Safer internet at home

This February we celebrated safer internet day. Lower school pupils watched video clips, heard a rap song on e-safety, and discussed their opinions on sharing information. We also hosted Digital Awareness, who spoke to Years 10 and and 7 on how to make the most of the internet while staying in control of how it affects their lives.

Despite its many benefits, there is no denying that technology can play havoc with teenagers' lives. It enables bullying, fosters unhealthy comparisons, and provides access to sinister content. From a purely material point of view, social media's addictiveness consumes time that would be better spent in face-to-face interactions, physical activity, study, and sleep.

Our previous newsletter highlighted the role of values, resilience and dialogue in withstanding the enhanced pressures of living in the digital age. The latter are skills that teenagers develop over time, with the support of parents and educators.

However, what about the here and now? What can parents do today to create a constructive approach to technology in the home? While they are in secondary school, we want our children to be active physically and intellectually, to be safe from indoctrination, to succeed in their studies, and, not least, to go to sleep.

While there is no catch-all solution, there are tweaks that parents can make to optimise the digital environment at home, reduce addiction and protect their family from insidious content.

Technology and sleep

Recent research in the UK reveals that 45% of 11–18-year olds check their mobile devices after going to bed (HMC, DAUK, 2016). Yet it is now increasingly recognised that the blue light emitted by screens reduces the secretion of melatonin and our ability to fall asleep.

What can we do to prevent technology from altering your children's sleep? Digital Awareness UK advises the following:

1. Limit your screen time before bed. Stop using the screen at least two hours before your desired bedtime. This will allow you to fall asleep much more easily.
2. Turn off notifications, or activate "do not disturb" "aeroplane mode" or mute settings.
3. Keep your device out of your personal space, or at least in a place that prevents you from seeing hearing or even reaching for it.
4. Turn on the Night Shift feature on your devices if available. You can reduce blue light exposure through your device's settings: for example, most Apple devices now have the "night shift mode" which changes the colour temperature of your device.
5. Invest in a pair of blue light blocking glasses. If you really must, when you don't have the time to wait two hours in between screen use and your bedtime, blue light blocking glasses allow you to continue late-night usage of your screen without the negative effects of late-night blue light.

Addiction and screen time

What is the right amount of screen time? As everyone's needs differ, the answer is difficult to assess or enforce. Noel Norton, author of Calmer, Easier, Happier Screen Time recommends that you focus on times of day. For example, you can agree on no screens before school or two hours before bed, and never during meals. Once you have an idea of how much screen time is acceptable for you or your children:

1. **Monitor yourself.** Apps such as "moment" and RealizD help identify how and how much you are using your device.

2. **Provide positive reinforcement.** There are apps that incentivise you to reduce the amount of times you check your device. "Forest", for instance, starts with a seed and allows the latter to grow into a tree then a forest the more time you spend without checking your device.

3. **Tackle gaming:** Gaming addiction is now classified as a medical disorder by the World Health Organisation, and children as young as 12 are eligible for treatment on the NHS.

Childnet offers top tips to deal with online gaming, such as, anti-intuitively, engaging with the gaming ourselves and playing a couple of games with our children.

https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/gaming

Inappropriate content

Thanks to the internet, young people can now turn to vetted, helpful websites for valuable support and information about mental health. But how to prevent their search history from inviting inappropriate content that glorifies negative coping strategies such as eating disorders, self-harming, and suicide? Consensus is that social media giants are slow to react to this issue, so how to take matters into our own hands?

Search history: to delete or not to delete?

If you have the time or the inclination to check your child's internet use regularly, search history is a good means of spotting inappropriate sites they may have visited.

On the other hand, search history and "cookies" will feed the algorithms that ultimately send dangerous links or images to your children.

Would deleting search history stop the negative content from reaching them? The answer is only to some extent.

Surfing in "incognito" mode may be a better solution, although the latter too has limitations. Private browsing, privacy mode or incognito mode is a privacy feature in some web browsers to disable browsing history and the web cache. This allows a person to browse the Web without storing local data that could be retrieved later. Privacy mode will also disable the storage of data in cookies. More information on this can be found in the

pastoral section of our website.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that this privacy protection is only within the browser application and websites might still associate the IP address at the web server to identify users.

Parental controls

These controls can be used to limit access to only age-appropriate content, to set usage times and to monitor activity. Childnet provides simple, step-by-step guidance to parental controls on your various devices:

https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/parental-controls

And finally, "show, don't tell"

Lead by example and create an agreement that applies to everyone in the family. Childnet has a template and a list of considerations in the creation of a family contract, as well as a template you can print and complete together:

https://www.childnet.com/ufiles/Family-agreement-advice.pdf

To facilitate the conversation, you could start by watching the following short clips created by Digital Awareness UK

https://www.gdst.net/parents/live-my-digital/online-safety-videos-resources
https://www.hmc.org.uk/blog/hmc-digital-awareness-uk-launch-tech-control-2018-help-young-people-make-good-decisions-use-technology/

We hope you find the above helpful. As ever, we value our collaboration with parents in taking Life Education beyond the classroom. It remains at the heart of our ethos to give the students the technical and emotional tools to face modern day demands.

Topics pupils have discussed in the first half of the spring term	
Year 6	Healthy living, safety in traffic, Brexit and Fairtrade
Year 7	Managing money and managing physical and online risk
Year 8	Relationship and sex education; sexting
Year 9	The meaning of community; peer pressure; drugs and alcohol
Year 10	Immigration and refugees; e-safety; independent thinking; individual impact on our surroundings
Year 11	Diversity; stereotypes; relationship and sex education; sexting; consent; online dating
Lower sixth	Team dynamics; advanced study; sex and relationships; entrepreneurship
Upper sixth	Safe driving; UCAS applications; global citizenship

In addition to tutor-led Life Education lessons, we have hosted the following speakers
TFL on road safety (Year 9)
Digital Awareness UK (Years 7 and 10)
Thoughtbox's Rachel Musson on independent thinking (Year 10)
Thoughtbox on Global Cultures (Year 9)
2-3 degrees on self-esteem and respect (Year 11)
Elevate on Study Skills (Year 11)
Wandsworth council specialists for SRE (Years 8 and 11)

Parent talks organised this spring term
18th March: parent seminar for Years 7 and 8: revision and study skills

Specialist speakers in the pipeline
Jack Galsworthy on Resilience (Years 7 and 10)
Anna Wille on Mindfulness (Year 8)
ThoughtBox on Becoming Me (Year 7)

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