28 February 2019

Dear Parents and Carers,

**Online Safety**

Last week a parent took to Facebook to talk about their child’s frightening experience with an unpleasant character on the internet. This post went on to be shared thousands of times around the globe. Sharing these posts to spread awareness and encourage people to be on their guard may seem like the obvious thing to do; however, despite the best intentions of internet users, publicising the issue has generated worldwide interest amongst young people where there previously was not any. Young people may then go on to seek out information and, as a result, find content that may upset or frighten them.

I would urge you to reassure your children about measures they can take to be safe on line and to not seek out or share these sites where your children are present.

The work we do in school about ensuring children feel safe is that at all times they know that they have safe people who they can tell anything and everything to. At St Mary’s children are continually taught to recognise that they will see and hear wrong choices around them but they should say STOP and that they should TELL the safe people they know they can trust.

We have been consistently working to ensure that we are a genuine listening school so that if children TELL we reassure them and we work to take what they say seriously.

As parents, you are in the best place to offer that listening platform but you will be aware that keeping your children safe on the internet needs to be much more about being proactive with and for them; blocking sites, giving time to find out what they are accessing and what risks they are managing and how you create a safe space for them as they grow to navigate the world of the internet safely.

Today in school, many children are talking about this internet site and images that are unpleasant. Teachers are reminding the children of our right to STOP and TELL their safe people. I had decided this morning to have a key stage 2 assembly tomorrow morning but I am reflecting on this in light of the advice below from Devon Safeguarding (see below).

Please be aware that children are talking about this issue and that they may need to be reassured and reminded about your strategies for keeping them safe on line.

Thanking you for your continued support with this important and ever changing matter.

Mrs Mannix

**Advice from Devon Safeguarding**

The UK Safer Internet Centre advice is that information about any app that raises safety concerns is not shared with parents directly or circulated broadly but on a ‘need to know’ basis. If a decision is made to share information widely, there is a risk of drawing attention to apps to children who don’t already know about them. Evidence shows that naming specific online content or games can increase the risk of creating media coverage and social media sharing, which can inadvertently promote the content to young audiences.

The Samaritans encourage parents and adults who work with young people to talk to them about their online activity. Let them share what they’re playing or looking at, rather than asking them if they are playing a specific game, as this may draw their attention to it.

The UK Safer Internet Centre encourages open and honest conversations with young people about the kind of content they could encounter online, and to ensure children know what to do and who to turn to if they do come across something that makes them feel worried or upset. It is also important that as professionals with a duty to safeguard the young people in our care that we are only sharing factual and useful information.

The UK Safer Internet Centre also runs a Professionals Online Safety Helpline for any online safety issues professionals may face themselves or with children in their care. Their website contains really useful tips, advice and resources for professionals and parents to help children and young people have a safe and positive time online.

There are some good sources of information and advice for schools and parents:

https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers

https://parentinfo.org/

Parent Info is a free web service providing information to parents and carers.

https://www.nspcc.org.uk/ShareAware

Advice from NSPCC on social networks, apps and games.

https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers