

# HOLYHEAD SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

May 2025

## OUR SAFEGUARDING TEAM



At Holyhead School we endeavour to provide a safe and welcoming environment where children are respected and valued. We believe that all children should feel safe and be able to approach someone if they have a concern. The safety and wellbeing of our students is the most important aspect of our work as a school. If you have any concerns about your child's wellbeing or safety, or want to report a concern about another child, please ask to speak to one of the Designated Safeguarding Team.

*In this month's issue we look at:*

- Our Designated Safeguarding Leads
- The impact of smartphones
- Tips on how to talk to your child about their smartphone use
- Artificial Intelligence
- Understanding TikTok
- How to reset your Instagram
- The secret emoji code

Smartphones have become an integral part of our young people's lives. However, there are concerns with the long-term impact this has on both mental health and wellbeing. In this month's newsletter we will be diving into this topic and the rise of artificial intelligence. If you have any concerns regarding the safety of a child then please contact the safeguarding team at Holyhead 0121 523 1960 or email lead DSL [ddenny@holyhead.crst.org.uk](mailto:ddenny@holyhead.crst.org.uk) or Senior DDSL [dbeale@holyhead.crst.org.uk](mailto:dbeale@holyhead.crst.org.uk)

## *The impact of smartphones*



“New research from the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) at King's College London, in partnership with YoungMinds – the UK's leading children's mental health charity - has found high levels of problematic mobile phone use, disturbed sleep, and self-harm among young people impacting mental health” .

There is a growing concern on how excessive use of smartphones can affect our children.

In addition to the effects of seeing inappropriate content online, the risk of cyberbullying and grooming, it is important that we also highlight the effects of smartphone use on our children's mental health.

If your child is using a smartphone then please try to ensure they maintain a healthy screen time limit. According to King's College London, “two new studies of smartphone habits in teenagers have identified links between problematic smartphone use and depression, anxiety and insomnia.”

[Self-harm and digital technology overuse in young people with lived mental health experience | King's College London](#)

### **Teens with problematic smartphone use are twice as likely to have anxiety – and many are eager to cut down**

A further study into smartphone habits in teenagers have identified links between problematic smartphone use (PSU) and depression, anxiety and insomnia. The research revealed that one in eight young people want help to reduce their smartphone use.

*“Adolescent smartphone use is a huge concern for parents and carers. We found that problematic smartphone use was linked with anxiety, depression and insomnia across two separate adolescent age groups using two different research methods. By revealing the link between problematic use of smartphones and poorer mental health, and demonstrating that young people are aware of this problem and are eager to manage their use, these studies highlight the need for evidence-based interventions to help adolescents struggling with difficult behaviours around their smartphone use”.*

Professor Ben Carter, Professor of Medical Statistics at King's IoPPN and the first author of both studies

PSU describes a pattern of behaviours, thoughts and feelings linked to smartphones that resembles an addiction, such as feeling panicky or upset when the phone is unavailable, finding it difficult to control the amount of time spent on the phone, using for longer without feeling satisfied, and using the phone to the detriment of other enjoyable or meaningful activities.

Overall, 18.7 percent of 16-18-year-olds and 14.5 percent of 13-16-year-olds self-reported PSU, with higher prevalence among girls.

Findings published in Acta Paediatrica revealed 16-18-year-olds who reported PSU were twice as likely to experience anxiety and almost three times as likely to experience depression compared to those who did not report PSU.

You can read the full article here [Teens with problematic smartphone use are twice as likely to have anxiety – and many are eager to cut down | King's College London](#)

## *5 Tips on how to talk to your child about their smartphone use*

Research by the University of Birmingham involving over 1,200 pupils, suggests that banning mobile phones in secondary schools alone [doesn't improve exam results, student wellbeing or classroom behaviour](#).

