Dear Parents and Carers,

One topic that frequently comes up when talking to parents is social media and the impact it has on their child. Young people face the daily and constant exposure to electronic devices, multiplying social media platforms, ever expanding chatrooms and the peer pressure to be part of them. Social media rolls on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week preventing students from getting a break from peer issues once they leave school. As you may have guessed, the vast majority of conflicts between peers as well as incidents of shared screenshots without consent or risks of child sexual exploitation are the result of young people spending a lot of and unsupervised time on their smartphones.

Other negative effects of social media exposure on teens may include anxiety, depression, issues around self-image. According to Smart Social, "research suggests that young people who spend more than 2 hours per day on social media are more likely to report poor mental health."

I am writing to request your support with monitoring your child's online social networking time but also to raise your awareness to some of the apps which are known to be ill-used or to have damaging effects on young people. While the school ensures that phones are not used by children during the school day, we are not able to manage our students' online activities when they are off-site. Your cooperation with us on that will ensure your son's/daughter's online safety extends to home time too.

To help you do that, you can also download the **Our Pact app** (https://ourpact.com) on your child's and your phone to choose from a **range of control and safety settings**: set scheduled blocks on your child's phone, block specific apps, set healthy screen time, locate your child and set a web filter.

The school's recommendations in line with that are:

1. **Decide on a cut-off time**
Restricting the time duration of device use is the first and most obvious step in protecting teens from the negatives associated with social networking. Prevent you child from going to bed with their phone.

2. **Censorship**
Request that your child shows you their phone, apps and photos regularly. It is a good idea to not allow your child to post photos of themselves online for obvious reasons.

The line between monitoring and hovering is fine, and every parent must devise their own limits to controlling the number and type of contacts the child has on his/her social networking accounts. It is not unreasonable to set rules that they can only allow people that they know (and the parents know of) into their contact list.

3. **Control of device use**
Using protection software such as Pact.com on the devices used by teens offers a safe way to control without restricting their presence on the Internet and social media.

Apps which cause most concern:
There is always a new "something" when it comes to technology and social media. Being aware of what else is out there doesn't necessarily solve the problem, but it is a good place to start for parents. Here are a few apps/sites to be aware of that have been making the rounds with teens nationally:

TikTok
Instagram
Kik
Ask.fm
Snapchat
Omegle
Whisper
Secret

Again, awareness is just the first step. We need to continue to have an open conversation about this and everything else happening in their lives. Please take this opportunity to have that conversation about how **nothing** on the internet is truly anonymous or temporary. It is critically important that your child creates a positive image on social media for future colleges and/or employers. Remind your child to consider the possible impact before posting anything on social media.

If you would like to learn more about supporting your child on social media, please visit Common Sense Media's website at www.commonsensemedia.org.

Yours faithfully,

Marta Hotez