



St Bartholomew's CE Primary School



"Let your light shine"

News in school 15.9.25

Dear Parents, Carers and Guardians,

Welcome back! We have now completed our first full week and as always, it is like we have never been away! Classrooms are ready and looking colourful and inviting. Baselines have been completed for reading and spellings (the statutory spelling lists can be found on the class pages on our website – please look at them with your children at home). Our wonderful new reception children seem to be settling in very well and have beaming smiles. I am very impressed with their confidence and independence already!

Our Head Girls and Deputy Head Girls are very excited to be leading the school and they are already coming forward with excellent ideas to start implementing.

We have started as we mean to go on and continue with our school vision:

At St Bartholomew's we provide a gate way of discovery through our diverse curriculum and nurture global disciples who positively impact God's gift to us – the world. Our curriculum enables our learners to recognise their place in Pinchbeck West; the importance and value of where they live. It aims to develop agents of change who are taught to protect the environment, solve problems to ensure society is a better place and take responsibility for their actions to make the future a somewhere far improved from where it is. There is a clear focus on developing a rich vocabulary through a text centred approach and providing learners with the opportunity to independently gain powerful knowledge to ensure their future success. Through boundless forgiveness, compassion and a safe learning environment our children can Let their Light Shine (Matthew 5:16). We learn to love responsibly by developing the skills and knowledge needed under God's spiritual counsel, bringing light to all those around us. We are beacons of hope and our communities guided by God's spirit and love.

COMMUNITY HOPE WISDOM DIGNITY

Please help us to live out our school vision every day and shine our light for the benefit of all our communities. This term, our core value focus is **FRIENDSHIP**. We will be looking at the recipe for good friendship and how to be a good friend. Our children will be writing prayers and wishes for friendship, and they will be displayed on our prayer wall. Please do take time to read through them if you come into school and join us for collective worship.

Having friends allows children to feel part of a group, increasing a sense of security and giving them someone their own age they can relate to and turn to. Knowing they can rely on friends and be relied upon can make children feel more included and engaged.

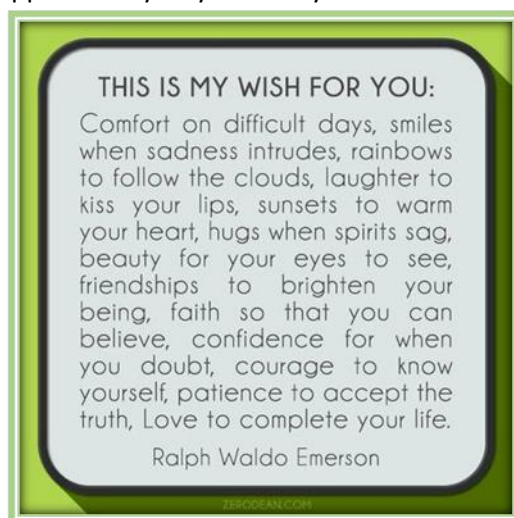
Developing different friendships over their time at school gives children ample opportunity to learn different social skills and the best ways to act in different scenarios. Children who learn important life skills when young, like how to talk to people and deal with conflict, are more likely to carry these skills through into later life.

Knowing they are going to school to spend time with friends can make children feel more motivated and more willing to learn. Positive school relationships help frame school and learning as a fun and exciting experience and something children get to do together.

Having a peer to lean on can help children deal with any negative emotions that may arise at school. Friendships can provide a support system and bolster mental health when children face difficulties with their learning, extracurricular activities, or classmates.

Fallouts, bad words and feelings of upset are all normal parts of developing school friendships. While this kind of thing can be unpleasant for your child to deal with at the time, learning to manage conflict and confrontation is an important element of growing up.

When your child exhibits particularly caring or empathic behaviour, take notice of it and praise them for thinking of others. Encourage these behaviours and explain why they're important in making and maintaining school friends. We will continue to help our children develop friendships, find friendship, be a good friend and advise on how to deal with tricky situations that pop up over their time here at St Bart's. Our staff and ELSAs (emotional, learning support assistants) are always on hand to support in any way that they can.



