ISSUE 8

Mount Kelly's Safeguarding Bulletin aims to provide parents and carers with the information needed to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with their children about potential risks in the wider world and online. This week's bulletin is on the topic of enjoying a tech-free Christmas and considerations around sharing photos online.

With Christmas right around the corner, families are excitedly anticipating the chance to spend some quality time with each other over the festive season. When everyone's engrossed in their phones or glued to their games consoles, however, genuinely meaningful moments with loved ones can often be difficult to orchestrate.

The Christmas #WakeUpWednesday guide provides some advice on helping young people to set aside their devices for a while and live in the moment. Even if going full tech cold turkey feels unrealistic, implementing just a few of these tips could still decrease the amount of screen time in your home this festive season – enabling everyone to make the most of it.

One of the more heart-warming, life-affirming aspects of social media is being able to share special moments in our children's lives with family and friends: from the first day at school or blowing out birthday cake candles to smiling holiday selfies and Christmas fun. Is there, however, such a thing as too *much* sharing – and can it actually put children in danger?

With potential risks such as accidentally displaying identifying details (images showing where a child lives or what school they go to, for example) and photos being seen and saved by strangers, perhaps we need to consider carefully what we post and where we post it. The guide on the final page of this bulletin runs through some safety considerations when sharing images.

12 Top Tips for Children and Young People to Enjoy a
TECH-FREE CHRISTMAS

The Christmas holidays are tailor made for families to enjoy relaxed quality time in each other's company – but with distractions like pinging phone notifications, the lure of games consoles and online Boxing Day sales, that can be more difficult than it sounds. Staying off our phones, laptops and tablets, however, can really help us to appreciate the things that genuinely matter at this special time of year. Follow our 12 top tips for a tech-free festive season ... Yule be glad you did! Merry Christmas!

CHRISTMAS CRAFTING
Get out the paper, glue and scissors and have a go at hand-making cards or gift tags. You could also create your own decorations to add a uniquely personal touch to the Christmas tree.

NATURE QUEST
Try a scavenger hunt in the garden or your local park. Challenge yourself and your family to find natural treasures that are symbolic of this time of year – like holly or pinecones, say.

CAROL KARAOKE
Sing your hearts out with a Christmas carol karaoke night. Pick out your favourite tunes and enjoy a musical celebration with family and friends.

WANDER DOWN MEMORY LANE
How about making a scrapbook filled with your favourite memories from Christmases gone by? Unleash your creativity while you enjoy reliving those magical holiday moments.

TRY REFLECTIVE JOURNALLING
Jot down your thoughts, feelings and reflections on the holiday in a notebook or diary – you could also list some of your main goals for the new year.

WRAP IT UP
Take time to get inventive with some luxurious gift wrapping. Break out the wrapping paper, ribbons and bows to make parcelling up those presents into a creative adventure.

WALK IN A WINTER WONDERLAND
Delight in the great outdoors with some gentle walks over the holiday. The family can all wrap up warm as you add to your step count and savour the crisp winter air together.

BE A SEASONAL CHEF
Get the whole family working together in the kitchen for some Christmas cooking. Choose a recipe and whip up a festive feast that all of you can enjoy.

ENJOY A CHRISTMAS STORY
Christmas is a perfect time for sparkling stories. Get cosy and lose yourself in a brilliant book, from Dickens to Dr Seuss or a more modern favourite by Chris van Allsburg or Tom Fletcher.

SNOWY SCULPTURES
If we're fortunate enough to get a white Christmas this year, make the most of the opportunity by having a family snowman-building competition!

GAMES NIGHT GALA
Dive into some old-school fun with a tech-free games night. Classic board games and card games have stood the test of time for a reason!

GOODWILL TO ALL
You and your family could spend a day volunteering – perhaps at a food bank or helping a local charity. After all, kindness and thinking of others are part of what Christmas is all about.

