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Dear Parents and Carers

### **Social media apps and websites**

As a school, we are aware of some of the social media apps that young people may use to connect with the people around them. We are also aware of the potential risks that come with such apps, particularly with regard to pupil safety and bullying.

As aforementioned in the Bohunt Bulletin, it is important to maintain open dialogue with your child regarding their use of social media from the moment they have a mobile phone.

When checking your child's phone to ensure they are using it safely, it can seem a tad overwhelming. You may well be greeted with an array of apps that you do not recognise, and so it can be difficult to identify which are safe for use and which are not. It can also be difficult to broach the subject with your child effectively to ensure a productive outcome.

The social media apps and websites outlined below come with some risks. It is important to be aware of these risks. It is worth keeping an eye out for them and discussing the risks associated with them should your child be interested in them or have the apps downloaded on their phone.



#### **Pickle.**

Pickle is an app that encourages its users to connect with others and perform dares in exchange for money via Paypal. There is a private chat function and users are vulnerable to meeting strangers online and being pressured to perform potentially harmful dares.



#### **YikYak.**

YikYak is an anonymous social forum, primarily used to post potentially harmful and threatening posts for all with the app to see. Whilst this is aimed at 17+ teenagers, some younger users can use it as a way to anonymously spread hurtful comments and these can be difficult, but not impossible, to trace.

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### **Tinder.**

Tinder is a dating app. Tinder's privacy policy allows children as young as 13 to register, as the app connects with Facebook. The geo-location features (where other users can see the location you are using the app from) and anonymous nature of this app puts children at high risk of connecting with people they do not know. This app is mostly used by adults and is not appropriate for children.



### **KiK Messenger.**

KiK is an app that allows users to message in a similar way to regular texting, including the option to send photos and sketches. This works by creating a username, as opposed to a mobile number and therefore there is potential for children to connect with people outside of their phone contacts. It is similar to an online chatroom and poses the same risks.



### **Snapchat.**

Snapchat is an app that allows users to send photos and messages to their contacts. These photos and messages can be viewed, and then disappear within 10 seconds of sending. Some users believe, wrongly, that these images disappear from devices once they have been sent. This is not true. Any user has the ability to 'screenshot' the image and save it to their device. These images can then be circulated like any other image.



### **Poke.**

Poke is similar to Snapchat, in that the images seemingly disappear after a few seconds of sending them. This is connected with Facebook.



### **Vine.**

Vine is Twitter's mobile app that allows users to shoot and share short loops of video. It is rated 17+, but anyone can download it. It is easy for any user to run a basic search and find offensive language, nudity, drug use and sexual videos. Whilst this is not the sole function of the app, it is there for all to view.

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### Tumblr.

Tumblr is a photo sharing app for 17+, but anyone can download it. It can be used for sharing images and chatting. Automatically, any new user's profile is set as 'public', meaning that any other user can view all content and photos.



### Instagram.

Possibly one of the most popular apps for teenagers, Instagram is a photo sharing site owned by Facebook. The app is rated 13+. It is possible to change privacy settings on this app to block contact from unknown users and also block sharing their location. Despite this, however, many users choose to keep their profile open for anyone to view and contact them.



### Yellow.

Yellow is an app for young people and encourages them to connect with strangers. It has a reputation as a dating app for children.

**Blue Whale** is a website that encourages its users to partake in a series of dares, that focus on self-harm and become increasingly more dangerous as the days progress. Unfortunately this website has been linked to encouraging young people to commit suicide.

**Sayat.me** is a website that provides a forum for anonymous posting about other people. This acts as a forum for unkindness, online bullying and trolling.

### How do I have these conversations?

It is easy to panic if you see an app on your child's phone that you did not know they had. It is even easier to wonder how to best support your child with making the best decisions without pushing them away.

It should always start with a conversation. You may find these tips useful:

- **Do not accuse your child** if they have an app you are worried about. Ask them what they use it for, and discuss the positives and negatives of using it. Try to keep them on your side and show understanding of their thoughts to download it in the first place.

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- **Discuss the potential risks** with your child and go over some general rules about how to stay safe online.
- Go through the **security settings** together on each app so that you are comfortable with these.
- Discuss the **deletion of any apps** with your child if you decide this so that they understand the reasons.
- Go to Settings and turn **Location Services OFF**. This will ensure that your child cannot be identified by location when using their phone.
- Make a rule that your child should always ask for permission before **downloading** any apps – even the free ones. You can then go through the privacy settings together for apps that are appropriate for children, and can discuss those that are not.
- Advise your child not to share any **passwords** with anyone, except you.
- **Tell your child to let you know** if they notice anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- **Remember that your child has not done this deliberately to upset you.** They can often follow what others are doing and can be unaware of the risks involved.

As a school we will continue to teach all students how to best stay safe online and make them aware of the risks associated with online behaviour. At home, you are in the best position to monitor your child's online activity and have these individual discussions with them to ensure they stay safe.

Remember that if you are ever concerned about something potentially harmful you find on your child's phone, and would like to seek advice, call the Police on 101 who will be able to assist you further.

Thank you for your continued support with educating our children on the risks of social media use and encouraging good habits and positive behaviours.

Yours faithfully

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