

SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

LATEST ADVICE FOR PARENTS, CARERS AND STAFF AT ALEC HUNTER ACADEMY

Welcome to our first edition of the newsletter from the Alec Hunter Academy Safeguarding Team.

We aim to bring you the latest advice on issues we feel will be important to you as part of our school community; as well as including information about useful websites and resources where further information can be found.

If you do have any concerns or questions around safeguarding, please email ABooth@alechunter.com



*Mr A Booth, Assistant
Headteacher &
Safeguarding Lead*

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CURRENT TRENDS TO BE AWARE OF

VAPING: THE DANGERS EXPLAINED

Vaping is openly taking place in Braintree by young people, of various ages, attending different schools. Information from the local police given to schools is that e-cigarettes/vape pens are being sold by independent stores around Braintree to students as young as fourteen.

Some entrepreneurial students are buying these (especially the pens, which can look like a biro or highlighter) in bulk and then selling them individually for a profit in schools across Braintree.

E-CIGARETTES OR VAPE PENS - WHAT ARE THEY?

- They are electronic devices that heat a liquid and produce an aerosol or mix of small particles in the air.
- They come in many shapes and sizes. Most have a battery, a heating element, and a place to hold a liquid.
- Some e-cigarettes look like regular cigarettes or cigars. They also look like USB flash drives, pens, and other everyday items.

Click [here](#) for a helpful guide: 'What Parents Should Know and Do'. It includes the signs of vaping and how parents/carers can safeguard their children.



Some vaping devices look like regular cigarettes, cigars or pipes, while others resemble USB sticks, guitar picks, small cellphones, lipstick, watches or other everyday items and tech devices.

HOW DO THEY WORK?

They produce an aerosol by heating a liquid that usually contains nicotine, flavourings and other chemicals that help to make the aerosol. This liquid is sometimes called 'e-juice', 'e-liquid', 'vape juice,' or 'vape liquid'. Nicotine is highly addictive and can harm adolescent brain development, which continues into the early to mid-20's.

CURRENT TRENDS

SAFER SCHOOLS APP

A reminder to parents and carers about our Safer Schools App, which is available to download for free. The Safer Schools App allows students and adults to explore current trends in the online world, including social media sites, apps and games. It provides up-to-date information about what is popular for young people and what parents/carers should look out for to keep their child safe from online harm. Below are some quotes from parents who are already using the App and further information on how to download it.

'The app is great, it's easy to navigate and provides awareness on issues that young people may be experiencing/facing. It also highlights key information on the latest social media platforms and trends.'

'As a member of school staff, and the parent of a teenager, the Safer Schools App provides me with the information I need to help me stay up to date with current concerns which in turn enables me to have meaningful conversations with my child, whilst also helping me to be alert to concerns which could affect our student cohort'

'Opened my eyes to the scary world my child lives and what I have to do to keep them safe. Thank you!'



SAFER SCHOOL APP

HOW TO DOWNLOAD THE APP

STEP 1

Search 'Safer Schools' and download the App.



STEP 2

When you open the Safer Schools App, you will be presented with the login screen. Here you will see your two options for accessing the App - numeric or QR.

1) Scan the QR Code

First, tap the "Scan QR Code" button (...or just Scan QR on Android...).

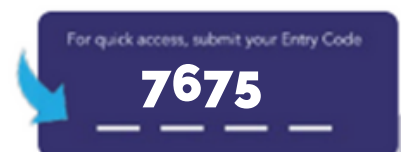
Hold your device so the QR code appears in your camera view (you may need to give permission for the App to use the camera). When it scans the code, you will be logged in!



2) Using the Numeric Code

In the "Select your school" section, choose your organisation from the dropdown list and click 'continue'.

Next, simply enter the 4-digit access entry code for your role within the school (parent/carer, staff or pupil).



Group Chats

Group chats are places where you can talk to more than one person at the same time. You can do this on dedicated apps, messaging apps, social media platforms or online games.

Some people create group chats for close friends. But other groups have hundreds of people in. These can be people from the same school or area, or people from across the world.

For students Group chats provide an easy way to:

- Socialise with friends
- Organise events
- Discuss school work
- Chat about games or hobbies

However, sometimes the things that are shared in group chats hurt other people. This could involve bullying or harassment.



