



St. Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy

SAFEGUARDING UPDATE – JULY 2026

Understanding AI: A Simple Guide for Parents

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is technology that allows computers to “think” and make decisions a bit like humans. It powers everyday tools children may already use—like voice assistants, chatbots, or apps that recommend videos and games.

What Parents Need to Know

- Children may not spot risks: AI can sometimes give wrong or inappropriate answers, even if it sounds confident.
- Privacy matters: Some AI tools collect information children share, so it’s important to supervise use.
- AI can pretend to be human: Chatbots may sound friendly or persuasive, but they don’t have feelings or judgment.
- Learning impact: AI can help with homework, but children still need to think for themselves and not rely on it fully.
- Bias and fairness: AI learns from data online, which means it can reflect stereotypes or unfair ideas.

Your Role as Parents

- Talk to your child about what AI is and how it works.
- Encourage them to ask questions if something feels odd or confusing.
- Guide them to use AI tools safely, just as you would with the internet or social media.

Trusted Resources for More Information

[NSPCC - AI Safety Tips For Parents](#)

Safe AI for Children - Quick Guide for Parents

Cyber Trust - AI & Online Safety Guide for Parents, Guardians, and Teachers

UNICEF - Generative AI: Risks and Opportunities for Children

UK Department for Education - Safe Use of Generative AI in Education (Module 3)

Internet safety

The holidays can be a time when teenagers rely heavily on social media and spend more time online than they normally do.

For more guidance for parents and carers, please follow the attached link:

[How to keep teens aged 14-17 safe online | Internet Matters](#)

Water Safety:

Please ensure that your children stay safe in and around the water this summer. With the hot weather, there has been a rise in water-related accidents and sadly some fatalities.

Key Principles of Water Safety

Know the Risks: Water can be unpredictable. Open water, rivers, lakes, and the sea may have strong currents, cold temperatures, or hidden hazards. Even confident swimmers can quickly lose strength or control, and panic can worsen the situation

Follow the Water Safety Code: The Royal Life Saving Society UK emphasizes simple, easy-to-remember rules: assess your surroundings, understand local hazards, know how to float, and never swim alone

Cold Water Awareness: Cold water shock can occur within seconds, causing involuntary gasping and loss of control. Wearing a wetsuit, bright clothing, and using a tow float can help maintain warmth and visibility

Supervision and Lifeguards: Always swim in lifeguarded areas when possible. Keep children within arm's reach and never attempt a rescue yourself; instead, call emergency services

Education and Skills: Learning to float, swim confidently, and recognize hazards is crucial. Sharing these skills with friends and family can save lives

Please see the resources below, which you can use to speak to your children about being safe around water:

[Water Safety for Teenagers | Royal Life Saving Society UK \(RLSS UK \)](#)

The Summer Holidays can be an expensive time for families but there are local and national businesses who offer cheap meals for children:

[Places Kids Eat Free \(or for £1\) Summer Holidays 2026](#)

Looking for something to do to entertain your family during the six-weeks holiday?

[The Secret Garden - Ford Estate | Facebook](#)

[Clubspark / Sunderland Parks Tennis / Home](#)

[What's on at Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens | Sunderland Culture](#)

[Summer Sparks | Sunderland Culture](#)

[Summer in Sunderland - MySunderland](#)

MENTAL HEALTH UPDATE

Sunderland Mental Health Support Service: Healthy Heads Team is a school based mental health service based in Sunderland and provided by South Tyneside & Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust.

The team is built up of Primary Mental Health Specialist, Speech and Language Therapist, Primary Mental Health Workers, Senior Educational Mental Health Practitioners (EMHP), EMHPs and trainee EMHPs.

Together they support children, young people and their families who are struggling with Mild-Moderate mental health and emotional well-being difficulties.

Healthy Heads support children and young people from Reception age to further education.

Healthy Heads work one-to-one with some of our students but also deliver sessions to identified groups in school, for example, 'Coping with Exam Stress' to Years 11 and 13. They also offer webinars to parents throughout the year in relation to supporting children's wellbeing. From September 2026, Healthy Heads staff will be running a lunchtime group for students in our new Mercy Hub to help build resilience and self-esteem.

At St Anthony's Academy, our students not only have the support of Healthy Heads but three other services – Washington Mind, the Road Centre and the Emotional Resilience Team. Together, these services have provided mental health support to over 100 of our pupils.

