



Hoyland Springwood Primary School

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Headteacher: Mrs Jennifer Hunt
Executive Headteacher: Mrs Gerry Wilson

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Re: Chat Apps during COVID-19 – please be aware!

Dear Parents/Carers,

First of all I hope you are all safe and well. Our team thinks about you all of the time and we miss you all dearly.

Secondly, I am writing to encourage you to continue to keep your child safe online, whilst at home. Children will be spending more time online (especially older pupils) due to communicating with friends and completing school work. Pupils nationally are using chat apps (of which there are many) regularly but may be communicating with people they don't know and that are of a different age and gender than what is displayed. This also may be happening whilst they are gaming.

We are alerting you to this as we are aware of a current situation with a pupil in one of our schools in the ECM Trust. They became involved in an online discussion with someone who they believed to be a slightly older child (aged 13 years). However, this actually was someone else, most probably an adult, who requested indecent pictures and further information from the child. It is thought that the unknown person was using the chat app to gain access to children and initiate inappropriate behaviour with them. The parents of the child felt it was important to inform other parents/carers of the situation and were happy for us to send out a letter to address this issue, to keep everyone safe. This is especially significant as online child sexual exploitation during COVID-19 is seeing a peak, which is very frightening for us as parents and professionals and potentially very dangerous for our children.

It is important to share such information to keep everyone safe.

As a school, we will aim to continue to educate all our children about the importance of being safe online and when using technology, through this period of time and we will continue to put post activities on Facebook to support learners. We urge you to continue this discussion and learning at home too. We ask that you regularly speak to your child/children about their use of devices and the internet. Also check who they are speaking to and what they are doing when online on a regular basis so that you can assess the risks they are in whilst on their devices.

As you know, our school operates an open door policy – challenging in COVID-19 times! However, our phone lines and school comms systems (emails and texts) are still running and are manned and checked regularly, so we are always here should you need advice in relation to any form of online safety. We also regularly update our school online safety web page and blogs with information and links to websites where you can find support in relation to online safety: <https://www.hoylandspringwood.org/esafety.html>

For other advice in relation to online safety and technology, please visit the following websites:

1. Parent Zone – Sign up for weekly updates on Online Safeguarding and other potential parenting issues - <https://parentzone.org.uk/home>
2. Digital Parenting – <http://vodafonedigitalparenting.co.uk/>



3. CEOP Online Safety - <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>
4. Thinkuknow - <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>
The 'Thinkuknow' website offers videos that can be shown to your child/children at your discretion. These videos are widely used/shown in training, however we recommend that you watch any videos yourself before showing them to your child/children to make sure they are appropriate for their age. The link for a commonly used video is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=599I1E-rWTU&safe=active>. Again, we ask that you watch this yourself prior to showing it to your child/children.
5. South Yorkshire Police - <https://www.southyorks.police.uk/find-out/crime-prevention-advice/online-safety/>

Many thanks for your continued support – stay safe and stay in! Well done and thank you to the great work our key worker parents are doing to help the cause. We massively appreciate your bravery and commitment. Please all, take care.

Mrs J Hunt
Headteacher & Designated Safeguarding Leader

Miss L Waugh
Computing and Online Safety Lead

Tips for Limiting Screen Time

Ideally you should limit their screen time to 2 hours per day. (Screen time includes television, computers, phones or any similar device)

If you are struggling to enforce this time limit as a rule you could consider the following:

* Set a time limit before they go on the computer. For example, if you want them to only play for 30 mins tell them that's the limit and set a timer. When the timer goes off so does the game, no questions asked. If they try to buy more time, calmly reiterate the time limit. If they refuse to stop playing give the computer a time out. Unplug the game and put it away in a designated time-out place for as long as you think is appropriate. If you have to resort to doing this you could say something like "I need you to show me that you can stick to the rules, if you're arguing/refusing to come off your game I might have to think about reducing the time you're allowed to play next time". Be prepared to follow this through even its taking 5 mins off the next time she goes on so that s/he knows you mean what you say.

5 mins off is a realistic time because you can continue this process if necessary.

* Be prepared if they tell you they're in the middle of a game - almost every game has a save function, so it can be paused without losing any points, clues weapons etc. You may have to help them figure out how this function works.

* After you have said time is up you will need to divert, which means having other activities they can do. A few examples are; playing a board game, reading a book, doing arts and crafts, playing at the park, helping to bake - get creative it's up to you to encourage them to be imaginative so that they are distracted from the computer.

Homework or other important things should be completed before screen time. They should not be watching/playing any device for at least an hour before they go to bed.