Online Safety Information

For Parents



5 Tips to give your child if they are a member of a group chat.

1. Speak to an adult if nasty messages are being sent.

It doesn't matter if the messages are about them or someone else - they don't need to deal with it alone.

2. Avoid group chats with lots of people you don't know.

Joining group chats with people they don't know could put them in uncomfortable situations. People they don't know could send inappropriate content, or they might pressure them to do things they don't want to do.

3. Check your privacy settings.

See if they can change the settings on their app to make sure that only contacts, friends or followers can add them into group chats. This means they'll be less likely to receive inappropriate content and things they don't want to see.

4. Leave the group if you don't feel comfortable.

Leaving the chat will show they don't agree with that nasty or inappropriate behaviour.

5. Remember that it's difficult to delete comments and photos that have been shared with groups.

Once the messages have been read by recipients, it's difficult to take them back. Make sure they think about what they share with large groups of people. You can have a conversation with you child on how to keep their messages kind and respectful and what that looks like through examples.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about GROUP CHATS

Occurring through messaging apps, on social media and in online games, group chats are among the most popular ways that young people engage with their peers online. Involving, by definition, three or more individuals, these groups allow users to send messages, images and videos to everyone in one place. While they are useful for helping friends, people with shared interests or members of a club to communicate and coordinate activities, they can also leave young people feeling excluded and bullied – as well as providing opportunities for inappropriate content to be shared and viewed.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

BULLYING

Unkind comments or images which are purposely aimed at an individual can be shared freely in a group chat – allowing and often encouraging others to join in the bullying behaviour. If this content is shared in a group of their peers (especially a larger group), it serves to amplify the hurt, embarrassment, anxiety and isolation that the victim feels.

EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION

This common issue with group chats can happen in several ways: starting a new group, for instance, but deliberately excluding a certain child. Likewise, the chat may take place on an app which one child doesn't have access to, meaning they can't be involved. A child can also feel isolated when a group chat is used to discuss or share images from an event that everyone else but them attended.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some discussions in group chats may include inappropriate words, swearing and unsuitable images or videos. These could be viewed by your child if they are part of that group, whether they actively engage in it or not. Some chat apps have a disappearing message function, so your child may be unable to report something they've seen because it can only be viewed once or for a short time.

SHARING GROUP CONTENT

It's important to remember that – while the content of the chat is private between those in the group – individual users can easily share a message, photo or video with others outside of the group or screenshot what's been posted. The risk of something your child intended as private becoming public (and potentially going viral) is higher if there are people they don't know well in the group.

UNKNOWN MEMBERS

Within larger group chats, it's more likely your child will be communicating with people they don't really know. These strangers may be friends of the host, but not necessarily friendly toward your child. It's wise for young people not to share personal details and stay aware that they have no control over the messages and images they share after they've put them online.

NOTIFICATIONS AND FOMO

A drawback of large group chats is the sheer number of notifications. Every time someone in the group messages, your child's device will be 'pinged' with an alert: potentially, this could mean hundreds of notifications a day. Not only is this highly distracting, but young people's fear of missing out on the latest conversation results in increased screen time as they try to keep up with the chat.

Advice for Parents & Carers

CONSIDER OTHERS' FEELINGS

Group chats are often an arena for young people to gain social status. This could cause them to do or say things on impulse, which could upset others in the group. Encourage your child to consider how other people might feel if they engaged in this behaviour. If your child does upset a member of their group chat, support them to reach out, show empathy and apologise for their mistake.

PRACTISE SAFE SHARING

In any online communication, it's vital for young people to be aware of what they're sharing and who might potentially see it. Discuss the importance of not revealing identifiable details like their address, their school or photos that they wouldn't like to be seen widely. Remind them that once something is shared in a group, they lose control of where it may end up and how it might be used.

GIVE SUPPORT, NOT JUDGEMENT

Remind your child that they can confide in you if they feel bullied or excluded in a group chat, instead of responding to the person who's upset them. Validate their hurt feelings and help to put them back in control by discussing how they'd like to handle the situation. On a related note, you could also empower your child to speak up if they're in a chat where others are being picked on.

