone to protect your child.
- Be especially aware of settings rules relating to your child's use of webcams and any applications or devices which allow voice or video chat. It is possible in some situations for webcams to be accessed and activated remotely by a third party.
- Make sure you read any parental guidance and safety recommendations (including age requirements) for any apps or websites before allowing your child to use them. **Most popular social networking sites and apps are only for users aged 13+, 16+ or 18+) so will not be age appropriate for the majority of children in our school.**
- Take an active interest in your child's life online and talk openly with them about the things they do. Talk to your child and ask them to show or even teach you how they use the internet. Learn which websites or tools they like to use and why. Learning together with your child can often open opportunities to discuss safe behaviour online.
- Always ensure your child knows how to report and block people online who may send nasty or inappropriate messages or content. Encourage your child not to retaliate or reply to cyberbullying and to keep any evidence.
- Ensure that your child knows that once a picture, video or comment is sent or posted online, then it can be very difficult to remove as other people can forward it and share it with others, without them even knowing.
- Make sure your child knows it's important that they tell an adult they trust if anything happens online that makes them feel scared, worried or uncomfortable.

The internet is a truly fantastic resource and as we have seen over the last seven weeks of school closure, can be essential in ensuring learning can continue, as well as a way for people to stay in contact with families and friends in situations such as lockdown. However, we must ensure we know what are children are doing online and be there to support and guide them around their usage. The vast majority of children use the internet without coming to any harm so it's essential to be realistic; stopping internet use or access to web sites often will not work and it can make a child feel less able to report a problem or concern. Education around safe use is much more beneficial. We have attached some helpful guides that you may wish to read which are aimed at the different age groups within our school. There are also other useful resources to support families online at <https://www.internetmatters.org/> and on the Keeping Safe Online section of the Federation website at <https://www.svf.org.uk/our-federation/safeguarding/keeping-safe-online>. The NSPCC website on Online Safety is also a good resource for parents at <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/> and you can always contact school if you have any issues or concerns and ask to speak to a member of staff.

Yours sincerely

Mr J K Souter  
Head of School