Dear Parents and Carers,

In light of a range of issues and incidents amongst children that have occurred throughout this year at St. Clare of Assisi Primary School, this booklet has been prepared to inform parents and carers about the issues concerning primary aged children and social networking. It is also a timely reminder of cyber safety as we head towards the summer holidays.

A recent concern has been the trend of increasingly younger children using the internet and social networking in loosely supervised or unsupervised situations outside of school, such as using Facebook, Instagram, Kik, Tumblr or askFM. These sites and others like them have been designed for the use of teenagers and adults. They are restricted to people who are at least 13 years old. To use these sites, a child under 13 years of age must either use someone else’s account or lie about their birth year to establish their own account. This is obviously a practice that we do not endorse, however we realise that this occurs with, or sometimes without parent awareness or permission.

With primary school aged children using these social networking sites, there are several safety and behavioural implications that sometimes spill over into school. One of the greatest concerns is that many primary aged children do not have the necessary maturity and judgment to be able to use these sites appropriately. Information, such as comments, photos and videos may end up being posted without the permission of the subject, containing content that can be embarrassing or hurtful. Some children may also choose to behave in a way online that they would not in person because the immediacy is muted and they are once-removed by the technology. Furthermore, many children of this age do not realise that it can be very difficult to take something back once it is posted as content can be printed, copied, saved and forwarded onto others.

We would encourage parents and carers to speak to their children directly about their use of social networking, making clear the behavioural expectations and informing them about the potential implications involved.

This booklet features information sheets that have been compiled from www.cybersmart.gov.au/. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us.

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Kids Helpline provides free online and phone counselling for children and young people. Visit www.kidshelpline.com.au or call 1800 55 1800
FACEBOOK

Facebook is a social networking site where users set up a profile with photos and information about themselves. Users share (post) photos, links, videos and comments with ‘friends’ of their choice and ‘like’ and comment on other people’s posts. Users can limit who sees their profile. 13 is the minimum user age required by Facebook.

If your child is over 13 you should still consider the following before agreeing to unsupervised Facebook access:

Is your child able to withstand taunts from others?
If you think your child will become very upset (more than other kids) if they have a negative experience online, your child may need you to guide them through the use of Facebook. Look through their profiles and public feeds together, talk about how some people behave differently online and teach them how to filter abusive comments, block and report people.

Does your child understand what is safe to put online?
If they might put their name, address, school, sports club or information that allows people to identify and locate them (even after you have talked through the dangers) they may need your help with using Facebook. Talk about the risks of ‘checking in’, posting sexy pictures, meeting online friends in person, making offensive comments, and what is and isn’t acceptable.

Does your child know how to report abuse and offensive or pornographic content?
If not you need to visit Facebook’s Safety Centre with them to ensure they know how to block and report people.

Are you worried your child will be left out if they aren’t on Facebook but also worried they aren’t ready?
As a compromise you may choose to let them have a Facebook account if they follow strict rules – including only using Facebook when you supervise them or you control their login. In return, and to keep them engaged with you, you can promise not to embarrass them by commenting publicly on their profile or posts. Teens tell us this is humiliating and it is their private world.

Are you going to supervise or ‘friend’ your child on Facebook?
If this is the case, be prepared to learn more than you might like about their friends. Try to withhold comment unless you are worried about safety. It is better to talk to your child in person if you have concerns than post comments publicly. If you publicly embarrass them, you will break your child’s trust and they may simply communicate with friends on a different program – or open a separate profile without your knowledge.

How do I talk to my child about my concerns?
Be honest with them. Express your love and concern about what might happen online. Ask if they have experienced bullying or sexual advances. Banning seldom works and children will find other ways to get online and may stop talking to you about issues to avoid getting in trouble. Keep the communication open. If they won’t talk to you about things, recruit a trusted family friend or family member to keep the communication going.

When should I be worried about my child?
If your child’s behaviour changes at home and/or school you should talk to them. Examples of changed behaviour could include disinterest in things they used to like, seeming very unhappy and/or their sleep and eating is being impacted. Seek professional advice if necessary from a school counsellor, your GP or a psychologist. If your child has particular vulnerabilities, be vigilant about their contacts offline and online. Help them join groups out of school where they can find friends and support. Talk to the school and make sure they are supported.
**INSTAGRAM**

Instagram is a photo and video sharing App popular with young people. Users communicate by posting comments to each other under photos and videos. They sometimes share user names from other sites or apps such as Kik or Facebook to continue chats privately. 13 is the minimum user age required by Instagram.