SDP (School Development Plan)

This term, I will be sending you a letter regarding our SDP priorities. Do have a read through them so you understand what our targets are for this year, to help to further develop our school. We value your voice and in a few weeks' time, I will be sending out a questionnaire to hear your thoughts and feeling on our school and take onboard any ideas you may have for taking the school further. I would really appreciate as many responses as possible.

Extra-curricular Parental Engagement

The following can be found on the school website class pages:

Common Exception Words for Year 1 and Year 2,

High Frequency Words for Year 2

Spelling List for Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6

Working on these at home with your child is an excellent way to keep them up to date with their learning and feeling confident.

Homework

I will be sending a letter out shortly to advise on our new homework system. We have started to work with IXL and the children will be given their own online pathway to follow that will target any gaps in their knowledge. More information to follow.

Reception 2026

We have already had several parents book to view the school for Reception 2026. If you have siblings that will be starting school next year or friends with children who are considering schools, please give them our details – we would love to see them. We will not be holding an Open Morning this year, parents can book visits at their convenience. The Reception 2026 application process will open in November.

Secondary School Places

Parents of our Year 6 children will have received, via ParentMail, the details of how to apply for a secondary school place for September 2026. Please note that this process closes on Friday 31st October 2025.

Uniform

We are no longer keeping uniform in school. Our school uniform is being supplied directly by Sign Design Services Limited, Bourne Rd, Spalding, Lincolnshire PE11 3LL. They can be contacted on 01775 761274, via email (sales@mysigndesign.co.uk) or you can visit their warehouse to place your order. The uniform will be provided without the logo, however if you wish the school logo be added, please state this in your communication. They have advised us that they will be closing The Shopp in Market Place. **Please be advised that we do have a limited number of clothing items remaining in stock. Therefore, we recommend that you contact the school office first before reaching out to Sign Design Services Limited.**

Our school colours are jade green and navy blue. Hair accessories should be green or blue and please can I ask that children refrain from having coloured braids during term time. Socks should be white, black, navy or grey. Please contact the PTFA if you are interested in any second hand uniform. KS2 children are required to provide a pencil case with the following equipment: equipment: pencil, purple biro, yellow highlighter, ruler, fine writer handwriting pen, rubber, glue stick, colouring pencils. Please remember to ask your child regularly if they require anything replenishing, especially glue sticks, which are frequently used items.

Car Safety at the Front of the School

Can I please remind drivers not to stop/block, even for a short period of time, the main driveway entrance to the school. We do, on occasions, require access for emergency vehicles.

PE/Swimming Timetable Term 1 2025/26:

Please note the change for Franklin Class.

	PE	Swimming
Dahl	Thursday	Tuesday
Nightingale	Tuesday	Wednesday
Darwin	Monday	Friday
Franklin	Tuesday	Thursday

Health Care Plans

In order that we can provide the necessary care required to those children who have on-going health care needs, we require parents to complete a 'Health Care Plan' form via ParentMail. This document is used to detail the on-going health issues and, if applicable, the medication that each child requires. If you haven't done so already and your child has health care needs, please complete the form via ParentMail. Thank you to those parents who have already completed their child's Health Care Plan.

Take care
Miss Ingle

Bible verse of the week

1 Peter 4:8:

"Above all, keep loving each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins"

School worship

Prayer for a New Term

Heavenly Father,

We give thanks for the start of this new term and for the opportunities it holds for growth, learning, and new experiences.

Grant our children the confidence, curiosity, and open hearts to learn. May they find joy in new friendships and show kindness and support to one another. When challenges arise, remind them of Your constant presence and love.

Give our staff strength, patience, and wisdom to inspire and guide. May their words build up, and may their hearts be filled with joy and grace. Protect them and guide their interactions with students and parents.

Bless our classrooms and hallways with hope and a spirit of discovery. Keep us all safe from harm and help us to treat each other with respect and understanding.

Guide us, Heavenly Father, as we embark on this new journey together, filling our minds and hearts with Your peace and love.

In Your holy name, Amen

Attendance winner of the week

Dahl Class are the attendance winners of the week and have won a trip to the park with Gerald during playtime one day next week.

