



Learning Opportunities



SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

December 2022

Advice for Parents and Carers

Welcome to our latest Safeguarding newsletter.

We aim to provide you with useful links, tips and the latest, relevant help and advice on issues we feel will be of importance to you.

If you would like any more information, please do not hesitate to contact the school

The traditional image of Christmas is incredibly optimistic, and it can be wonderful, but we must remember that it certainly isn't a given for everyone. It can be a tough time because expectations are high and for some there can be the added pressure to 'have a good time'.

Safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone especially at this time of year, we have to be extra-vigilant and offer support where we can and be proactive where we suspect or see the signs of abuse and neglect, and seek the help of the police and social services.

Concerned about a child?

Call [03000 41 11 11](tel:03000411111) (text relay 18001 03000 41 11 11)

email social.services@kent.gov.uk

Out of hours and in an emergency

Outside of normal office hours, for example during the night, call [03000 41 91 91](tel:03000419191).

If you think someone is in immediate danger, the best thing to do is call 999 for the emergency services.



KCC – Christmas HAF provision

The HAF Programme offers families of children aged 4-16, who are eligible for benefits related free school meals (FSM), opportunities to access a range of free activities in the Christmas holidays.

The HAF programme of Christmas provision is now available on The Education People website (take a look under "where can I go for information about programmes in my area").

[HAF Programme - welcome information for families \(theeducationpeople.org\)](https://www.theeducationpeople.org/)



Some Safeguarding Issues to be mindful of over the Christmas period.

Isolation

Children and families can be cut off from their usual support network. They might not always be able to leave the house, which can leave them feeling anxious and depressed.

Home Alone

This is the time of year when many children are left by themselves for long periods and sometimes overnight. Children who are unsupervised are potentially put at risk of suffering or injury and the festive period is often a time when adults seek entertainment outside of the home.

Outside Influences

Children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from people outside their families. Child sexual exploitation, exploitation by criminal gangs, involvement in organised crime groups, trafficking and radicalisation can all be more prevalent during holiday periods when children aren't safeguarded.

Expense

Christmas places families under enormous pressure to spend money purchasing gifts, entertainment, and decorating. Sadly, many can't do this without going into debt.

Technology

Digital safeguarding is an important part of keeping children and young people protected. Gifts such as Tablets, Gaming Consoles or Smartphones can all be used to go online so it is important to think ahead about what safety features are available and set them up in advance.

Mental Health

Research by mental health charity Mind has shown that people with mental health problems struggle with self-harm and suicidal feelings due to the pressure of Christmas and this places children and young people in extremely vulnerable situations.

It's natural to feel anxious during times of uncertainty, but help is available

For 24hr support text the word **Kent** to **85258**. Texts are free from most UK mobile networks. For full details visit releasethepressure.uk



Children & Young People in Kent and Medway can access specific support services
- they are just a text, call or a click on website or app away.



ChatHealth is available for young people aged 11 to 19 in Kent and offers a confidential and anonymous texting service to a nurse via 07520 618850. However, the service is only available Monday to Friday and between 9am and 5pm.



Created by young people for young people. If you are aged 10 to 16, [Moodspark](#) is a place where you can learn how to look after your emotional and mental health and find ways to help you bounce back when life gets tough.



[Good Mental Health Matters](#) provides information to help you make small changes to improve your mental health and give you the tools you need to cope when things get tough. There are videos to watch on five ways to keep stress in check and protect your mental health.



The [Mind and Body programme](#) is delivered to 13 to 25-year-olds in school and the community to explore and better manage thoughts and behaviours associated with self-harm.



CHUMS specialist bereavement support

[CHUMS](#) offer specialist bereavement support to children and young people from 3½ up until their 26th birthday in Kent and Medway. This specialist bereavement service is provided by a wide range of experienced, trained professionals and volunteers. Support can be tailored to provide evidence-based interventions to children and young people through 1:1, group and drop-in sessions.

Kent Youth Health

Through [Kent Youth Health](#) young people or their parents / carers can contact the school health teams from 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, including during school holidays. Find out more including how to refer yourself at www.kentyouthhealth.nhs.uk

This May Help has been created to support parents and carers with concerns about their child's mental health.

The website gives easy-to-follow advice to help families manage their child's mental health. This advice was developed by NHS professionals and parents who've been through their own child's mental health journey.

