



SOCIAL NETWORKING & CYBER-SAFETY

A RESOURCE FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS OF
UPPER-PRIMARY AND YEAR 7/8 STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Glenaeon has a firm policy on the use of electronic devices at school and clear guidelines for parents in controlling media access in the early years, but the management of media and technology at home can be a difficult issue for parents of pre-teen and adolescent children.

In Classes 5 and 6, children will often begin to socialise more independently and want to stay in contact with one another – particularly in holiday periods. It may be a time when children are introduced to electronic messaging, social networking, email, and voice and video chat by older siblings and/or friends. This is the reality of the world we live in, and as parents we should be aware of some of the potential problems that these technologies can bring.

In Years 7 and 8, online social networking tends to become even more central to the social dynamic of the class. Parents of Year 7 and 8 students will experience significant pressure from their child not to ‘isolate them’ from their social group by controlling access to digital devices. Students of this age group are also interested in having parties – often at night, and will be tempted to use digital tools to organise their social life. This comes with its own set of problems and issues.

Some devices such as smart phones, music players, and hand-held gaming devices are particularly pose particular challenges – designed for a specific purpose – storing and accessing music, making phone calls, playing games – but these devices often have cameras and can provide easy access to The Internet via Wi-Fi etc. While many families have good filters on home computers to protect children from inappropriate content, this protection is not always carried over to other devices. Smart phones and other devices may have some filtering available but parents must ensure they actively set up and monitor these settings on each device provided to a child.

In order to help children develop a healthy relationship to technology, it is important to establish clear guidelines, and to help them build the right habits as they move into adolescence and adulthood.

Technology and Social Media are increasingly crucial tools in adult life, and they have many benefits. This booklet is intended to give an overview of the potential issues for children, as well as to provide some recommendations and resources to help parents deal with these issues proactively and positively.

KEY MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY ISSUES FOR PARENTS

The main technology related issues of concern facing parents of pre-teen and early teenage children are:

- Physiological effects of exposure to excessive screen-time and its potential impact on sleep, mood, and general wellbeing
- Access to inappropriate and confronting content online and via media, movies, games etc. – and the capacity to send this content on to others
- Exposure to advertising material which may be difficult for children without advanced critical thinking skills to distinguish from website content
- Access to social networking sites which may allow opportunities for inappropriate relationships to form between the child and unknown adults or older children.
- Potential for harmful and abusive situations such as ‘grooming’ and ‘sexting’
- Capacity for children to become involved with Cyber bullying – either as a victim or a perpetrator

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

The motivations for accessing inappropriate material online can be very innocent at age 11 or 12 but the consequences can be significant and harmful. Typing ‘rude words’ into a search engine (in the same way that previous generations looked them up in a dictionary or an encyclopaedia), can instantly bring confronting, graphic images to the unwitting child. Older students (13 or 14) may also access inappropriate material with more sophisticated searching and may be tempted to download copies of this content and, potentially, to share it with others.

Internet filters can deal with this issue up to a point – but they must be consistently applied to all devices. Supervision of technology use is also critical and computers etc. should be located in a shared or visible place in the home.

Parents should also check with one another when organising visits, sleepovers etc. to establish the access and supervision rules that are in place in other households.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social Networking is an increasingly vital part of adult life. It has many benefits, and can be a powerful tool for forming and maintaining connections with friends, family and others. Despite their many advantages, Social Networks are not always safe places for children and it is important to be aware of the potential issues.

Foremost in the minds of parents and teachers when thinking about social networking, is the potential risk posed by cyber-bullying. This is covered in more detail in the section on cyber-bullying later in this booklet.

On many social networking sites, there are opportunities for people to misrepresent who they really are. This may often be innocuous, and many online communities encourage a level of anonymity. However, with this comes the potential for more sinister social manipulation of often overly trusting children. In extreme cases, predators may use a false identity to ‘groom’ or target a child.

Even if your child does not have a bad experience of this type, such networks will connect them with many 'friends' of all ages. Children may befriend older children they know of from school or elsewhere and therefore be exposed to online conversations, posts and images that are not age-appropriate.

Be aware that social networking sites, readily accessible via smart phones, can also be accessed via other Internet-enabled devices such as some iPods and gaming consoles.

Unfortunately, it is very difficult for parents of Class 5 and 6 children to successfully prohibit all access to social networking sites. Many online services do not accept users younger than 13 years old – but this offers no guarantee of security, as it is very difficult for these sites to enforce the age restriction. If your children do not access social networking sites from home they will be very likely to do so from a friend or relative's device elsewhere.

