



Safeguarding, Health & Safety and Well-being Updates

Autumn Term 1st Half 2024

Dear Parents/Carers,

Please find below several updates regarding activities, events and support available through school regarding safeguarding your children.

World Mental Health Day - 10th October 2024



On the 10th October 2024 we joined organizations across the country to celebrate 'World Mental Health Day'. All learners across the school were thinking about 'Mental Health' and understanding more about the important part it plays in our everyday lives. The following aspects were explored in an 'age appropriate' way, as part of our on-going commitment to the importance of 'Mental Health and well-being'.

- Strategies to tackle anxiety
- Recognising mental health problems
- Feeling empowered to talk about problems and recognising emotions.
- Understanding that everyone has mental health and that we need to take care of our mental health so that Mental Health issues do not develop.

The following link will take you to the 'Mental health Foundations' web page for families about 'Looking after you own Mental Health'

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/looking-after-your-mental-health>

Mental Health & Well-being Update



As a school we continue to benefit from the weekly support of Natalie Ball our 'Education Mental Health Practitioner' (EMHP). As part of this service, with your consent, we can refer children in to access support around a number of 'mental health areas'.

This school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people/vulnerable adults and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.



If you feel that you would like to know more about how Natalie Ball can help or the services that are on offer, please contact the office and ask to speak to Mrs Oakes or Mrs Johnson-Allen who is the school's new 'Mental Health Lead'.

Learners in Draco class have been undertaking a learning programme entitled 'Bouncebackability' led by Natalie and her colleague. This has explored aspects of being 'resilient' and 'bouncing back from any setbacks'. After half term Hyrda class will be participating in this programme.

NSPCC - Talk PANTS



In school we often use resources from the NSPCC to help educate our learners about how to keep themselves and others safe. 'Talk PANTS' is a resource that we use in school to educate our learners about knowing that their body belongs to them and they should tell a safe adult they trust if anything makes them feel upset or worried. The link below will take you to NSPCC website and support for parents around this subject.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/pants-underwear-rule/>

School Evacuation Invacuation and Lockdown Procedures



Following recent updates and training attended by staff we have reviewed and updated our Evacuation and Invacuation/Lockdown procedures. For safety reasons these are not shared on our school website but will be practising these with all staff and learners.

If we have to undertake a full lockdown in school we will be alerting you as Parents/Carers via a text message. Under these circumstances we ask that you do not try to contact the school or collect your child as we will require all lines of communication to be available for key services. We will keep up updated and will inform you when it is safe to make contact and collect your child/children.

Health & Safety Audit (undertaken by the Local Authority -9th October 2024

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Health & Safety



Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service Health, Safety and Wellbeing Audit Report (HSF 4 V.14 Feb 24)

For Squirrel Hayes First School.
9.10.2024

On the 9th October the school was audited by the Local Authority Health & Safety Team as part of their review and evaluation processes. **I am pleased to share that the school retained the top score of Level 5 again as an outcome to this process.** You will already be aware that Health and Safety is a high priority at Squirrel Hayes First School and we would like to thank you for your continued support and cooperation in ensuring that all our policies and procedures are followed.

In-Game-Chat Advice



Online gaming enjoys an apparently ever-increasing level of popularity, and many players are eager to connect with one another as they enjoy a friendly competition or go for the win side by side. Whether it's to strategise and coordinate, or simply have a chat as you indulge in your hobby, the fact remains that plenty of games now offer means for their players to talk to one another, be that in a text or voice format.

Unfortunately, this functionality - which is used to connect with strangers just as often as it is with friends - poses several risks to younger players, and it's vital for parents and educators to understand these safety concerns. **The free guide attached below offers expert advice on the issues that may arise when using in-game chat, and lets you know how to safeguard the children in your care as they make use of this technology.** We've also produced [a version of this guide](#) in podcast format, so you can access the same superb support while you're on the go.

If you require any additional information or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Yours sincerely,
Mrs E. J. Pickford (Headteacher) & Team

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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about IN-GAME CHAT

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Video games are continuing to grow in popularity – including, of course, among children and young people – and the emergence of gaming communities has been accelerated by the inclusion of chat functionality across many different titles. While in-game chat isn't inherently a bad thing, it can create some concerns about online safety and the people that children might be interacting with.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHAT

There are a number of ways that gamers commonly chat with one another online. As the name would suggest, in-game chat happens within the game itself. There's also party chat: a group voice conversation that console users can have with anyone on the same platform. This tends to be more commonly used by players who already know each other. Finally, many gamers – especially on PC – will chat via a third-party app such as Discord.

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

Whether it's text- or voice-based, in-game chat is frequently open to all players to use. Many games default to making it an opt-in function, but some don't: meaning a child could start seeing messages within the game from people they're playing with, regardless of whether they know those individuals or not. While most strangers won't necessarily have ill intent, there are some who may behave inappropriately when chatting to a child – intentionally or otherwise.

DANGER OF GROOMING

It's been reported that some young gamers have encountered older players online who pretend to be a lower age to manipulate children, sending gifts in exchange for chatting and sending photos. Just as on any messaging platform, it's good to advise young people to avoid speaking to strangers; emphasise that they shouldn't accept gifts from anyone online that they don't know.

BULLYING AND ABUSE

While some in-game chat can turn toxic because of how a match plays out, others turn that way because of people who engage in trolling – in essence, behaving in an offensive and abusive way simply to cause pain or get a rise out of whoever they're talking to. These 'trolls' often lean on racial slurs, anti-LGBT sentiment and other hateful rhetoric; they normally feel most confident preying on younger, more impressionable gamers.

POTENTIAL FOR PRIVATE CHAT

If a player would like a re-match with a stranger after meeting them in the game, they can send a friend request, or use the party chat together in the future. For the most part, this is harmless – but it might lead to messages being exchanged in private. This could then escalate to the sharing of private information, and potentially attempts to manipulate or scam younger players.

COMPETITIVE ATMOSPHERE

Certain games are very competitive, and players can sometimes get upset if they feel a teammate is underperforming, an opponent won unfairly, or they're just a bad loser. This can lead to unpleasant messages that stray away from playful 'trash talk' and wander into the territory of bullying. Some players have been known to get incredibly abusive in situations like this, and the impact of this on a young gamer's emotional wellbeing could be severe.

Advice for Parents & Educators

LOCK-DOWN IN-GAME CHAT

In-game chat can often be disabled in the game's settings. This allows children to play without risk of contact from strangers – but it will need to be done in each individual game. Text chat appears in the corner of the screen in many titles, so it's normally easy to take a quick glance and see what's being said. With voice chat, explain to children what behaviour is inappropriate, so they can spot the dangers themselves.

REPORT POTENTIAL OFFENDERS

Most games offer a robust means of reporting other players, so you can flag an account as potentially harmful. This normally leads to the account not being matched with yours in the future and, if that person's conduct breaks any of the game's rules, they may be banned from playing entirely. This is done within the game itself, so each title has a slightly different process, but these tend to be designed for simplicity.

CONSIDER OTHER CHAT OPTIONS

If a child wants to play with people they know, consider using party chat or a third-party service like Discord. This allows everyone involved to chat on a private server and even enjoy each other's company while playing different games. It's also far more secure, as anyone looking to join will need to request and be granted access – normally by whoever is hosting the chat.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Make sure children understand the differences between being competitive and being abusive. Talk about what constitutes unusual or inappropriate behaviour from strangers online. Be clear that if anything ever concerns or worries them, they should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible. Empower children to identify the risks of in-game chat for themselves and reassure them they won't get in trouble for seeking help if anything goes wrong.