All schools are expected to keep their attendance over 96%. At the end of our first week, our Year-to-Date attendance sits at 96.45%. If you need any help with attendance, please come and speak to us as we will help in any way that we can. Dr Chris Whitty released this statement via the DfE: *"It is usually appropriate for parents and carers to send their children to school with mild respiratory illnesses. This would include general cold symptoms: a minor cough, runny nose or sore throat. However, children should not be sent to school if they have a temperature of 38°C or above."*

**MOMENTS
MATTER,
ATTENDANCE
COUNTS.**

Governor News

On behalf of Governors, a big thank you to all pupils who submitted so many wonderful and creative entries to the St. Bartholomew's village show on 6 September. Special congratulations to the prize winners, but all of you are to be highly commended for your efforts and making such a good contribution on behalf of the school. We are all so proud to be part of such a lovely and vibrant school community.

Church News

Thirsty on a Thursday: The Church is open every Thursday between 9.30—11am for you to drop in any time for tea/coffee and a chat.

Dates for Your Diary

All calendar dates/events can be found on our school website by clicking on the link below which will take you to the 'calendar' tab. If you wish to add an event to your own calendar, you can do so by clicking on the event and pressing the 'add calendar' button.

[Events from September 24 – December 16 – St Bartholomew's](#)

Reception Welcome Disco

Please complete the form, via ParentMail, if you wish your child to attend the Reception Welcome disco. Please see the PTFA newsletter for the payment link, as we will no longer be taking cash in the school office for this event.

Any Other Information/Reminders

School Mobile Phone

The afterschool club can be reached on 07534725872 from 3.15pm-5pm. Outside of these hours, please contact the school office.

Afterschool Club

Please be aware that if parents/carers/guardians are more than 5 minutes late collecting their child at the end of the school day, your child will be taken to afterschool club and a charge will be made. If parents/carers/guardians are more than 5 minutes late collecting from free after school clubs that finish at 4pm, your child will be taken to afterschool club and a charge will be made.

Severe Weather/Snow Closure

In the event of severe weather, we will always strive to ensure that the school remains open, but in the event that extreme weather conditions necessitate the closure of the school we will advise you of this in a number of ways. We will notify parents via email via Parentmail, update the school website and advise Lincs FM and BBC Lincolnshire radio stations so listen out to their broadcasts or log onto their websites. We will also post a message on the school's Facebook page.

School Opening

Our school office is open from 8.30am to 3.15pm, Monday to Friday. If you wish to contact the school out of these hours, please call 01775 640357 and leave a message on our answerphone or alternatively email enquiries@stbartholomews.lincs.sch.uk.

Whatsapp



What is Whatsapp

WhatsApp is a messaging app owned by Meta that allows users (13+) to send text, voice, and video messages, make calls, and share media, documents, and locations, all using an internet connection

Privacy Settings

Whatsapp has the following privacy settings -

Last seen online
Profile photo
About
Status
Read receipts
Silence unknown callers

You can set these features to Everyone, My contacts, My contacts except... and Nobody

Location Sharing

WhatsApp gives you the ability to share your device's location with other users

This can be turned off in settings

Reporting and Blocking

You can report problematic content to WhatsApp. You can also block a user to stop all contact

Sharing Personal Information

Ensure you remind your children that they shouldn't share private information including -

- names, phone numbers, links to other social media accounts or their school locations
- other people's personal information
- links to join private group chats
- photos of themselves including indecent images

Group chats

WhatsApp has the ability for users to be added or create group chats, if your child is added into a group chat with people they don't know that will give that person the ability to chat with them.

You can't always control if you're added to a group chat; but remind children that they can always leave whenever they want to or block unwanted contact

You can mute the group chat without leaving the group, this stops notifications but still allows you to check in when you want.

Further information



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10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators

RECOGNISING & MANAGING STRESS

According to recent studies, over 60% of young people report feeling regularly overwhelmed – with stress impacting their learning, emotional wellbeing and social connections. If left unaddressed, stress can lead to more serious concerns such as anxiety, depression or disengagement. This guide offers ten practical, evidence-based strategies to help children and young people recognise, manage and recover from stress in healthy ways.

1 SPOT THE SUBTLE SIGNS

Look out for changes in mood, behaviour, or energy levels, such as irritability, withdrawal, clinginess, or frequent headaches. These may indicate that a child is feeling overwhelmed. By tuning into these cues early and offering a calm, non-judgemental space to talk, adults can help children feel heard and supported before issues escalate.