The lead author of the report, Dr Victoria Goodyear, did say reducing the time teenagers spend on smartphones should be a focus and said

**"We need to do more than just ban phones in schools."**

**We know it can be challenging to talk to your teenager about their smartphone use, so we've compiled some tips and advice.**

### **1. Involve everyone in the conversation**

Before you speak to your child, think about how you'd ideally like them to use their smartphone, and then ask them how they feel about their device use. Some teenagers may surprise you and say they want to reduce the amount of time they spend on their phone, where others will be feeling more relaxed about it.

According to Ofcom's Media Literacy Report 2024, more than one in ten (96%) 12 to 15-year-olds in the UK have their own mobile phone, rising to 99% for 16 to 17-year-olds. More than one in four (44%)

16-17-year-olds surveyed feel their own screen time is too high, compared to just under a third (31%) of 8-11-year-olds.

## **2. Choose your timing well**

No-one wants to talk about how they use their smartphone when they're tired, if they've just got home from school or when they're about to go out somewhere. Choose an appropriate time to talk to your teenager. This could be:

- In the car or on the bus together
- At dinnertime
- Whilst watching TV or gaming together
- Before bed, when a lot of children open up more about their day.

## **3. Create a family agreement**

You could also create a family agreement or device management plan that everyone has their say in, and that you all agree to. This could include:

- Naming device-free zones in the home
- Times of the day which are device free (such as at the dinner table and bedtime)
- Having one place to charge phones (such as in the kitchen)
- Other expectations around phone use, such as being kind to others, and prioritising face-to-face conversations.

## **4. Model good smartphone use yourself**

One idea is modelling healthy device use behaviours yourself, and encouraging children to point out to you when you're using your device too much! "Children have likely seen their parents on devices from a young age and will want to have a device of their own to use as their parents and older siblings do."

Modelling good smartphone use might include:

- Not looking at your phone when your child is talking to you
- Putting your phone away at certain times of day or for certain amounts of time
- Not checking your phone late at night
- Restricting how much time you spend on social media or other apps
- Leaving your phone charging in the kitchen or hallway at night.

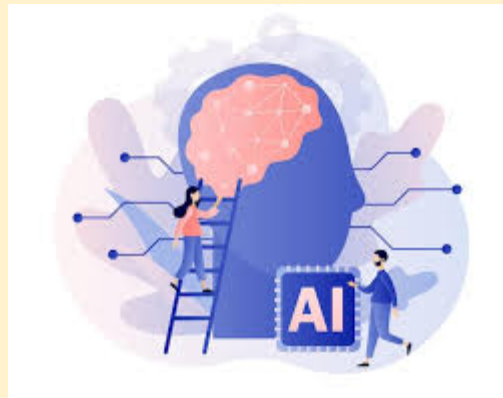
## 5. Consider what activities they'll do instead

Many children – especially teenagers – will feel their social lives are connected to their device, so it's important to factor that in if you're trying to reduce their screen time.

“Make a list of things that you'd like to do individually, and things you'd like to do together, then make plans to do these. This will help with reducing time on screens.

“When we give up a habit that involves holding something in our hands, we need to replace it with something else that involves our hands too. Devices have many addictive elements but tackling the habitual part of needing to reach for something and do something with your hands is a good way of starting to break the cycle. Even something as simple as having putty or modelling clay around to make things, or a pen and paper to doodle on can be helpful. These types of activities involve the hands but also require thought and creativity which can help to keep the mind active and distracted from thinking about devices.”

## *Artificial Intelligence*



### What is AI?

AI is when a computer/machine can learn and perform tasks like a human. Its popularity continues to increase, and examples include:

- Virtual assistants like Alexa and Siri.
- Chatbots such as ChatGPT and My AI from Snapchat

### Potential Risks of AI?

- Chat apps - A simple search of “AI Chat” within the App store highlights the number of apps already available and just scrolling through, you can see that they are not suitable for children with many rated as 17+.
- Image manipulation – there are AI tools that can be used to digitally remove clothes from photos, which clearly raises serious safeguarding and privacy concerns.
- Deep Fakes – there are also AI tools that create realistic, fake videos which can be used to spread misinformation or cause harm.

