



Dear Parent/Guardian

Online Safety Update for Parents – May 2017

We are writing to you to update you on some recent online safety issues.

Safeguarding – Hoaxes and ‘Fake News’

You may well have seen or heard of some alarming reports in the news and on social media about the ‘Blue Whale Game,’ an alleged viral suicide game reported to have originated in Russia targeting young people.

We would like to reassure you that Snopes, an online fact checking website, have found that although there have been reports of young people committing suicide in Russia over the last six months, of these reported cases **none have been found to have a conclusive tie to the game**, and that the ‘Blue Whale Game’ story is in fact a hoax, or ‘fake news’, something that has been featured in the news recently. Additional information regarding this hoax can be found here: <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/advice-those-concerned-about-%E2%80%98blue-whale%E2%80%99-hoax>

The danger with a social media share of a hoax or fake story is that it will reach everyone including young people. There are significant pressures caused by FOMO – fear of missing out; this affects body image, feelings of belonging and for a young person with poor mental health it may encourage them to consider or copy a dangerous behaviour.

The other issue with sharing specific alerts is that adults will, with the right intentions, focus on the specifics of the story and so may be less open to the signs and symptoms of harm and abuse. Children are always at the centre of our concerns, and we can assure you that we take any concern of a child self-harming very seriously and do not rely on the Media to highlight this to us.

This hoax/fake issue has happened before, for example, in August 2013 fourteen year old Hannah Smith committed suicide; the news stories told us Hannah had been bullied on Ask.fm. Calls were made to close the site, it was said that the site promoted bullying and suicide; even the Prime Minister joined in calling for the site to be closed. The Ask.fm site owners stayed quiet – they stayed quiet because they were working with Police, providing facts behind the case. Sometime later, it emerged that the bullying messages Hannah had received were sent from her own computer, she had sent the messages to herself. This case was not about an evil website, but about the poor mental health of a teenager.

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There will always be risk with the use of any online app. Online communication of any kind is open to risk, some forms are moderated, some have software monitoring, but the risk will **always** be there.

The most important messages for your child about keeping safe online are:

- Follow the age restrictions (check before you sign up).
- Turn privacy settings on and regularly check them.
- Do not participate in anonymous chat (communicating with people you do not know).
- Block, delete and report users or posts that worry you.
- Exercise caution when sharing/sending posts of any kind (including images).

Always use a personal email address to sign up for any online service or Social Media website (students **MUST NOT** use their school email account for this purpose. The school will contact you if this is found to be the case).

We encourage you as parents/guardians to keep the conversation going at home, to talk to your child about what they are doing online. Ensure that your child is aware of their personal safety and encourage them to tell a trusted adult if they are worried or concerned. The risk will always be there, but learning about risk and learning how to manage and mitigate risk is key learning for children and young people. We have to help them with this, and raise concerns where a child is at risk of harm and abuse.

Yours sincerely

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Deputy Headteacher

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Useful Support Sites:

<https://saferinternet.org.uk/> <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

<http://www.digitallyconfident.org/>

<https://parentzone.org.uk/>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

<http://www.childnet.com/> <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/> <http://vodafonedigitalparenting.co.uk/>