AVOID INVITING STRANGERS

Sadly, many individuals online hide their true identity to gain a child's trust – for example, to gather information on them, to exchange inappropriate content or to coax them into doing things they aren't comfortable with. Ensure your child understands why they shouldn't add people they don't know to a group chat – and, especially, to never accept a group chat invitation from a stranger.

BLOCK, REPORT AND LEAVE

If your child is in a chat where inappropriate content is being shared, advise them to block the users sending the material, report them to the host app or platform and exit the group. If any of this content could be putting a minor at risk, contact the police. Emphasise to your child that it's OK for them to simply leave any group chat that they don't feel comfortable being a part of.

SILENCE NOTIFICATIONS

Having a phone or tablet bombarded with notifications from a group chat can be a massive irritation and distraction – especially if it's happening late in the evening. Explain to your child that they can still be part of the group chat, but that it would be healthier for them to turn off or mute the notifications and catch up with the conversation at a time which better suits them.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing Internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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ALEC HUNTER WELLBEING TEAM

The wellbeing Team at AHA strive to give the best care and support to the students. We ensure we have the resources available to meet their needs but most of the time they just appreciate being listened to, discussing concerns or worries and trying to problem-solve to make life a little easier.

A common theme with many young people is the sense of not being listened to or heard, so the wellbeing team try these strategies below to show students they have our full attention. We have found that trying out these steps to active listening can make a significant difference to their overall emotional wellbeing.

Active Listening Skills



Eye Contact

Eye contact during the conversation shows the speaker that you give him your attention and that you really care about what he says.



Avoid Distractions

There are so many examples of distractions such as our thoughts, mobile phones, gadgets, music, side activities, other people and more. Learn to avoid these distractions otherwise they can destroy your conversation.



Body Gestures

Body gestures and language are a whole science. Your body gestures tell the speaker whether you listen carefully or not.



Give Feedback

Ask questions to clarify certain points, tell your opinions, summarize the speaker's comments.



Show That You're Listening

Use facial expressions such as smile, note your posture, encourage the speaker to share and to continue.

Listening allows you to learn, to have relationships, to plan, to develop, to be the part of something, to create, to think.... and much more!

What is active listening?

Here are the five points to follow:

1. Pay attention

- Give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message.
- Recognise that non- verbal communication also 'speaks' loudly.
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, TV, phone, or side conversations
- Look directly at the speaker
- Put aside distracting thoughts
- 'Listen' to the body language of the speaker

2. Show that you are listening

- Use your own body language and gestures to show you are ready to listen and engage.
- Nod your head occasionally
- Make it known from your posture that you're interested.
- Use facial expressions and smile.

3. Give feedback

- As an active listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This will then help you to reflect on what is being said and to ask questions.
- Ask questions to check certain points
- Use paraphrasing when you are reflecting. 'What I am hearing is....' 'I hear you' and 'Sounds like you are saying....'

4. Defer Judgment

- Interrupting the speaker will only waste time and then it can frustrate the speaker and limits the full understanding of the message.
- Before asking questions allow the speaker to finish each point.

5. Appropriately respond to the speaker.

- Active listening is designed to encourage respect and understanding (boosting confidence and self-esteem) You add nothing by attacking the speaker other than putting them down.
- Be honest and open with your response.
- Respectfully assert your opinions.

ALEC HUNTER WELLBEING TEAM

Drop-in Sessions

We have the pleasure to be able to provide monthly drop In sessions for parents/carers. These sessions are open to any parent or carer to signpost and access advice if you have any concerns around your child.

Sharon McCormick, our Family Liaison Support Worker, will be in school from **8am until 9.15am** on the dates listed below where you can pop in, have a cup of tea without appointment and speak with her.

Please note, these sessions are on a 'first come, first served' basis so if you attend there may be a short wait.