If your child is over 13 you should still consider the following before agreeing to unsupervised Instagram access:

**Is your child able to withstand taunts from others?**
If you think your child will become very upset (more than other kids) if somebody posts a negative comment on a photo they post, your child may need you to guide them through the use of Instagram. You may like to set your child’s profile to ‘private’ and teach them how to block and report people.

**Does your child understand what is safe to put online?**
If they might put their name, address, school, sports club or information that allows people to identify and locate them (even after you have talked through the dangers) they may need your help with using Instagram. Talk about the risks of ‘checking in’, posting sexy pictures, meeting online friends in person, making offensive comments, and what is and isn’t acceptable.

**Does your child know how to report abuse and offensive or pornographic content?**
If not you need to visit Instagram’s Privacy and Safety Centre with them to ensure they know how to block and report people. [http://help.instagram.com](http://help.instagram.com)

**Are you worried your child will be left out if they aren’t on Instagram but also worried they aren’t ready?**
As a compromise you may choose to let them have an Instagram account if they follow strict rules – including only using Instagram when you supervise them or you control their login. In return, and to keep them engaged with you, you can promise not to embarrass them by commenting publicly on their profile or posts. Teens tell us this is humiliating and it is their private world.

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If your child’s behaviour changes at home and/or school you should talk to them. Examples of changed behaviour could include disinterest in things they used to like, seeming very unhappy and/or their sleep and eating is being impacted. Seek professional advice if necessary from a school counsellor, your GP or a psychologist. If your child has particular vulnerabilities, be vigilant about their contacts offline and online. Help them join groups out of school where they can find friends and support. Talk to the school and make sure they are supported.
KIK

Kik is a messaging app for smart devices such as smartphones, iPod touches and tablets. Once the app is downloaded the user can send texts, 'stickers', pictures, surveys and videos to other Kik users free of charge (other than normal data costs) – which is one of the reasons it is popular with kids. Kik states that users must be 17 years or older.

Kik users have a User Name to identify them; they don’t use their phone number. Some users share their User Names with each other on other platforms like Instagram to continue the chat privately.

Are there risks for my child?

Kik allows children to send messages to other users as they would with SMS. The main difference is that you might not know who they are messaging and in some cases they may not know who is messaging them. Kik also allows you to send messages and pictures to more than one user at a time.

What should my child do to protect themselves?

Ideally children should only message friends they know offline. If they are going to message strangers or ‘friends of friends’ they should keep their information including their phone number private. In the ‘privacy’ settings of Kik users can block people. Under the ‘notifications’ setting, users can choose whether to turn the ‘Ignore new people’ on – the default is set to off.

Is there sexual and violent content on Kik?

The type of content your child will receive will depend on who they are sharing messages with. If they only message people they know the risk of being sent inappropriate content is the same as with normal messaging.

If they seek out anonymous users, they may be subject to inappropriate content. Remember the Kik developers recommend use by those 17 years and over.

If my child is quite vulnerable should I stop them using Kik?

You know your child better than anyone else. If you are concerned about them you should keep a close watch on all their on and offline activities. If you feel they are in contact with anonymous users talk to them about your concerns.

How do I talk to my child about my concerns?

Be honest with them. Express your love and concern about what might happen. Ask if they have experienced bullying or sexual advances. Banning seldom works and children will find other ways to get online and may stop talking to you about issues to avoid getting in trouble. Keep the communication open. If they won’t talk to you about things, recruit a trusted family friend or family member to keep the communication going.

When should I be worried about my child?

If your child’s behaviour changes at home and/or school you should talk to them. Examples of changed behaviour could include disinterest in things they used to like, seeming very unhappy and/or their sleep and eating is being impacted. Seek professional advice if necessary from a school counsellor, your GP or a psychologist. If your child has particular vulnerabilities, be vigilant about their contacts offline and online. Help them join groups out of school where they can find friends and support. Talk to the school and make sure they are supported.
TUMBLR

Tumblr is a blog site where people create their own ‘tumblelog’ which is a set of pages which can include text, photos, quotes, links, music, and videos. Users choose a look (theme) and customise their ‘tumblelog’ to reflect their chosen image. Users follow, share and comment on other Blogs. It can be accessed through any device that has internet access.