2 KEEP CONVERSATIONS FLOWING

Make time for open, informal check-ins – whether it's during car journeys, over dinner, or in quiet classroom moments. Let children know it's okay to talk about what's bothering them. Regular, low-pressure conversations create a safe space where emotions are validated, not dismissed.

3 MAKE MOVEMENT PART OF THE DAY

Physical activity can dramatically reduce stress hormones while improving mood and focus. Encourage movement through activities children genuinely enjoy – from team sports to dancing around the kitchen. Even light activity like stretching or walking the dog can help us all unwind.

4 SUPPORT HEALTHY SLEEP PATTERNS

Poor sleep makes stress harder to manage. Establish a calming evening routine that avoids screens before bedtime and promotes winding down, such as reading, listening to music, or chatting quietly. Good sleep hygiene helps reset mood, enhances concentration, and boosts emotional resilience.

5 PRACTISE MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness doesn't have to mean long periods of meditation. A few slow breaths before lessons or short family meditation sessions before bed can make a real difference. These simple habits help children ground themselves, reduce emotional reactivity, and build inner calm over time.

6 SET DIGITAL BOUNDARIES

Excessive screen time, especially before bed or on social media, is linked with higher stress levels. Set clear expectations for when and where devices can be used and suggest screen-free alternatives like crafts, nature walks, or board games to promote digital balance and reduce overstimulation.

7 NURTURE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Strong relationships act as a buffer against stress. Whether it's a trusted adult, a sibling, or a good friend, ensure children have people around them they can talk to and spend quality time with. Help them build those bonds through shared activities and meaningful interaction.

8 PROGRESS OVER PERFECTION

Set realistic goals and praise effort, not just outcomes. When children feel pressured to be perfect, stress naturally follows. Celebrate small wins and help them reframe setbacks as learning opportunities. This helps build confidence and reduces the fear of failure.

9 TEACH EVERYDAY PROBLEM-SOLVING

Use real-life scenarios to build resilience. Encourage children to identify problems, consider possible solutions, and choose a plan of action. Practising these steps builds a sense of control and reduces the helplessness that often accompanies stress.

10 BE THE MODEL THEY NEED

Children notice how adults respond to challenges. Model healthy coping strategies such as taking breaks, asking for help, or calmly expressing frustration. By showing how you manage stress constructively, you help normalise these behaviours and encourage children to do the same.

Meet Our Expert

Anna Bateman is Director of Halcyon Education Ltd, Director for Wellbeing and Family Services at Leigh Trust, and lead expert for mental health at The National College. Anna specialises in strategic mental health solutions for schools, supporting educators and families to improve resilience, emotional literacy, and overall wellbeing for children across the UK.



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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about ONLINE SLANG

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Slang moves fast – and for many young people, it's not just how they talk, but how they share their identity and feelings. Learning key terms helps adults connect and show understanding, even if the lingo seems baffling at first.

GENERATIONAL MISCOMMUNICATION

Words like 'rizz' or 'slaps' can be misunderstood by adults, leading to awkward moments or a breakdown in trust. These phrases often carry subtle social meanings among young people.

RAPIDLY SHIFTING MEANINGS

Slang changes quickly. A term like 'bop' might sound innocent one week and be repurposed the next. This makes it easy for adults to fall behind and for children to misstep.

SHIELDING BULLYING OR EXCLUSION

Inside jokes and trending terms like 'simp' or 'NPC' can be used to mock or exclude others. What looks like harmless fun might actually reinforce social divisions or bullying.

PERFORMING FOR THE ALGORITHM

Slang often reflects what's popular on platforms like TikTok. Young users might exaggerate or act out for likes, creating online personas that don't match their real selves.

CONTENT MODERATION WITH CODED SPEECH

To avoid content filters, young people sometimes use slang or emojis to talk about serious topics – for example, saying 'unalive' instead of other death-related terms. This makes harmful content harder to spot.

LONG-TERM DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

A slang-filled post might seem funny now but could resurface years later during job checks or university applications – possibly out of context, but still damaging.