It is therefore wise to speak with your children about social networking and lay down some ground rules to help to safeguard them. In particular, talk to your child about personal information and why it is vital to protect it. This sort of information can be used to identify or locate where they live, where they go to school or activities in which they are involved. Actively discourage them from communicating online with people they do not know and ensure they come to you if they have any online encounters with which they are uncomfortable.

SOCIAL NETWORKING DOS AND DON'TS

These are the recommendations of the NSW Police on this issue.

Instruct your child:

- To never arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they meet online
- To never upload (post) pictures of themselves onto the Internet
- To never give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number
- To never download pictures or other material from an unknown source, as there is a good chance there could be sexually explicit images
- To never respond to messages or chats that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing
- That whatever they are told online may or may not be true.

Other Issues to discuss with your child:

- Personal responsibility while on-line. Consider talking openly with your child about your concerns.
- Privacy concerns on the Internet. What private information is OK to share and what is not?
- Urban legends and tales. Just because information is on the computer screen, it doesn't mean it's true. Do not believe everything someone tells you via the Internet.
- Use of Common Sense. While we don't know the motives of everyone on the Internet, children need to keep some facts and tips in mind while on-line.

- Virus checks. Always use caution when opening files downloaded from unknown sites or people.

Settings

Check the settings on your social networking page, change it so only those you know and trust can see anything about you. Check it regularly as the settings may be changed by the Host site. Be aware that even though your settings may be secure, your friends' settings may not be the same, which can leave you vulnerable.

Profile

Review the profile you have placed on line, how much does it reveal about you. Are you happy for everyone to know all this about you?

Details

Don't put your photo, contact details or your current school on your profile. If you need to, give these details out to people you know and trust. What you place on The Internet is no longer private and is no longer under your control. Others may use it for any purpose they wish.

Social Networking – Parties

- Never use Social Networking sites to send out party invitations
- Your child may have safe settings but you do not have any control over the settings of recipients – or over how many times the invitation gets sent on
- Your name and address, phone number, school, child's age group etc. could become public knowledge overnight
- Equally, if the party is in a public place this could become an open invitation to uninvited guests
- You and your child also need to be aware that predators use social networking sites to single out targets for their attention

SOCIAL NETWORKING IN GAMES

Be aware that many games include features that allow for communication with other players in a variety of ways, and that these features also constitute a form of social media.

Consider placing limits, where possible, on your child's exposure to video games and other interactive media. The decision about how much to allow, what games/movies/television shows to allow, and when to allow them can be a difficult one, and needs to be made and regularly reviewed by each family, taking into consideration:

- The age of your child
- The family's values and interests
- The balance of time spent on homework and other obligations
- The balance of time spent engaging in physical activity

Some types of games can engender strong feelings of competitiveness and/or anger and frustration, and this can often lead to harsh and abrasive language amongst players. In some cases, this can lead to abusive interactions and cyber-bullying.

Due to its transient nature, communication that occurs during gaming can be very difficult for parents to monitor. Often, there is no record of messages or conversations.

Consider restricting your child's gaming to public areas of the house, in order that you can more easily monitor their communication. It is important to prioritise your child's safety and health over their entertainment while they are at a vulnerable age.

Carefully monitor your child's gaming partners.. Younger children should never game with strangers, or with friends of friends who they have not met in person.

Communicate clearly with parents of other children about what boundaries you are trying to maintain for your child and respect the boundaries of others. Remember that families with older children may have a more open internet/media environment than you want for your younger child. If this is a concern for you, discuss putting certain mutually acceptable parameters in place during visits.

CYBER-BULLYING

Cyber bullying or harassment and inappropriate use of communication technology can have very serious consequences, even if its intent is not malicious. It is very important for children to understand this, and to learn which types of behaviour are unacceptable and, in many cases, illegal. Children often have the sense that the messages they send are private and will not be intercepted by third parties – but of course once a message, photo or video has been sent, it can be very easily forwarded, uploaded or shared with others. Once this has occurred, it can be very difficult, if not impossible to remove.

Sometimes messages are sent which are genuinely meant as a joke by the sender. Without facial expressions and tone of voice to accompany them they can be seriously misconstrued by the recipient. These messages can still constitute cyber bullying especially if sent repeatedly or copied on to others.

Young people can also create serious problems for themselves via 'sexting' or sending nude or otherwise inappropriate photographs of themselves to others. This usually occurs within an older age group, but can happen in Years 7 and 8. This may occur within the context of a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship but in the eyes of the law, any nude photographs of a minor constitutes child pornography and may be dealt with extremely harshly.