## How can I protect my child?

As always, to keep your child safe online, it is important to:

- Develop your child's digital literacy by highlighting the risks of AI and showing them how important it is to verify what they see online.
- Set up appropriate parental controls on their devices/ broadband.
- Chat to your child regularly and ensure your child knows that they should talk to you or another trusted adult if anything concerns them.

## *Understanding TikTok*



You must be over 13 years of age to use TikTok. TikTok is a social media platform for sharing and watching short video clips. Some of the videos may not be appropriate for your child to view and there is also the risk of strangers contacting your child. If your child is using TikTok then make sure appropriate security/privacy settings are applied.

### **Account set up**

It is important that when setting up an account, your child enters their real date of birth as accounts are tailored by age e.g., Direct Messaging is disabled for accounts aged 13- 15. In addition, advertisements are tailored by age. By default, accounts for people under 16 are set to private and we would recommend keeping it as this. This means your child must approve follower requests. You can read more about the other settings available, such as switching off comments and restricted mode here:

<https://support.tiktok.com/en/account-and-privacy/account-privacysettings/privacy-and-safety-settings-for-users-under-age-18>

### **Family Pairing**

This allows you to link your own account to your child's account. You can then set controls such as restricted mode. You can find out more here:

<https://support.tiktok.com/en/safety-hc/account-and-user-safety/family-pairing>

### **Inappropriate content, themes and challenges on TikTok**

Whilst against TikTok's guidelines, explicit and inappropriate content can be found on this platform, for example nudity/sexual content and hate speech. Some of the songs available to lip sync to may contain inappropriate lyrics or adult themes. We often see viral challenges on social media, some of which can be dangerous. If your child is using TikTok, chat to them regularly about what they are viewing.

## **Stranger contact**

Talk to your child about who is following them online and ensure that they understand that people may not be who they say they are when online. It is important that children understand not to share personal information. Refresh your feed You can refresh your “For You” feed to update the content recommended:

<https://support.tiktok.com/en/account-and-privacy/account-privacysettings/refresh-your-for-you-feed>

## **Blocking and Reporting**

Ensure your child knows how to use the safety features available to them, including how to report comments, direct messages and another user.

## *How to reset your Instagram*

How to Reset Your Instagram Recommendations You should be at least 13 years old to have an Instagram account.

Algorithms can create an echo chamber on social media or start showing us too much of one subject that no longer appeals to us or as a parent, you feel your child is viewing too much of. Instagram now offers the ability to reset recommendations, which will clear recommended content across Explore, Reels and Feed.

To reset recommendations, go to your Profile, tap on the menu icon (☰) in the top-right corner, select Content Preferences and then you can reset suggested content.