Advice for Parents & Educators

KEEP UP, DON'T CATCH UP

Follow youth culture pages or ask your child about new slang. Staying informed shows that you're engaged and open to understanding their world.

FOCUS ON CONNECTION OVER CONTROL

Being someone your child can talk to is more valuable than using strict filters or monitoring apps. Openness builds trust.

ASK, DON'T INTERROGATE

Use open questions to invite conversation. You're not quizzing them – just trying to learn more about their online lives.

ENCOURAGE CRITICAL MEDIA LITERACY

Talk about where slang comes from, how it spreads, and how it can impact others. This helps young people use language more thoughtfully.

ONLINE SLANG CHEAT SHEET -

The following slang terms are common examples – please be aware this isn't an exhaustive list and both meaning and prevalence can change swiftly.

COMMON SLANG:

- Sigma** – Independent, self-reliant (often male) mindset; proud outsider status. Often celebrated in motivational memes.
- Skibidi** – Nonsense word from the viral 'Skibidi Toilet' meme; expresses chaos or fun. Usually harmless but pervasive.
- Chat** – The collective audience or group of viewers (e.g. on a livestream). Used when addressing followers directly.
- Lock in** – To focus, commit or get serious (e.g. before gaming or sports). Positive encouragement to concentrate.
- Cooking** – Doing something exceptionally well or gaining momentum. Opposite of 'cooked'.
- Rizz** – Charisma or flirting ability (short for charisma). Can praise social confidence.
- Aura or aura farming** – One's perceived 'energy' or vibe; 'farming' means manufacturing clout.

POTENTIALLY CONCERNING SLANG

- Bop** – An adult content creator (e.g. OnlyFans). Indicates exposure to 18+ material.
- Gyat or gyatt** – Sexualised exclamation about someone's backside. Objectifies appearance.
- Tralalero tralala / bombardino crocodilo / tung tung tung sahur** – Spammy references to AI-generated creatures with 'Italian-sounding' names. Can clog chats, derail discussion, and harass others.
- Glazing** – Overpraising or obsessively defending a streamer or celebrity.
- Crash out** – To lose control, give up or have a meltdown; sometimes hints at self-harm.
- Cooked** – Ruined, exhausted or in serious trouble; sometimes mental health-related.
- Unalive** – Euphemism for death or suicide; used to avoid content filters.
- NPC** – Used to suggest someone is lacking independent thoughts or is repetitive and predictable.

Meet Our Expert

Keith Broni is a globally renowned emoji expert and the Editor in Chief of emojipedia.org, the world's number one emoji resource. He has an MSc in Business Psychology from University College London and an MBA from Quantic School of Business and Technology.



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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about TECHNOLOGY ATTACHMENT

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

In today's digital age, children are increasingly forming emotional and habitual attachments to their devices. With 96% regularly accessing the internet and nearly half engaging in live streaming or content sharing, their online presence is greater than ever. This guide explores the phenomenon of technology attachment in young people and offers expert advice on fostering healthier digital habits.

WIRED FOR REWARD

Children's brains are particularly sensitive to reward-based stimulation, and some digital platforms, especially those offering quick-hit content like short-form videos, are designed to exploit this. The instant gratification of likes, comments, and rapid scene changes triggers dopamine releases, making these interactions highly addictive. Over time, this may contribute to changes in attention patterns and a reduced inclination towards activities that involve prolonged focus or delayed gratification, such as reading, problem-solving, or creative play.

NIGHT-TIME TECH HABITS

Screen use late into the evening can disrupt natural sleep patterns by suppressing melatonin, the hormone that regulates sleep. Children engaging with stimulating content may experience delayed bedtimes, lower sleep quality, and increased fatigue during the day. Additionally, fear of missing out (FOMO) on online interactions can cause anxiety and resistance to logging off, creating a cycle of late-night engagement and tired mornings.

SHAPED BY SCREENS

For many children, digital spaces have become a key arena for identity exploration and expression. Social media encourages them to curate their image carefully, with likes, comments, and shares serving as social validation. This environment can tie self-esteem to online feedback, making children vulnerable to comparison, self-doubt, and pressure to present a perfect version of themselves, even when it doesn't reflect reality.