Parents and carers have shared advice that helped them and that may also help other families. The advice covered on This May Help includes: self-harm, gaming and online activity, teenagers safety, eating disorders, school avoidance, understanding mental health, understanding teenagers, online threats, building rapport, building resilience, building a support network, self-care tips, managing an emergency, managing in a crisis, and preparing for a children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) appointment.

The films offer advice across six main subject areas, with ten additional films offering supporting information. The films can be viewed in any order at any time. Each film has a dedicated page where you'll also find helpful advice and links to other resources. The text for each subject is available from the [downloads page](#).

A Dangerous New Online Trend - Child Abuse Spamming

Throughout late November and into December a new trend began to emerge from the internet's criminal elements. The trend involves paying abusers for every link they distribute to child abuse websites.

There is a risk of accidental exposure to child sexual abuse online as this "disturbing" new trend escalates.

Advice from the IWF is that users should avoid clicking on unsolicited links or suspect posts, and any suspected child sexual abuse material on the internet should be reported to the Internet Watch Foundation.

Advice when making a report to www.iwf.org.uk:

- Do report images and videos of child sexual abuse to the IWF to be removed. Reports to the IWF are anonymous.
- Do provide the exact URL where child sexual abuse images are located.
- Don't report other harmful content – you can find details of other agencies to report to on the IWF's website.
- Do report to the police if you are concerned a child may be in immediate danger.
- Do report only once for each web address – or URL. Repeat reporting of the same URL isn't needed and wastes analysts' time.
- Do report non-photographic visual depictions of the sexual abuse of children, such as computer-generated images. Anything of this nature, which is also hosted in the UK, the IWF can get removed.

Reviews and tools

The Family Gaming Database shares research and advice on thousands of video games, including content warnings and PEGI ratings.

taminggaming.com

Common Sense Media provides expert reviews, advice and age-appropriate recommendations on games, apps, films and more. Users can access up to three free reviews per month.

commonsensemedia.org

Parental controls and privacy settings described step-by-step alongside support on a range of online safety topics.

internetmatters.org



Giving devices this Christmas

When buying devices for your child, it can be difficult to know what to look out for from an online safety perspective and what's age-appropriate.

Increasingly, different technology categories overlap. Whether it's smartwatches providing messaging or smartphones having brilliant cameras, understanding how these things work in the home is more important than ever. More information is available via internet matters UK.

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/tech-guide/>

Here are just a few tips on how families can ensure that children and young people can enjoy and stay safe with any new technology and devices they may receive.

Research the device

[Common Sense Media](#) is a website which reviews games, apps, services and more to help you decide if something is appropriate for your child.

Once you have settled on a device, have a look out for any parental controls you can put in place, and take a look at the privacy settings available.

Set up the device ahead of your child opening it

A great way to ensure your child starts their experience in the safest way is to get the device set up before you give it to them.

Once you've researched the device, you can charge it up and have a go at putting in place some safety settings and parental controls to help you feel comfortable with your child using it.

If you are gifting a second-hand device to your child, you can make sure that the device has been reset to factory settings before you give it as a gift. On Android devices you can restrict [what content can be downloaded in Google Play](#).

On Apple devices you can go into [Content & Privacy Restrictions in Screen Time](#) to help block and limit specific apps and restrict explicit content, purchases and downloads.

Have a conversation

It is important that your child knows that if they encounter something online that they haven't seen before, or something that worries or upsets them, they can turn to you for help.

It is important to give practical safety tips to your child in the case of coming across unwanted content, whether that's teaching them how to use report and block tools, or to turn the device off and speak to an adult they trust.

Remember to be curious and not furious - if they know it isn't their fault and you help them to overcome their issue, they're likely to come back to you to speak about any future issues.

The Safer Internet Centre also has some excellent advice in their Parents' Guide to Technology and includes device-specific settings for different models. Explore more about parental controls. Families may want to think about setting up a Family Agreement as suggested by Childnet International.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SOCIAL MEDIA & MENTAL HEALTH

An estimated one-third of children have a social media account, so it's important that trusted adults know what content young people are consuming, what they're posting and the interactions they're having. On social media, it can be easy to go down 'rabbit holes' that aren't beneficial to our wellbeing. As platforms grapple with managing such 'legal but harmful' content, lives are being impacted – sometimes to tragic effect. We might be daunted by the scale of the tech giants and their content which so entrains young people, but we can still help children to be aware of their mental wellness: recognising when something isn't OK... and knowing what to do about content that upsets them.