Meet Our Expert
Minds Ahead design and deliver the UK's only specialist postgraduate mental health qualifications. They also provide training and support to education organisations and local authorities – empowering school leaders and staff with the knowledge and tools to shape their settings into inclusive communities where the mental health of pupils and personnel is prioritised.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

SHARING PHOTOS ONLINE

School is often a time chock-full of milestones for your child, and you may well be eager to share their accomplishments with the world. In today's digital age, sharing images of such precious moments on social media is commonplace, and – while that's a lovely thing to do – it *does* come with some risks attached. Our guide can help parents and carers to consider the potential dangers and make informed choices about safely sharing photos of their children online.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

INVASIONS OF PRIVACY

Even with the right settings in place, absolutely nothing online is 100% private. Anyone who can view your photos could take screenshots and potentially share them elsewhere. Privacy settings are still important, though, so it's always wise to ensure your social media accounts have them set up; just bear in mind that you can't *completely* control what happens to anything once it's gone online.

REVEALING PERSONAL DETAILS

Small details in photos can often reveal personal information. Backgrounds can give clues to where you live, for example, while school logos on uniforms, sports kits, or bags could help someone identify which school your child attends. With interactive maps and reverse image searches commonplace online, information like this could easily be misused by an individual with malicious intentions.

MISUSE OF IMAGES

Once something's been shared online, it's almost impossible to get it deleted. Photos can show up in search engine results and be downloaded, manipulated, and shared without consent. There's the potential for someone's images to be used for advertising purposes (which in many cases, isn't illegal) or even more inappropriate reasons, such as cyber-bullying or serious forms of exploitation.

ONLINE GROOMING

Pictures that convey details about your child's interests, activities, or daily routines could arm an online predator with the kind of information they can deploy to gain a child's trust. They might use this knowledge to pretend to be the same age as the child or to have a shared hobby. Essentially, the more a predator knows about a young person, the easier it is for them to invent some 'common ground'.

PRESSURE TO PLEASE

When their parents or carers share notable moments and accomplishments in a child's life on social media, some children may begin to feel an expectation to *always* meet certain standards, to achieve things, or to behave in ways that are "worth sharing". Knowing that other people (even friends and family) can see these posts on social media might also add to the pressure they're feeling internally.

IMPACT ON DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

Every photo of a child posted online contributes to their digital footprint Young people's lives have never been so closely and publicly documented as they are now, and this permanent online presence could affect a child's future opportunities or the choices they make as they grow up – in addition to influencing how they see themselves and, consequently, their emotional wellbeing.

#backtoschool

Advice for Parents & Carers

REVIEW SETTINGS REGULARLY

Make sure your social media's secure in terms of who can view your content or see your location (only family and trusted friends, for example). Privacy settings aren't totally foolproof, but they *do* make it tougher for strangers to access your pics. Reviewing your settings regularly is also a good starting point for conversations with your child about managing their own social accounts when they're older.

CHECK YOUR PHOTOS

Photos of your child shouldn't provide any clues to where they live or go to school: even a house number, street name, or car number plate could be a giveaway. Cover up or blur out school logos, too. If you *really* want to share a particular pic, you could post a watermarked or low-res version, which can help to discourage misuse as those images are less appealing to download or reproduce.

CONSIDER OTHER CHILDREN

When taking a group photo, make sure you get parents' or carers' permission to share it on social media. There may be an important safeguarding reason for them not wanting their child's photo posted publicly online, or it might simply not tally with their personal beliefs or cultural background. A quick conversation in advance, just to make sure, is usually hugely appreciated.

THINK AHEAD

Try to consider the longer-term implications of what you post. Would you be happy with that photo being online in 10 years' time? Would your child still be OK with the image when they're older? Once your child is mature enough, you could ask for their consent before posting: it respects their privacy, fosters trust and understanding, and helps them to start thinking about their own online life.

Meet Our Expert

Gabriella Russo is a safeguarding consultant with more than 30 years' experience working with children, families, and adults in education, local authority, and mental health settings, both in the UK and internationally. She has developed online safety training for local authorities and foster care agencies across Britain and is the online safety expert for FosterWiki.

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#WakeUpWednesday