DIGITAL WORLD DANGERS

The internet can expose children to unfiltered content, some of which may be inappropriate, misleading, or harmful. Cyberbullying, exposure to idealised lifestyles, and online predators are all risks children face, often without fully understanding the consequences. Misinformation can shape distorted worldviews, while constant comparison to others can erode self-confidence. Without guidance, children may internalise these digital dangers, impacting their emotional and mental health.

DIGITAL DEPENDENCY BUILDS

Devices often become digital comfort blankets. In moments of boredom, anxiety, or loneliness, children may instinctively reach for screens to self-soothe. This reliance on digital distraction limits their ability to develop healthy coping mechanisms, such as mindfulness, conversation or physical activity. As the habit builds, their dependency may displace real-world experiences and emotional resilience.

FRIENDSHIPS & FILTERS

Technology transforms how young people socialise, often replacing face-to-face interaction with text-based or image-based communication. While messaging apps and social media enable connection, they may also limit emotional expression and the development of essential interpersonal skills, such as tone recognition, empathy, and reading body language. As a result, some children may become less confident with exchanges in person and more reliant on digital personas to navigate friendships.

Advice for Parents & Educators

READ THE ROOM

Pay attention to behavioural changes that may signal unhealthy tech attachment. This includes mood swings, increased secrecy about online activity, withdrawal from family time or hobbies, and visible distress when separated from devices. These cues can indicate deeper emotional reliance or even exposure to distressing content. Early recognition allows for proactive support and meaningful conversation.

SHAPE DIGITAL BOUNDARIES

Create a balanced digital environment with clear guidelines on when and how devices can be used. This includes screen-free zones (e.g. bedrooms, dining tables), app restrictions, and time limits. More importantly, involve children in these decisions and explain the reasoning behind them, even reflecting upon your own digital use so they can see it's something we all have to manage. Turning boundaries into a dialogue, not just directives, helps build trust and encourages self-regulation.

DON'T WAIT, REACH OUT EARLY

If a child's relationship with technology starts affecting their emotional wellbeing, school performance, or social connections, don't hesitate to seek help. Open up discussions with teachers, pastoral staff, or digital wellbeing professionals. Early intervention is key, and a supportive network can provide tools, resources, and reassurance for both children and adults navigating this evolving digital landscape.

SET THE STANDARD

Children often model the behaviour they see. When adults demonstrate healthy digital habits, such as prioritising face-to-face conversation, balancing screen time with other activities, and using devices with purpose, children are more likely to follow suit. Share your own positive uses of technology and invite children to do the same. This collaborative approach helps demystify tech use and encourages responsible engagement.

Meet Our Expert

Philippa Wraithmell is an award-winning educator, author of *The Digital Ecosystem*, and founder of EdRupture and Digital Bridge. Digital Bridge supports the relationship between families and technology, empowering everyone to be balanced and digitally well. With over 15 years in digital education and wellbeing, she supports families, schools, and governments to build balanced and safe digital cultures.



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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about GROUP CHATS

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

On messaging apps, social media and online games, group chats are one of the most popular ways that children connect. Group chats allow messages, images and videos to be shared in one place and help friendships flourish; however, they also come with a number of risks.

TEASING AND BULLYING

Children of all ages are keen to fit in socially, and group chats can sometimes complicate that process. While group chats can foster connection, they can also give way to mean comments or jokes at someone's expense, especially when others join in for laughs. When bullying happens publicly, in front of friends and classmates, it can intensify the emotional impact – adding to embarrassment, anxiety and feelings of isolation for the child being targeted.

UNKNOWN MEMBERS

Children often can't control who is added to a group, which can lead to privacy concerns. Sharing personal details in group chats can be dangerous, and children have no control over what others do with the material they send. Some members of the chat might even decide to use such information maliciously.

PEER PRESSURE

Children may feel they have to constantly stay engaged just to be included and keep up with the conversation. In some cases, they might partake in inappropriate behaviours – like sharing explicit photos, jokes or teasing – just to fit in. Group settings can also encourage children to act in ways they normally wouldn't, or stay silent when they know something is wrong, out of fear of being excluded. Some children may find it difficult to leave toxic group chats.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some group chats may include inappropriate language or imagery. Even if a child isn't actively participating in the conversation, they may still be exposed to this content simply by being part of the group. Some apps have disappearing messaging features, where content is only available once or for a few seconds, which makes it harder for children to report something they've seen.

EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION

Exclusion in group chats is common and can take several forms. Sometimes a new group is created specifically to leave one child out on purpose. In other cases, the chat may happen on an app that a child doesn't have access to, making it impossible for them to join in. This can cause feelings of being left out – even unintentionally.

VIDEO AND LIVE CHATS

Many popular apps allow children to engage in live streaming with interactive chats or have group video chats. Anyone can be added to these streams, and often children tag peers in the comments and have conversations which are unmoderated. There's a risk of being exposed to inappropriate or violent content and offensive language, either in the group videos or via the group chats.

Advice for Parents & Educators

CONSIDER OTHERS' FEELINGS

Group chats can become an arena for children to compete for social status. Help children consider how people might feel if they behave unkindly. If a child does upset someone, encourage them to reach out, show empathy and apologise for their mistake.

SET SOME GROUP CHAT RULES

Discuss safe group chat practices, such as asking a peer for consent before adding them to a group chat, or leaving a group chat if a stranger is added. Tell children that if they're added to a group they didn't agree to beforehand, it's OK for them to leave immediately.

BLOCK, REPORT AND LEAVE

If a child encounters inappropriate content or feels uncomfortable in a group chat, encourage them to block and report the sender and leave the group. Make sure children know it's OK to leave a group chat if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

SUPPORT, NOT JUDGEMENT

Group chats are an excellent way for children to connect and feel like they belong. However, remind them that they can confide in you if they feel bullied or excluded, instead of responding to the person who's upset them. Validate their feelings and empower them by discussing how they'd like to handle the situation. You can also encourage children to speak up if they witness others being bullied.

PRACTISE SAFE SHARING

It's vital for children to be aware of what they're sharing and who might potentially see it. Ensure they understand the importance of not revealing personal details – like their address, their school, or photos they wouldn't like to be seen widely. Remind them that once something is shared in a group, they can't be certain where it might end up or how it might be used.

SILENCE NOTIFICATIONS

Being bombarded with notifications from a group chat can be an irritating distraction – especially if it's happening late in the evening. Explain to children that they can still be part of a group chat while disabling notifications. In fact, it would be healthier for them to do so, helping them avoid the pressure to respond immediately.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant at BCyberAware, who has developed anti-bullying and cyber-safety workshops and policies for schools in Australia and the UK. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government, comparing the internet use and online behaviours of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about VPNs

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

BYPASSING RESTRICTIONS

VPNs are commonly used by young people to get around blocks on school networks or parental controls. This could include accessing social media, gaming sites or adult content that would otherwise be filtered out.

ACCESSING INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

When a VPN is active, content filters can no longer see which sites a child is visiting. This means they could access inappropriate content without detection. This also makes it harder to intervene when a child is engaging in risky behaviour, as it may be difficult to detect it's happening.

REDUCED TRANSPARENCY

VPNs may make parental monitoring software ineffective, stopping parents from monitoring their child's activities, including their ability to identify potentially harmful or inappropriate content or online contact. This in turn may prevent parents from protecting their children from attempted sextortion or other online threats.

FALSE SENSE OF ANONYMITY

Children believing that VPNs make them 'invisible' online may seek to explore unsuitable internet content, including content which might otherwise be blocked. This may result in them seeking and accessing increasingly inappropriate – or even harmful – content.

INCREASED EXPOSURE TO MALWARE

Many free VPN apps are poorly regulated and may carry hidden malware. Young people installing unverified software could unknowingly open up their device (and home network) to spying, data theft, computer viruses, or even remote access by criminals.

RISK OF MALICIOUS VPN PROVIDERS

Although VPNs may increase privacy from network or service provider filtering and monitoring, this results in providing user and usage data to VPN providers. Some VPN providers may track user activity and sell that data to advertisers – or worse, malicious third parties. Not all VPNs are trustworthy.

Advice for Parents & Educators

EXPLAIN THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF VPNs

Explain how VPNs can help protect user data and therefore may be appropriate when using public or other unsecured Wi-Fi, or while dealing with sensitive corporate or personal data.