Top Tips to support your teenager's emotional wellbeing in the summer holidays:

The summer school holidays are almost here! Often portrayed as a carefree time filled with sunshine, laughter and adventure, for many families this extended break from school can also bring unexpected emotional and psychological challenges. Without the structure and social interaction that school provides, some children and young people may struggle with boredom, anxiety or feelings of isolation. As parents and caregivers, it's important to recognise that mental health is just as vital during the summer as it is during the school year. With a thoughtful approach, the summer holidays can become a time of emotional growth, connection and well-being.

The Hidden Challenges

While summer offers a welcome break from academic stress, it can also disrupt the routines that help children feel secure. Some common mental health challenges children and young people may face during the holidays include:

- Loss of structure: Without a daily schedule, children may feel aimless or restless.
- Social isolation: Time away from classmates can lead to loneliness.
- Increased screen time: Excessive use of devices can affect mood, sleep and self-esteem.
- Family stress: Financial pressures, lack of childcare or strained relationships can impact a child's emotional environment.

The Opportunity for Growth

On the flip side, summer also presents a unique opportunity to nurture resilience, creativity and emotional intelligence. With the right support, children and young people can use this time to recharge, explore new interests and strengthen family bonds.

Strategies for Supporting Mental Health

Establish a Flexible Routine

Children thrive on predictability. While summer doesn't need to be rigid, a loose daily structure can provide comfort and reduce anxiety. Some of the following could help maintain a routine during the summer break.

- Regular wake-up and bedtimes
- Scheduled meals and snacks
- Time for play, learning and rest
- Chores or responsibilities

A visual picture calendar can help younger children understand what to expect each day.

Prioritise Physical Activity

Movement is essential for mental well-being. Physical activity releases endorphins, reduces stress and improves sleep. You could implement some of the following activities into their daily routine.

- Outdoor games and sports.
- Trampolining (good for regulation).
- Family walks in the countryside.
- Bike rides.
- Dance parties at home.
- Swimming.

Even 30 minutes a day can make a big difference.

Encourage Social Interaction

Social connection is a key protective factor for mental health. Help your child stay connected by:

- Organising playdates or group outings.
- Enrolling in summer camps or clubs.
- Scheduling video calls with friends or relatives.
- Participating in community events or volunteering.

For children who are shy, introverted or on the autistic spectrum, smaller or one-on-one interactions may feel more comfortable.

Balance Screen Time with Offline Activities

While screens can offer entertainment and learning, too much can lead to irritability, sleep disruption, addiction and reduced attention span. Set healthy boundaries:

- Designate screen-free times. (e.g., during meals, before bed)
- Encourage creative offline activities like drawing, building or reading.
- Use parental controls or timers if needed.

Modelling balanced screen use as a parent also sets a powerful example.

Create Opportunities for trying new tasks

Children feel empowered when they contribute and achieve. Give them age-appropriate responsibilities or projects:

- Helping with cooking – teach them how to make and decorate a cake.
- Get them out in the garden – planting, weeding, watering.
- Organising their room or toys.
- Learning a new skill or hobby.

Celebrate their efforts and progress, not just outcomes.

Encourage Emotional Expression

Make it safe for your child to talk about their feelings. Use open-ended questions and active listening:

- “What was something fun or tricky about today?”
- “Is there anything you’re worried about right now?”
- “How can I help you feel better?”

You can also use creative tools like emotion charts, storytelling or drawing to help younger children express themselves.

Be Mindful of Warning Signs

While ups and downs are normal, persistent changes in behaviour may signal a deeper issue. Watch for:

- Withdrawal from activities or people
- Changes in appetite or sleep
- Frequent mood swings or irritability
- Physical complaints without a clear cause

If you're concerned, don't hesitate to seek support from a GP, school counsellor or mental health profession.

Ideas to Boost Well-being and Connection

Here are some simple, joyful activities that support mental health:

- Gratitude Jar: Each day, write something you're thankful for and add it to a jar.
- Mindfulness Walks: Take a walk and notice five things you can see, hear and feel.
- Family Story Time: Read books together and talk about the characters' emotions.
- Creative Time: Set up a craft station or writing corner.
- Kindness Challenges: Encourage acts of kindness, like writing a thank-you note or helping a neighbour.

Supporting Parents and Caregivers

Caring for your child's mental health starts with caring for your own. The summer holidays can be demanding and are long, so remember to:

- Take breaks when you can.
- Connect with other parents or support networks.
- Set realistic expectations.
- Practice self-compassion.

Your well-being directly influences your child's emotional environment.

Final Thoughts

The summer holidays are more than just a break from school—they're a chance to build emotional resilience, deepen family bonds and create lasting memories. By being intentional about your child's mental health, you can help them feel secure, supported and joyful throughout the summer and beyond. Remember childhood is fleeting so enjoy!