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Checking Your Child's Phone

Why is it important?

Checking your child's phone is not an invasion of privacy; it is a vital safety measure. Children often lack the maturity and life experience to navigate the digital world safely, leaving them vulnerable to grooming, cyberbullying, and inappropriate content while using their devices. Here is some more information:

- **Preventing Grooming and Predatory Contact:** Predators often lurk on social media and gaming platforms, masquerading as peers to build trust and exploit vulnerable children.
- **Identifying Cyberbullying:** Online harassment can happen at any time. Monitoring helps you spot warning signs of emotional distress or bullying that your child might be hiding out of shame or fear.
- **Guiding Digital Footprints:** Children may not realize that the photos, locations, or personal details they share online can be accessed by strangers or have lasting consequences.
- **Spotting Overuse and Mental Health Impacts:** Unregulated screen time can lead to a lack of concentration, sleep disturbances, and anxiety triggered by social media pressures.

What is the best way to monitor?

Checking your child's phone requires balancing your child's right to privacy with your need to keep them safe. Experts recommend setting clear boundaries from day one, performing joint-checks rather than covert snooping, and gradually granting more independence as they mature. Here are some top tips:

1. Set Expectations Early

The "Transparency" Rule: Let your child know upfront that phone privileges come with parental oversight. Explain that you will occasionally look through their phone not because you don't trust them, but to protect them from online risks.

Age-Appropriate Agreements: For younger children (under 12), random checks and app approvals are standard. As they reach their mid-teens, transition to "negotiated openness," where they know you can check their device, but primarily intervene when safety is in question.

2. Check "Together"

Co-viewing: Instead of taking their phone secretly, sit down with them and ask them to show you their favourite apps, games, or who they are talking to. This makes it an engaging conversation rather than a covert investigation.

Avoid Reading Everything: Respect boundaries. Your child deserves a digital equivalent of a private diary. Focus on verifying who they are talking to and whether they are being cyberbullied, rather than reading every single everyday conversation.

3. Utilise Digital Tools

Instead of manually reading every text, you can use built-in features and apps to manage safety:

Native OS Controls: Use Apple's Screen Time or Android's Google Family Link to set downtime, block specific apps, and manage content restrictions.

Safety Alerts: Consider setting up reactive text monitoring apps that can send you alerts only if concerning or dangerous keywords are detected, saving you from constant daily device searches.

4. Have Open, Ongoing Conversations

Discuss the "Why": Never limit access or take a phone without explaining your reasoning calmly.

Create a Safe Space: Let them know they can come to you if they receive a worrying, inappropriate, or scary message without fear of getting into trouble. If they know they won't

automatically have their phone taken away for making a mistake, they will be much more likely to confide in you when something goes wrong.

For tailored tool recommendations, guides, and conversation starters, you can explore these websites:

- NSPCC Online Safety Hub: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>
- UK-focused Action For Children advice portal: <https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/home-family-life/technology/checking-tracking-your-childs-phone/>

Real or Fake News?

A lot of children see or hear news updates from social media or via friends so it's important that we talk to them about fake news and provide them with the skills to help them distinguish between real or fake news. So how do we get them to critically think about what they are reading?

Here are some tips:

- Check the source (who wrote it).
- When was it written? Is it based on an old story?
- Is it on a reputable news site, for example Newsround?

You can also use 'fact checker' sites such as <https://fullfact.org/> to see if the news item has already been fact checked and linked to a credible source.

Parental controls

Does your child have a game console? If yes, have you set up age-appropriate parental controls? The controls vary across the different consoles, but all will allow you to restrict spending and communication for example.

PlayStation

Set up your account as a family manager and create a separate child account so you can tailor their activities.

Find out more here: <https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/support/account/psn-safety-parents-guide/>

Xbox

You can download an app to manage your child's gaming experience. Find out more here:

<https://www.xbox.com/en-GB/apps/family-settings-app>

Nintendo Switch

Nintendo also offer a free app to monitor what and how your children are playing. Find out more

here: <https://www.nintendo.co.uk/Nintendo-Switch-Family/Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls/Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls-1183145.html>

TikTok

TikTok has an age rating of 13+. The NSPCC have created a news article discussing if TikTok is safe for children and provides an overview of how to keep your child safe on TikTok using their safety settings. Read the article here: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/child-safe-settings-tiktok>

In the article, it states that TikTok can be a creative outlet for young people as it allows them to learn about video editing and discover new interests. *However*, it can be easy for children and young people to come across inappropriate content on the app. Because TikTok uses algorithms to show users new content, it's easy for young people to come across inappropriate or upsetting videos. The platform also has communication features that allow users to privately message each other which could put your child at risk of being contacted by someone they don't know.