Tumblr states that users must be at least 13 years old. If your child is over 13 you should still consider the following before agreeing to Tumblr.

What are the risks?
As with all social media that encourages interaction between users, the risks come from contact with people your children don’t know, and from your child potentially accessing inappropriate content.
There are many blogs specifically hosting adult content, and some that promote risky behaviour such as eating disorders and self harm. However, your child can choose the topics they do and don’t follow.

Does your child understand what is safe to put online?
If they might put their name, address, school, sports club or information that allows people to identify and locate them (even after you have talked through the dangers) they may need your help with using Tumblr. Talk about the risks of posting sexy pictures, meeting online friends in person, making offensive comments, and what is and isn’t acceptable.

My child wants people to know who they are and have more ‘followers’. What should I do?
It is normal for teens to want to achieve status and fame. They will probably want as many people following their blogs and reblogging their information as possible. The key to doing this safely is convincing your teen that it is better for them to use a fake name that can be their ‘brand’. Check the brand name they come up with to make sure it isn’t overtly sexual – that will attract the wrong audience.

Does your child know how to report abuse and offensive or pornographic content?
Tumblr does not provide a safety or reporting centre, but users are able to email support@tumblr.com with concerns. All blogs are public and cannot be made private, but users can “Ignore” users by visiting www.tumblr.com/ignore

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When should I be worried about my child?
If your child’s behaviour changes at home and/or school you should talk to them. Examples of changed behaviour could include disinterest in things they used to like, seeming very unhappy and/or their sleep and eating is being impacted. Seek professional advice if necessary from a school counsellor, your GP or a psychologist. If your child has particular vulnerabilities, be vigilant about their contacts offline and online. Help them join groups out of school where they can find friends and support. Talk to the school and make sure they are supported.
Ask.fm is a social networking platform where users create profiles with photos and information about themselves. Users ask each other questions, but you don’t have to be a member to ask a question or browse profiles. Users can block their identity and ask questions anonymously. Users can limit who they accept questions from or can leave themselves open to questions from anyone, including anonymous users.

What do people ask on Ask.fm?
Ask.fm allows users to check through open profiles without creating their own account. There are many overtly sexual questions asked. Some users deflect them well, while others are not as skilled or are happy to engage in the sexual banter. Many conversations are between school friends and cover daily school happenings.

What is Ask.fm doing to protect children?
Ask.fm’s Terms of Use state that users must be 13 years or older. It advises people not to share personal information and to block and report users who break the Terms of Service. It advises that ‘if the person keeps bothering you, report abuse to us by pressing the Report button and to law enforcement’…’we can supply identifying information (of anonymous users) if necessary’.

In August 2013 Ask.fm announced changes to its policies due to public scrutiny. It indicated it will improve its reporting, moderation and information on sources of help and advice. If your child has an Ask.fm account, you may like to go online with them to help select the appropriate settings.

Will banning my child from Ask.fm protect them? Are there other platforms like this?
Banning use of sites or apps may not be the best option as children will find ways to engage with platforms like Ask.fm. You can’t protect children from all of the risks posed by these platforms and applications but you can discuss your concerns and establish boundaries. The platform is itself not the issue – the behaviour is.

How do I talk to my child about my concerns?
Be honest with them. Talk about the media stories, express your love and concern about what is happening online. Ask if they have experienced bullying or sexual advances online and talk it through with them. Banning seldom works and children will find other ways to get online. They will stop talking to you about issues if they aren’t meant to be online anyway. Keep the communication open, or recruit a trusted family friend or family member to help.

When should I be worried about my child?
If your child’s behaviour changes at home or school you should talk to them, particularly if they seem disinterested in things they used to like, seem very unhappy and/or their sleep and eating is impacted. Seek professional advice if necessary including through the Cybersmart Online Helpline counselling service, the school counsellor, your GP or a psychologist. If your child has particular vulnerabilities, be vigilant about their contacts offline and online. Help them join groups out of school where they can find friends and support. Talk to the school and make sure they are supported.