1. UNDERSTAND THE ALGORITHM

Algorithms rank content by user interest: someone who regularly interacts with sports news, say, will see the latest results at the top of their feed. Likewise, if a user browses content that can cause harm, that's what will be recommended to them in future. Someone who's had a bad day and looks for posts which reflect their mood will find similar content being suggested to them more and more.

2. AVOID THE MAIN FEEDS

Avoiding the default feeds on social media platforms limits the amount of recommended content that's shown. Users can opt to only scroll through the accounts they follow, use restricted modes, or highlight posts that they don't want to see more of. Explore the platform safety settings to see how you can take control of what your child's phone shows them when they open the app.

3. DISCUSS WHAT THEY'VE SEEN

Chatting about what your child's seen online keeps you aware of the content they're interacting with. Don't assume that platforms are screening out inappropriate material, or even that your child would recognise content as being harmful. Discuss who they follow, what posts they like and what comes up in their feeds: if alarm bells ring, it could be time for a more in-depth talk or to seek support.

4. LEARN HOW TO HIDE CONTENT

If your child stumbles across unsuitable content on social media, there's the option to hide that post as well as indicating you'd prefer any similar material not to be suggested in future. On some platforms, you might also be able to block posts that contain specific words, which is an excellent way to start taking control of what your child sees online.

5. SET DAILY LIMITS

Phones and most apps can tell you how much they're being used. Spending too long online can mean a child misses out on other activities that are important to all-round wellbeing. You could set some family rules – for everyone to follow – around device use, such as screen time limits and tech-free spaces: involving your child in creating this agreement makes them more likely to stick to it.

6. MONITOR THEIR ACTIVITY

Keeping a discreet eye on how your child is using social media can help ensure they're not entering potentially dangerous situations. As they grow up, of course, children need space to exercise their independence – but you can still occasionally ask to see what they're looking at. Be transparent about your own social media use and try not to sound judgemental about your child's.

7. TURN OFF PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

Even for adults, it's tempting to check an email or message as soon as the alert sound pings. Push notifications encourage people to open their apps and spend time on their devices, so turning them off will help your child to practise mindful use of tech. Most of us have other things that we need to focus on as a priority – and those notifications will still be there later, when we have more time.

8. USE DEVICES TOGETHER

Giving children internet-enabled devices and complete freedom to explore platforms on their own can result in exposure to hugely damaging content. You could consider making a particular area at home a designated space to use phones, tablets and so on – making it much easier to monitor what content your child is viewing and (if necessary) steer them away from any potentially harmful paths.

9. ENCOURAGE OTHER ACTIVITIES

Mental health professionals often highlight the importance of exercise, quality time with loved ones, a balanced diet and restful sleep for our mental wellbeing. Spending hours on social media can cause us to sacrifice other activities that our brains need to feel well – so encouraging your child to put down their phone and enjoy something that doesn't involve a screen can be immensely beneficial.

10. TALK ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

Most platforms default children's accounts to private, so only people they've accepted as friends can see their posts. This reduces the risk of bullying or unkind comments, but – just like offline life – the digital world can still make children feel as if they need to act or look a certain way to fit in. Talk to your child about peer pressure, and listen to any concerns so you can provide the support they need.

Meet Our Expert

Shazia Sarwar-Aziz is executive headteacher at a specialist primary school and, as an emotional therapy coach, works with school leaders to focus on the SEND, mental health and wellbeing agenda. A passionate advocate for vulnerable learners, Shazia is a Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching and the author of *The Rainbow Within*, a book which supports children with SEMH needs.



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Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-16004009>
<https://www.onlinesafety.com/insights/social-media-algorithms/>



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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II

The Call of Duty (CoD) series is a worldwide gaming phenomenon, with millions of copies sold every year. While 2021's release, Vanguard, wasn't quite as well received, this latest entry – Modern Warfare II – has so far proved a massive commercial success. A sequel to the recent Modern Warfare reboot (and not to be confused with the original Modern Warfare 2, from back in 2009), the game is an online shooter which features – unsurprisingly – extreme violence, rendered in realistic graphics. Amid the explosions and political nature of the plot, there's much for parents to be aware of.

AGE RATING
PEGI
18

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

VIRTUAL VIOLENCE

Like most of its predecessors in the franchise, Modern Warfare II carries an 18 age rating from PEGI (the Pan-European Gaming Information system, which assesses games' content for suitability). This means players will encounter – according to PEGI's wording – depictions of "gross violence, apparently motiveless killing, or violence towards defenceless characters".