TikTok have also created a Guardian's Guide designed to provide an overview of TikTok and the tools and controls available: <https://www.tiktok.com/safety/en/guardians-guide/>

Social Media

There are several different social media platforms that your child might be on or wanting to join such as Instagram, Tiktok and Snapchat. Social Media platforms are used to share pictures and communicate with others. It is important to review each individual platform to see what age your child should be to access them and to set appropriate privacy settings.

Age Restrictions On Social Media					
13	14	16	17	18	18
Twitter Facebook Instagram Pinterest Google+ Tumblr Reddit Snapchat Secret TikTok	LinkedIn	WhatsApp	Vine Tinder	Path Twitch Call of Duty	(13 with parental consent) YouTube Keek Foursquare WeChat Kik Flickr

Since most social media requires children to be at least 13 years old, it should not be used by any pupil at Balliol Primary School!

It is also important to talk to your child about information they should keep private. Is your child ready for social media? This article looks at the risks that you need to consider as well as advice on how to get started:

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/is-my-child-ready-for-social-media/>

Further information

Visit the Social Media Advice hub from Internet Matters to learn more:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/social-media-advice-hub/>

YouTube

Does your child want to be a YouTuber? YouTube is intended for users over the age of 13, however the App store rates YouTube as 17+ due to the content that can be found on there. Lots of YouTube channels centre around children so is it any wonder that many children aspire to have their own channel? How can we support and keep them safe though?

Posting videos

You should be over 13 years of age to post videos on YouTube. Talk to your child about posting videos, do they understand what information they should keep private and what to do if they receive negative comments? YouTube have produced these tips:

<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2802244>

Select an appropriate setting for their videos

There are three different settings for videos published on YouTube:

- Public: anyone can view the video
- Private: video can only be viewed by users that you select
- Unlisted: only people who have the link to the video can view it.

Other tips:

- Explore comment settings – comments can be held for review, specific words can be blocked and ensure your child knows how to remove and report comments if necessary: <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/9483359>
- Visit your child's channel to see what videos they are posting
- Ensure your child knows how to block and report users if necessary.

How can I make YouTube safer?

- 1 - Turn on Restricted mode as this restricts the availability of mature content. You will need to set up a Google account to do this.
- 2 - Explore YouTube together and see what they like to watch. Make sure your child understands that they can talk to you if they see anything that makes them feel uncomfortable online.
- 3 - Ensure your child knows how to report inappropriate content.

What alternative, age-appropriate and safer option is there to YouTube?

YouTube Kids (4+) was created to give children a more contained environment. Remember though that not all videos have been manually reviewed and so if you do find something then flag it for fast review.

Snapchat

What is Snapchat?

Snapchat is an app used for messaging and sharing photos and videos. You must be 13+ to sign up. Users can send messages (snaps) to others that can only be seen for a set time period e.g. 10 seconds. Users can also upload snaps to stories which then disappear after 24 hours.

What should I be aware of?

- Who is your child friends with? Talk to your child about who their 'friends' online are.
- Group chats - in a group chat there may be people that they're not friends with on the app who can then communicate with them in the group. This also increases their risk of interacting with strangers.
- Snap Map - The map lets users see where 'friends' are. Location sharing via the map is optional and is off by default (we recommend that it remains off).
- Snapchat streaks - Streaks count how many consecutive days two people have been sending Snaps to each other, this can increase pressure to respond daily.
- Inappropriate content – due to the nature of the app your child may come across content that is inappropriate.
- Screenshots – whilst Snaps disappear, users may take screenshots before they do, potentially resulting in them losing control of what they have shared as it could be sent to other people.
- Bullying – there is a risk of bullying on all platforms so please ensure your child knows how to block and report other users if necessary. <https://snap.com/safety/safety-reporting/>
<https://support.snapchat.com/en-GB/a/remove-block-friends>

Safety tips

It is important to talk to your child regularly about what they are doing online and make sure that they know that they should always talk to you or another trusted adult if they have any concerns. Please make sure the appropriate privacy settings are set up and your child knows how to block and report other users if necessary. Although Balliol children are too young to use snapchat, if you do still choose to use it at home then we would advise that you explore Snapchat with your child and suggest why certain options are safer, for example, setting your account so only friends (rather than everyone) can see your content and only those you are friends with can contact you. <https://support.snapchat.com/en-GB/article/privacy-settings2> Don't forget to talk to your child about being kind online, for example only posting positive comments, don't say anything they wouldn't say in real life and treat others as they would expect to be treated.