Dear Parent/Carer,

I am currently supporting St Michael's Primary school in relation to work around the safe and legal use of social media.

Northumbria Police and Northumberland County Council often receive complaints and reports relating to the misuse of social media, some of which relate to young people. Whilst we would always support positive and constructive social media use, it is recognised that its misuse can lead to distress or cause offence.

It is our aim to make sure that young people use social media safely, legally and with the same courtesy they would when speaking face to face with others and it is important that parents and carers feel confident in helping them to do so.

In order to help you support your child when using social media, I have put together a list of sites that are often accessed with some information about them. I hope you find them useful. I would also be happy to discuss them with you or speak to you about any concerns you may have in person and I can be contacted using the details below.

Kind regards,

Judith Davis

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TikTok (was musical.ly) is an app where users can make short videos (15 – 60 secs), taking advantage of a number of editing tools, filters and musical overlays in the process. This makes it very appealing as it allows young people to be creative and share this with others.

Users can share their videos either only with friends or publicly. Some users have millions of followers.

Users can see videos made by others on their home screen. These can be filtered according to trending subjects and who they are following.

Users can follow other people who can be strangers, including celebrities and watch videos on everything from dancing, hair, beauty, baking and challenges.

What is good about it –

TikTok encourages creativity in young people, which is fun and which they can share with friends. They can challenge each other to dance-offs and challenges and using hashtags, can follow any open account that is of specific interest to them, like beauty or dancing.

Features a *'restricted mode'* to filter out mature content.

Usage time can be set to restrict the amount of time spent on the app. (Both above are found in 'digital wellbeing under privacy settings).
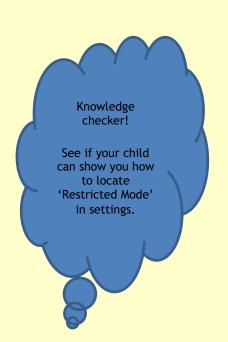
Parents can apply comment filters so that certain customised words can be filtered out to restrict swearing and bullying.

Why should I worry?

Even with restricted mode, videos can contain swearing or suggestive imagery and music not appropriate for younger children. This can also include reference to drugs and alcohol.

By default, accounts are public so parents should be vigilant making sure that settings are correct. They can be reverted, which is appealing because certain features are lost with a private setting.

There is a possibility of negative and bullying comments, even where filters have been applied. Comments can however be disabled entirely.

Knowledge checker!

See if your child can show you how to locate 'Restricted Mode' in settings.

WhatsApp (owned by Facebook) is a free app that allows users to send messages, photos, documents and make video and voice calls, as long as they have an internet connection. It is available on all major mobile operating systems.

Users must verify their account with a standard mobile number to start using the app.

Young people like it because it allows group chat so they can set up specific groups to discuss things privately (with up to 256 people).

The minimum age of use for WhatsApp is 16 years old. It had previously dropped to 13 years old but in April 2018 returned to 16, as a response to data-protection legislation.

What's good about it:

WhatsApp it isn't public in the same way that Twitter is, and people can only message friends who are already added on their phone. As long as your child only has trusted people as contacts on their phone, it is a relatively safe social media app.

Users can leave group chats should they wish to.

The settings allow users to hide their location or block contacts.

WhatsApp uses end to end encryption which makes the messages secure.

Why should I worry:

Although your child can block a contact, where a group chat is in progress, the blocked contacts can still be in the group.
This also applies to strangers. Your child can always control their own participation however and can leave whenever they want to.
As with all apps, there is a potential for bullying or sharing inappropriate content. Parents should be happy their child knows what to do if anything they see or hear makes them uncomfortable.

Instagram - a free photo and video sharing app. It allows you to take a picture directly on the app or import one from the album on your phone. You can then apply filters and other tools to customise the image. After that, you add a caption and share with your followers, who can comment. Includes private messaging.

Has a 'stories' feature similar to Snapchat. Users can take photos and videos and then post them to their Instagram story, which will stay viewable for 24 hours. Users are told when someone takes a screenshot of their story.

Also features Go Live where users can live stream their videos in real time.

What's good about it:

Users can follow accounts of interest such as celebrities or businesses in an engaging way.
Users can show case their achievements to friends and invite comment.
Users can limit who sees their pictures in settings.
Users can apply filters to comments to reduce offensive messages.

Why should I worry:

Young people can feel pressurised to have a lot of followers and feel unpopular if not.
Young people can feel pressurised to edit themselves and apply filters to make themselves 'more perfect'.
Comments can be negative and lead to bullying.
Some accounts could expose children to inappropriate content and have been linked to self-harm, excessive dieting and poor mental health.

If your child has or wants WhatsApp, it is a good idea to talk to them about group chats, stating the risks and showing them how to exit a group if they're invited to one that has people in it that they don't know.

Ask your child if they know how to block comments or apply filters to comments or hide offensive comments from posts.

Did you know…..?

Instagram is owned by Facebook.
It started in 2010 and has one billion active users.
If it was a country, it would have the 3rd biggest population in the world

Snapchat – a popular photo-messaging app that allows users to take photos, re cord videos, add drawings and send them to their friends. A message on Snapchat only appears for a few seconds, but once you leave the page or the time limit expires, it is gone permanently.

Also feature a 'story' facility where snaps and videos can stay for up to 24 hours.

Snapchat has made popular the sending of 'streaks' with users being rewarded with special emojis for keeping up long streaks of consecutive photo messaging between friends.

Ask your child if they know where to turn on 'Ghost Mode' and who it applies to.

What's good about it:
Numerous filters and voice changers that make the photo experience more fun.
Users can only send to friends and keep their pictures private.
Privacy settings allow users to filter who can contact them directly with snaps, chats and calls.
Location can be hidden to some or all users using 'ghost mode'

Why should I worry:
The momentary nature of Snapchat can mean that young people may be more inclined to take images on impulse that they might later regret.
Images can be screenshot or recorded with another device, meaning they become permanent, perhaps against the wishes of the sender.

Supporting your child's social media use

Help your child think about what they share online and who sees it. Compare it to what they would be happy to share offline. You might want to start by asking:

What kinds of things do you share online?
Should we share everything?
What shouldn't we share?
Use examples that are easy for them to understand: "You wouldn't give your number to a stranger on the street. Is a stranger online any different?"

Remind them that they shouldn't share private things, such as:

Personal information, like emails, names, phone numbers, school names
Anything that identifies where they live
Photos of their body
Gossip

Explain that you understand the internet is a great place to play, create, learn and connect. But remind them they can talk to you if anything upsets or worries them.

And Finally….

Here are some websites you may want to visit to find out more……

http://www.net-aware.org.uk/
Part of the NSPCC – you will find a run down of over 40 different sites, what they do and what you need to know to make a decision about whether your child should be using it.

https://www.internetmatters.org
In partnership with BT, Internet Matters is a nonprofit organisation, set up to help parents keep their children safe online

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/sexting
A great place to look at how to deal with and approach the subject of sexting. A difficult topic but one that needs early discussions.