OFFENSIVE CHAT & MESSAGING

Most CoD players are likely to spend the majority of their time on Modern Warfare II in online multiplayer mode. This entails competing against – or cooperating with – strangers on the online battlefield. The fast-paced, cut-throat world of CoD means that communication through the game's voice chat and direct messages often turns heated and aggressive, which may upset younger players.

IN-GAME PURCHASES

Modern Warfare II follows the 'battle pass' model of games like Fortnite. For a fee – usually around £10 – each 'season' (every three months or so), players will be invited to complete extra challenges to earn new weapons and equipment. Different tiers of battle pass (costing more money) enable them to achieve this more quickly, while items can also be purchased from the in-game store.

POLITICAL SENSITIVITY

Previous CoD games have been accused of attempting to "rewrite history": failing to correctly attribute alleged war crimes to the US military, for example. The semi-fictional version of history presented on screen can cause players to misunderstand past conflicts and the real reasons they took place. This could lead to young people developing a distorted, inaccurate view of world politics.

AN ADDICTIVE EXPERIENCE

Multplayer mode in Call of Duty titles revolves around levelling up your character to unlock new weapons, abilities and equipment. The process is designed so that it doesn't take too long to see an improvement, and the feeling of making meaningful progress can keep players hooked for hours. It's easy for gamers of any age to lose track of time, but younger ones are especially susceptible.

Advice for Parents & Carers

RESPECT THE AGE RATING

Based on accurately recreating combat situations, Call of Duty games are unflinching in their portrayal of war. Limbs are shot off and explosions send gore flying, while the previous Modern Warfare featured a lengthy interrogation and torture sequence. With Modern Warfare II offering the same style of brutal realism, it's worth reiterating that the PEGI 18 age rating is there for a reason.

CLOSE OFF COMMUNICATION

Unless they're playing with their real-life friends, it may be worth closing communication channels if your child plays Modern Warfare II. There's less of a team focus than in many other online combat games and therefore no real need to interact with strangers. Call of Duty fans can be intensely competitive, so even a single action by your child could provoke a barrage of abuse from strangers.

SET SPENDING LIMITS

If your child is likely to be tempted by buying that 'must-have' weapon or item, consider removing your bank details from the console or computer to prevent indiscriminate spending – and an unwelcome bill. Pre-paid cards could be an option for in-game purchases, allowing you to control how much your child can spend in advance – and helping them learn the basics of budgeting.

TRY OTHER MODES

If it seems that your child only ever plays Modern Warfare II in multiplayer, you could try out the Spec Ops mode with them – formulating strategies while enjoying each other's company. You could also play multiplayer together, taking it in turns to ensure regular breaks. Another alternative is the game's campaign mode, featuring bespoke missions and scenarios which follow an overarching plot.

Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is Games Editor of technology and entertainment website Dexerto and has been working in the gaming media for three years. A long-time gaming enthusiast, he is also a parent and therefore a keen advocate of online safety. Writing mainly about tech and fitness, his articles have also been published on influential sites including IGN and TechRadar, among others.



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Sources: <https://pegi.org/what-do-the-ratings-mean/>; <https://www.gamesradar.com/call-of-duty-modern-warfare-2-accused-of-rewriting-history-to-benefit-usa-for-its-own-attack/>



www.nationalonlinesafety.com



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Get help and support

There are lots of organisations who work to support families and children. Visit childnet.com/get-help if you're worried about an online concern.

NSPCC 0808 800 5000
nspcc.org.uk
Free support and advice for adults concerned about the safety or wellbeing of a child.

 **family lives** 0808 800 2222
familylives.org.uk
Free support and advice on any aspect of parenting and family life.

YOUNGMINDS 0808 802 5544
fighting for young people's mental health
youngminds.org.uk
Free support and advice on how to support young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Helplines for children & young people

childline 0800 11 11
childline.org.uk
Providing help and support for under 18s.

THE MIX 0808 808 4994
themix.org.uk
Providing help and support for 13-25 year olds.

Our Safeguarding Team are always available to offer support and guidance on any safeguarding issues or concerns.

Our Safeguarding Team



Simon



Kev



Cath

Our School website features a Safeguarding area which includes links to our policies and our parents / carers & visitors Safeguarding leaflet

<https://learningopps.org/safeguarding/>

Please contact Simon Graydon (Designated Safeguarding Lead) if you have any Safeguarding / Child Protection concerns: simong@learningopps.org 01304 381906 / 07394 984289 / 01304 371527



From everyone at Learning Opportunities we would like to wish you a happy and safe Christmas & New Year.