During the 2008-2009 year, the most common age group to contact Kids Helpline regarding cyber bullying was 10-14 year olds (50.4%),

Cyber bullying can take many forms:

- **Direct messaging** - from perpetrator to victim of hurtful or threatening text messages.
- **'Text Wars'** – multiple perpetrators sending numerous messages of ill will to a victim (can also come via Twitter).
- **Direct forwarding** - of threatening photos & videos.
- **Stealing passwords** - enabling the perpetrator to impersonate the victim and communicate inappropriately with others on their behalf.
- **Blogging** – publicly humiliating others via a weblog.
- **Websites** – purposely creating websites to humiliate or threaten the victim.
- **Sending pictures** – sending humiliating or degrading photographs of a victim to multiple recipients.
- **Internet polling** – perpetrator sets up and runs a poll on the an internet site with questions designed to humiliate/embarrass the victim.
- **Bullying during online gaming** - perpetrators isolate, harass or otherwise target the victim within the gaming context.
- **Malicious Code** – direct attempt to damage the victim's computer by forwarding viruses.
- **Malicious Subscribing** – perpetrator subscribes on behalf of victim to email marketers, sex sites etc.
- **Impersonation** – perpetrator while impersonating the victim sends a message to third parties inviting retaliation. Can be extremely dangerous if the victim's actual contact details are given.

- **‘Notify Wars’** – perpetrator goads victim into contravening the rules of a website to cause their account to be frozen.
- **Prank Calls** – very easy to make when you are carrying a mobile around with you all the time.
- **False Facebook accounts** – perpetrator impersonating victim sets up a Facebook account on their behalf often including malicious or embarrassing content.
- **Outing** – Perpetrator publicly displays information about the victim designed to cause humiliation or embarrassment.
- **‘Flame Wars’** – heated and or threatening arguments in an online message board or other forum.

It is important that, as parents, we understand the potential hazards of cyber-bullying so that we can help to ensure that we protect our children from becoming either victims or perpetrators.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO SAFEGUARD OUR CHILDREN?

The answer to this question will vary widely according to the ages, temperaments and circumstances of your child but some suggestions are:

- Think carefully about giving your child a mobile phone and, if possible, consider providing them with a simple so-called ‘dumb’ phone without a camera or Internet connectivity
- Think carefully about giving your child a sophisticated iPod device. If your child must have an iPod, consider a simpler device like an iPod Shuffle (music only).
- Talk to your child about their use of digital technology and ensure they understand the serious implications of inappropriate behaviour.
- Talk to your child about sharing personal information online. Ensure they check with you first before signing up for or joining anything online.
- Monitor your child’s use of phone/ iPod and internet technology.
- Don’t allow computers or any device with a screen in bedrooms or other areas where they can be used in an unsupervised environment.
- Install filtering software to restrict access to inappropriate websites and ensure filters exist on all devices that your child has access to.
- Prioritise the safety of your child over their curiosity about technology while they are at a vulnerable age.
- Prioritise the safety of your child over their entertainment. Children travelling on bus journeys can do many other things to pass the time – read/knit etc/complete puzzles etc.
- Look at the content rating - despite inconsistencies, this is generally a useful guide on the appropriateness of the movie, game, etc.
- Know before you go – it’s important to review movies, games and other media yourself before giving it to your child.
- Watching with your child/adolescent enables you to mediate between the content and the values you would like your child to possess as well as allowing you to discuss, with them, the differences between real-world actions and consequences, and what may be portrayed in media

- Limit amount of screen-time when you notice changes in your child's mood, behaviour or their attitude to other activities
- Ask your child about what they already do online: do they have an email address, Facebook account, avatar etc? – you may be surprised at the answers – especially if they have older siblings
- Try to support other families in dealing with these issues. Communicate clearly with parents of other children about what boundaries you are trying to maintain for your child and respect the boundaries of others. Remember that families with older children or different values may have a more open internet/media environment than you want for your younger child. If this is a concern to you, discuss putting certain mutually acceptable parameters in place during visits

It is very important that you establish a culture of communication with your child. They need to feel that they can talk to you about concerns they are having with content they are finding online, or interactions they are having. They need to feel that when they make an honest mistake, you will help them to work through the issue.