EXPLAIN THE RISKS OF VPNs

Discuss online risks, including harmful, disturbing, and criminal content. Inform children about criminal contact, such as sextortion, and how VPNs may restrict adults from monitoring children's internet use and helping them avoid these risks.

FREE ISN'T FREE

Discuss the risk of 'free' VPNs and how they may sell or use people's data, which adds privacy risks. Additionally, discuss the potential for added malware in VPN downloads, and how these compromise devices and apps, leading to potential fraud or theft.

CHECK DEVICES FOR VPNs

VPNs can be installed as both apps and browser extensions, so regularly check these on the devices used by the young people in your care. If they have been using VPNs, discuss it, listen to their reasoning, and inform them of the associated risks. In some cases, it may be appropriate to block VPN use via parental controls and other settings.

DISCUSS ONLINE BOUNDARIES

Reinforce the importance of keeping safe online and how filtering and monitoring helps keep young people safe – explain this to them rather than just 'being strict'. Encourage an open conversation around what they're accessing and why.

Meet Our Expert

This guide has been created in collaboration with Gary Henderson, director of IT at a large independent school in the UK, an ambassador for the Association of Network Managers in Education and the Vice Chair of the Independent Schools Council Digital Advisory Group.



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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Conspiracy theories are false or misleading beliefs that explain events as secret plots, often involving powerful groups. While once fringe, they are now more accessible through digital media, online influencers and because of algorithmic recommendations. The DfE guidance document, 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (KCSIE) explicitly recognises conspiracy theories as potential content risks. This guide will help parents and educators understand the risks, spot the signs, and build children's resilience to conspiracy theories.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

UNDERMINING TRUST

Conspiracy theories can lead children and young people to distrust democratic institutions and British Values, teachers, and even their own families and loved ones. This erosion of trust makes young people more vulnerable to extremist narratives by isolating them from reliable sources of information.

ONLINE ALGORITHM TRAPS

Social media platforms can often recommend sensationalist content. Once a child engages with one conspiracy-themed video or post, algorithms push more of the same, thereby creating an echo chamber that can intensify their beliefs.

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT

Exposure to frightening conspiracy content, such as global plots, viruses, or government control, can fuel feelings of anxiety, paranoia, or hopelessness. For some young people, it can trigger prolonged distress or obsessive thinking.

GATEWAY TO EXTREMISM

Conspiracy theories can often overlap with extremist ideologies. Narratives that blame specific groups, such as politicians, scientists, or particular ethnic groups, can groom children in ways that foster hate, bigotry, and radicalisation.

CONFLICT WITH PEERS

Belief in conspiracy theories can lead to isolation or conflict at school. Children may struggle with peer relationships if they express these beliefs or become distrustful of others who disagree; sometimes, confrontation can even result in a strengthening of the belief in the conspiracy theory.

ERODED CRITICAL THINKING

Young people influenced by conspiracies may reject evidence-based learning. This risks undermining their academic progress and weakening their ability to think critically, assess risks, or engage in healthy debate.

Advice for Parents & Educators

I WANT TO BELIEVE

CREATE SAFE CONVERSATIONS

Don't mock or dismiss any questions that children and young people ask about conspiracy theories. Instead, create open, judgement-free spaces to talk. This strengthens trust and makes it more likely they will confide in you.

PROMOTE CRITICAL THINKING

Teach young people how to assess information critically. Encourage them to ask appropriate questions, such as: Who is telling me this? What evidence is there? What do other trusted sources say? Use real examples from current media to explain your answers and reasoning.

MONITOR DIGITAL BEHAVIOUR

Be aware of the content children are accessing, especially on platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, or Reddit. Use parental controls, but more importantly, maintain ongoing dialogue about online experiences and influencers.

REINFORCE RELIABLE SOURCES

Point children toward trustworthy and reliable sources of news and information in a variety of formats tailored to the young person's age. Build habits of verifying facts using reliable sources, and teach them how to spot misleading content.

Meet Our Expert

Brendan O'Keeffe is a headteacher and digital education consultant with over a decade of experience in education. As Director of Digital Strategy across multiple schools and an advisor to The National College, he specialises in digital safety, PREVENT, and pastoral care.



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Source: See full reference list on guide page at: <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/conspiracy-theories>



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