## *The secret emoji code*

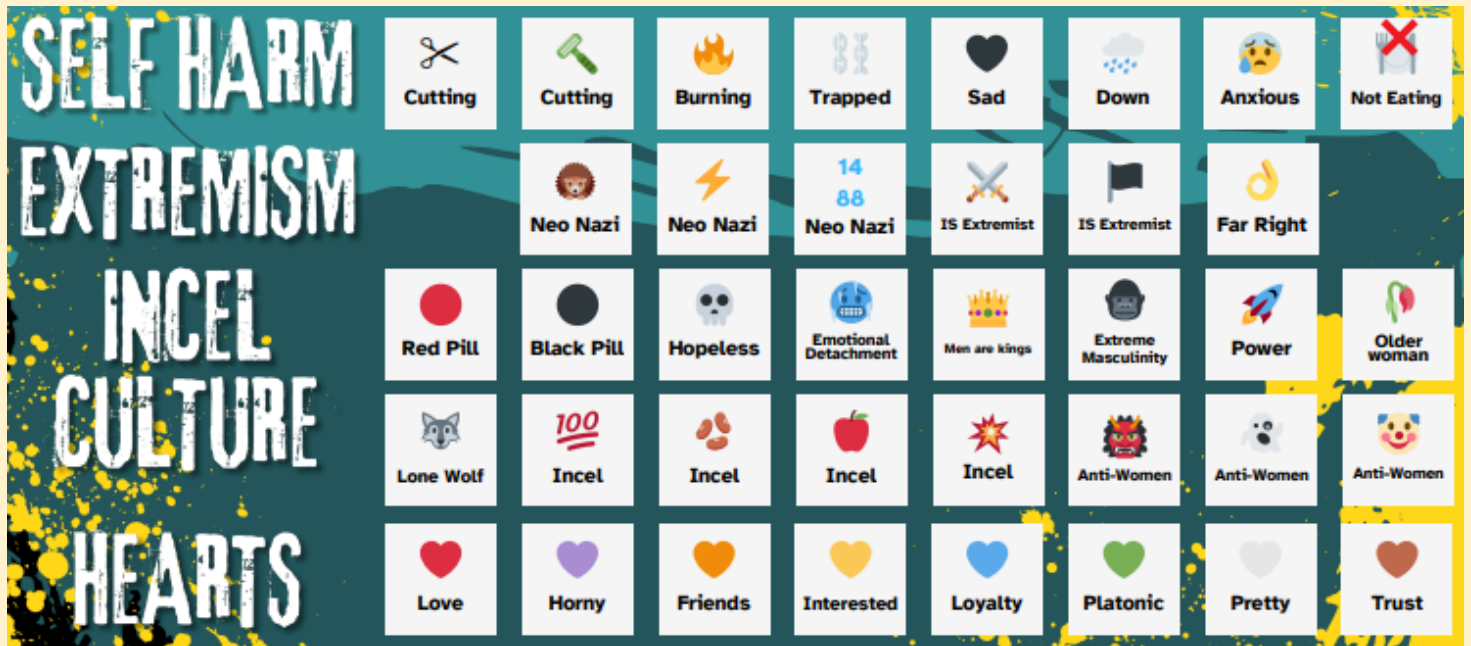
The Netflix drama ‘*Adolescence*’ has cast a stark light on a troubling digital phenomenon - the covert use of emojis by teenagers to communicate about drugs, violence, sex, and extremist ideologies. The series has highlighted the increasing media coverage of issues relating to misogyny, the manosphere and other gender based toxic influences. Though emojis are typically a playful form of expression, their hidden use in this context has raised serious concerns about online safety, especially in the largely unregulated digital spaces where young people may spend much of their time. The attached resource will support schools and parents by raising awareness about the covert use of emojis by young people to communicate hidden messages.

The intersection of emoji uses with the rise of the ‘manosphere’, a network of online groups that promote misogynistic views and traditional gender dominance gives cause for concern. Terms like ‘incel’ (involuntary celibate) are increasingly appearing in teenage conversations, often subtly signalled through emojis. These symbols, when used in certain contexts, can indicate alignment with harmful ideologies that have, in extreme cases, been linked to real-world violence. Influencers like Andrew Tate, frequently appearing on the social media feeds of young people, have contributed to the spread of such beliefs. While not every use of these emojis is cause for alarm, the trend underlines the

importance of digital literacy and ongoing dialogue with young people. Parents are encouraged to stay informed, avoid making assumptions, and create a safe space for open, judgement-free conversations, because being aware is the first step toward meaningful protection.

When monitoring digital interactions for these emojis, it's important to remember that context matters. Their use does not automatically indicate a harmful conversation - the specific circumstances in which a symbol is used will reveal whether it's something that should spark concern. Understanding the hidden meanings behind emojis can be most helpful when they are considered alongside other markers of risk.





If you have any concerns about your child or a student at Holyhead school please contact our DSL team 0121 523 1960 or email Lead DSL [ddenny@holyhead.crst.org.uk](mailto:ddenny@holyhead.crst.org.uk)