USEFUL LINKS & RESOURCES

The content of this booklet is directed at parents as adults and each parent will need to determine the best method to bring this information to their child(ren) in an age appropriate way. There are many very useful websites for parents providing specialist assistance in these areas. Links for some of them are:

Creative Living with Children	creativelivingwithchildren.com
Australian Government Office of the Children's Safety Commissioner (formerly CyberSmart.gov.au)	esafety.gov.au
KidsHelp	kidshelp.com.au
Commonsense Media	commonsensemedia.org
Think U Know	thinkuknow.org
The Cyber Safety Lady	thecybersafetylady.com.au

Glenaeon has a policy about cyber bullying – part of our overall bullying policy which is in the Parent's Handbook . We also have a firm policy on the use of electronic devices at school. Both these policies are included in this booklet. Each year we run parent education sessions to help parents to work with these issues. More information about these sessions will come to you via the Newsletter and Parent Education Booklets throughout the year.

The following are Glenaeon school policy excerpts reproduced here for your convenience.

ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT POLICY

From **Kindy to Class 2 no electronic equipment is to be brought to school.** From Classes 3-12, mobile phones are permitted but must be switched off (not on silent) within the school grounds. If your child is seen using their mobile phone on school premises it will be confiscated for the rest of the day and they can collect it from the office as they leave. **For children in all classes no other electronic equipment is permitted at school.** If electronic equipment is seen or found it will be confiscated and handed to the office and may be collected by the student at a later date. Students will also receive an entry in the Conduct book. We ask for parental support in this matter, which we consider to be very important for pedagogical, health and safety reasons.

MORE ABOUT MOBILE PHONES

Mobile phones are now very much part of our lives. However, while they are wonderful tools for adults they can create serious dilemmas for children and young people. The following Q&A has been prepared to address the questions we are most commonly asked about use of mobile phones by school students.

What is the school policy on mobile phones?

From Kindy to Class 2 children are not permitted to bring mobile phones to school. From Classes 3-12 mobile phones are permitted but must be switched off (not on silent) within the school grounds. If your child is seen using their mobile phone on school premises it will be confiscated for the rest of the day and they can collect it from the office as they leave. Please note that mobile phones are strongly discouraged for all children, particularly children in younger years. If you feel it is necessary for your child to have a mobile phone for safety reasons please ensure it is a simple phone that preferably does not incorporate a camera or internet access.

Mobile phone rules also apply to school events even though they may take place off site or outside usual school hours.

What if my child needs to call me during the day?

There is a telephone available for student emergency use during the school day. The phones are located in the main reception at each campus and may be used by students with Class Teacher or Guardian's permission.

What about on school camps?

Unless specifically advised otherwise students are not permitted to bring mobile phones on camps. If phones are seen during a camp they will be confiscated by the supervising teacher and held in safe keeping until the end of the camp. It is also likely that the student responsible will incur conduct consequences such as a detention.

Students on camp should advise the supervising teacher if they need to make a phone call and appropriate arrangements will be made.

Why aren't mobile phones permitted on camps?

During camps students may be tempted to utilise their phone in an inappropriate way that is very disruptive to the routine of the camp and can put the phone user and other students at risk. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Texting and calling other students after lights out
- Using phones to organise a rendezvous after lights out
- Taking inappropriate photographs of classmates
- Accessing inappropriate material on the internet

We ask that you support the school and the teachers supervising school camps by ensuring that your child leaves their phone at home.

Are there ever exceptions to this rule?

In some very special circumstances such as when children suffer from extreme anxiety it may be possible for a teacher to take charge of a student's mobile phone and allow them to make or receive calls in accordance with special pre-arrangements organised with parents.

What happens to confiscated phones?

Confiscated phones are sealed in an envelope with the student's details recorded on it and kept in a secure location in the school office until the end of the day. Confiscated phones are returned to students (who must call at Reception to collect them) at the end of the school day and must be kept out of sight while on school premises.

Can my child use their phone at a school bus stop?

If your child wishes to use their phone at a school bus stop or the school gate etc. before or after school they should request permission from the duty teacher and advise the purpose of the call – e.g. to make transport arrangements.

Why do they have to ask for permission?

Unfortunately there have been instances of improper use of phones at bus stops – e.g. to display inappropriate images to others. The school has a duty of care to students and this measure is for the students' protection.

Some of these measures seem a bit draconian – surely children can't be endangered by a simple phone?

Unfortunately when you provide your child with a phone – especially an internet enabled phone- they become connected to the rest of the world. Some of the issues that arise from this are noted below:

- When children are provided with mobile phones they are automatically able to build up a personal list of contacts - the phone numbers of other children they communicate with by phone (the same goes for email accounts). This contact list can easily be shared.
- It is very important that parents are aware of this and speak to their children about the proper and appropriate use of phones and most importantly about the importance of not passing on their own or other people's details to third parties.

