

03 April 2019

Dear Parents/Carers,

Social Media, Sleep and Health

You may be aware that there is much discussion about children and young people's use of social media and the negative impact it can have on their wellbeing, self-esteem and relationships.

We thought it would be useful to share the most up-to-date expert guidance, so that you are in a strong position **to manage social media and screen use*** with your children. We hope this helps with that part of your parental/caring role which is about setting boundaries.



Many Hackney schools have access to a useful App that helps keep children safer both online and offline. Find out more [here: zurichsaferschools.co.uk/aboutus/](https://zurichsaferschools.co.uk/aboutus/)

Part 1) Managing social media use and screen time

Talking helps: Talk with children about using screens and what they are watching/sending. A change in behaviour can be a sign they are distressed – make sure they know they can always speak to you or another responsible adult if they feel uncomfortable with screen or social media use. Don't allow the sending or receiving of bullying language.

Talk about sharing: Talk about sharing photos and information online and how photos and words are sometimes manipulated. There can be unwanted explicit images which young people are under pressure to share. Parents and carers should never assume that children are happy for their photos to be shared. For everyone – when in doubt, don't upload!

Age guidance: The age limit companies set for having a social media account with Snapchat, Kik, Instagram, TikTok (formerly Musical.ly), Facebook, and YouTube is 13. For WhatsApp, it is 16. Children can easily access highly inappropriate material on YouTube unless '*Restricted Mode*' controls are set.

Use helpful phone features: Some devices and platforms have special features – try using these features to keep track of how much time you and your children spend on screens or social media. For example, when Apple released iOS 12, they made a giant leap in supporting families with the release of their new Screen Time feature. With this you can set your limits and restrictions across all devices linked to your iCloud account, including family members. There are other Apps such as 'Ourpact' help parents to set limits on usage and access.

NSPCC has excellent resources for online safety here:
<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1489/share-aware-parents-guide.pdf>

We strongly recommend that families ensure children's phones are outside their bedrooms at bedtime and that parents set time limits for screen (including phones) time.

Part 2) Making sure your child/children take part in a range of healthy activities

Exercise: NHS guidance is that to maintain a basic level of health, children and young people aged 5 to 18 need to do at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. Being active for at least 60 minutes a day is linked to better general health, stronger bones and muscles, and higher levels of self-esteem.

Keep moving: Everyone should take a break after a couple of hours sitting or lying down using a screen. It's good to get up and move about and important for children to develop healthy habits which will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives.

We recognise that some young people have conditions which mean exercise is difficult for them.

Family time: Different families have different routines and expectations around the time they spend together. We do know that family time is vitally important for all young people and encourage parents to plan time for face to face conversations, with adults giving their full attention to children. Screen-free mealtimes are one way of doing this but there are many other ways to connect and talk such as reading together at bedtime and finding activities which all the family can enjoy.

Sleep matters: Getting enough good quality sleep is very important, particularly for growing children and adolescents whose brains are dependent on sleep for normal development and learning. Sleep deprivation has been linked to increased risk factors for diseases.

TOP TIPS:

- Leave phones and other screens outside the bedroom at bedtime. Use of any screen like a laptop, computer or phone an hour before going to bed has been shown to make sleep more difficult.
- Aim for regular routines around bedtime and waking up, which helps the body to develop a strong internal rhythm, promoting sound sleep.
- Ensure your child has been active during the day and has had time outside. Exposure to daylight supports good sleep.
- Ensure bedrooms are not too hot and have dimmed lights which helps to signal to the brain that it is time to sleep. Reading before bed is an excellent way for children to wind down.
- NHS guidance states that 5 year olds need 11 hours sleep on average, 9 year olds need 10 hours sleep and 14 year olds need 9 hours sleep.

Safety when out and about: Advise children to put their screens away while crossing the road, or doing an activity that needs their full attention.

There is excellent advice in the 5 to Thrive model for good wellbeing: <https://fivetothrive.net>

Some of the above may already be familiar to you and you may feel that you don't need to change any of your family's routines. However, if you do want to change routines it is usually

helpful to sit and talk that through with your family members so that everyone is clear: some prompts are available at: <https://www.childnet.com/blog/family-agreement>.

We hope you find this useful. Your child's school may also give additional advice around these issues which are so critical to children's health and happiness. We will be holding an open session for parents/carers with professionals offering advice on **Tuesday 11 June 2019, 6.30pm** at The Tomlinson Centre, Queensbridge Road, London E8 3ND.

Best wishes



Annie Gammon
Director of Education / Head of Hackney
Learning Trust



Jim Gamble
Chair of the City & Hackney Safeguarding
Children Board

*We do note that sometimes social media and screen time can be talked about interchangeably. Screen use is a mix of television, computer use and smartphone use: some of this will include social media use e.g. Snapchat, WhatsApp, Instagram. Screen use in itself is not a bad thing; however too much time in front of a screen may displace other healthy activity. You should know that there is some connection between excessive use of social media and anxiety.

Some discussion questions for families have been produced by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-12/rcpch_screen_time_guide_-_final.pdf, and by the Chief Medical Officer.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777026/UK_CMO_commentary_on_screentime_and_social_media_map_of_reviews.pdf

There are also some pointers to additional sources of information at this website:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-council-for-internet-safety>.