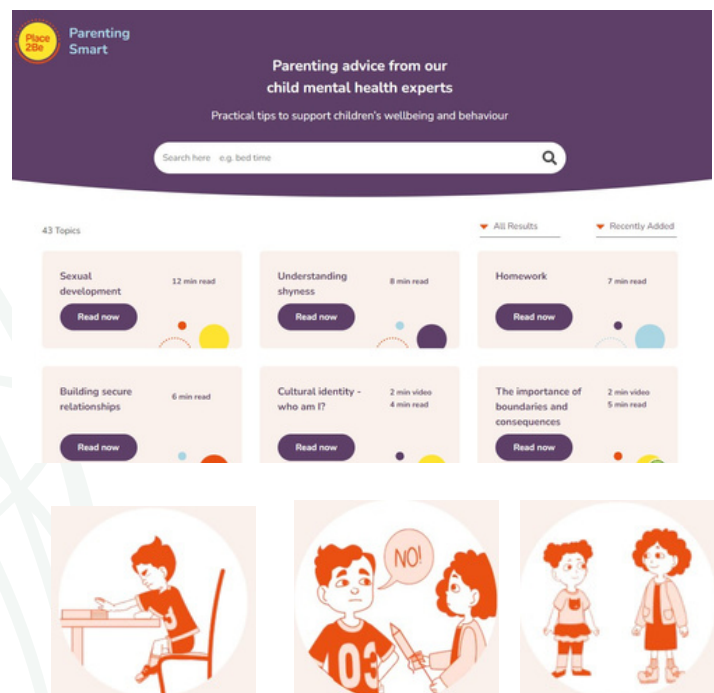
- **Monday 27th March**
- **Tuesday 25th April,**
- **Monday 22nd May**



Place2Be: Parenting Smart website

The Parenting Smart website offers practical advice for parents and carers with typical situations in which they can find themselves with their children. All the advice is created by Place2Be's parenting experts and is based on evidence and their experiences working with young people and their families.

Each article addresses a specific topic and most can be read in under 10 minutes. Over 40 topics are covered, including 'Building secure relationships', 'Cultural identity - who am I?', 'Peer pressure', 'Supporting healthy gaming habits' and 'Co-Parenting after a separation or divorce'.



<https://parentingsmart.place2be.org.uk/>



SAFEGUARDING RESOURCES

COMMON SENSE MEDIA

www.commonsensemedia.org

The Common Sense website is great for checking content and suitability of videos, apps and games for young people.

CHILDLINE

www.childline.org.uk

Information and advice for young people about a wide range of subjects, including bullying, family issues, anxiety and relationships.

THINKUKNOW

www.thinkuknow.co.uk

The National Crime Agency's CEOP Education team aim to help protect young people from the threat of online child sexual abuse and exploitation, reducing vulnerability to abuse and increasing confidence and ability to seek help from an appropriate source.

KOOTH

www.kooth.com

Online mental wellbeing community offering free, safe and anonymous support for young people featuring discussion boards, live chats and helpful articles from the Kooth community.

YOUNGMINDS

www.youngminds.org.uk

Support for young people's mental health with additional resources for parents including practical ways to support your child.

SAMARITANS

www.samaritans.org

Whatever you are going through you can call, email or write and speak to a Samaritan 24/7.

MIND

www.mind.org.uk

Advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

INTERNET SAFETY RESOURCES

INTERNETMATTERS.ORG

Step-by-step guides to help parents and carers set up their tight controls and privacy settings on the networks, gadgets, apps and sites they use at home, to give children a safer online experience.
<https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>

The logo for internetmatters.org, featuring the text "internet matters.org" in white lowercase letters on a solid green rectangular background.

SAFERINTERNET.ORG.UK

How to set up filters on your home internet to help prevent age-inappropriate content being accessed on devices.
<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers/parental-controls-offered-your-home-internet-provider>



NSPCC.ORG.UK

Guidance on how to talk to your child if you are worried they may have been taking, sharing or receiving inappropriate or explicit images online.
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/inappropriate-explicit-content/>

The NSPCC logo, consisting of the letters "NSPCC" in white bold font on a solid green rectangular background.

CEOP.POLICE.UK

Child Exploitation and Online Protection. If you have been a victim of sexual online abuse or you're worried this is happening to someone you know make a report to one of CEOP's Child Protection Advisors
<https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>



Braintree Area Foodbank Vouchers

We know that anyone can find themselves at crisis point for a number of different reasons. In order to provide the most appropriate help for the circumstances of your situation the foodbank work with local agencies, such as Citizens Advice, children's centres and health visitors.. For more information, please click this link:
<https://braintreearea.foodbank.org.uk/get-help/foodbank-vouchers/>