- Bluetooth and download capacity or internet capability make it even easier for children to share contact data with one another
- Phones with internet capacity and cameras add another element of risk. Cameras in particular expose children to many dangers including risk of pornography prosecution for inappropriate images – often very innocently taken. (This has already occurred in Victoria).
- Mobile phones open up opportunities for exposure to cyber bullying. Unkind, abusive and teasing messages are often sent without a moment's thought in the heat of an argument. Children tend to think what they are doing is ephemeral – like shouting something mean during a fight – but once these things are 'out there' they are there forever and can be passed on with great ease.

Police statistics tell us that the highest level of phone related cyber bullying in Australia is amongst children in Class 5.

Below are some useful tips for parents in acquiring and using mobile phones for children.

TIPS FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH MOBILE PHONES:

- Choose a mobile phone for your child that does not feature internet access, or alternatively speak with your carrier to block internet access. All carriers provide this service
- Talk to your carrier about blocking services that are not required on your child's phone. While GPS and other features can be useful, consider the implications of a complete stranger being able to pinpoint the exact location of your child. Blocking or restricting services can include the opportunity to limit incoming and outgoing calls, text, instant messaging and picture messages
- Monitor your child's telephone usage and be wary of gifts your child receives from unfamiliar people, particularly mobile phones
- Consider setting strict guidelines regarding your child's use of the phone. For example, advise your child to use the mobile phone for emergencies and calls to home only
- Consider purchasing a pre-paid SIM card (available from your carrier) that strictly limits the use of the phone – once the limit is reached the phone card needs to be re-charged with credit
- Talk to your child about the appropriate use of camera phones. If your child has a camera phone then it is important you set some guidelines for its use, including when taking photos of others. Ask your child to let you know if anyone else's use of a camera phone makes them feel uncomfortable
- Stress the importance of not responding to any messages from unknown people. If your child receives persistent calls or messages from an unknown person, you should report it to the police, taking note of the number and saving any messages or pictures on the mobile handset.

The following websites have very useful information for parents trying to handle these issues.

- http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD..PC/pc=PC_100694
- <http://www.police.qld.gov.au/programs/personalSafety/childProtection/>

CYBER-BULLYING POLICY

Cyber bullying is when one student is targeted by another through the use of digital technology, mobile communication devices or through the internet. The aim of this targeting may be harassment, stalking, threats or other forms of harmful behaviour.

Cyber bullying takes many forms and may involve the use of websites, mobile phones, chat rooms, email, SMS and the uploading of pictures or video. It could involve the sending of threatening messages, communicating false pretences, forwarding of other students' private communication, establishment of websites designed to humiliate or the posting of humiliating messages or pictures.

In general the school views cyber bullying in the same way it views other types of bullying and students and parents who are aware of, or have been victims of cyber bullying are encouraged to report the incidents to teachers or class guardians. Glенаeon's electronic equipment policy forbids the use of phones at school and in school supervised areas. Adherence to this rule helps to limit opportunities for cyber bullying.

ADVICE FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

Cyber bullying can have traumatic effects on students and it can occur in or out of school time. Students who are targeted in this way often feel powerless and isolated. Listed below are some strategies to help protect students from cyber bullying.

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS

- Talk to a parent, friend, teacher or class guardian about the cyber bullying.
- Keep and save as evidence any bullying emails, text messages or images.
- Do not reply to bullying or threatening text messages or emails - do not engage in any communication with the sender(s) as this could make matters worse.
- Do not give out your personal details online - if you are in a chatroom, watch what you say about where you live, the school you go to, your email address etc.
- Remember the tone and meaning of written messages can be misinterpreted.
- Check that your messages are clear and respectful.
- Use blocking software to block messages from certain senders or use mail filters to block emails from specific email addresses.
- Remember that sending/forwarding abusive or threatening messages is inappropriate and could be deemed unlawful under State and/or Federal legislation depending on the circumstances.

STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

There are a number of things you can do to help ensure your child stays safe when using Internet or phone services:

- Talk to your child about bullying and harassment.
- Talk to your child's teacher or class guardian about your concerns.

- Educate your child about Internet safety and the proper etiquette when using Internet or phone services.
- Keep your eyes out for behavioural changes that may indicate your child is being bullied, harassed, victimized or vilified, as you may be able to intervene.
- Encourage your child to report any incidents of cyberbullying to you.
- Limit computer use for younger children (refer to section on electronic media)
- Stay involved - have the home computer in a public space (not in the child's bedroom) and monitor your child's Internet habits
- Make sure your home computer is protected with security software