



Guildford County School

SPECIALIST MUSIC COLLEGE

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1 December 2017

Dear Parents and Carers,

Re: Children and Sexting

I wrote to you last December about the issue of 'sexting' amongst young people. I thought that it might be useful to write again now about how to keep your child safe from exploitation if they are inappropriately using their mobile devices and computers. I apologise that the content of this letter may be challenging to deal with at home, but I feel that as follow up from work done at school, it is important to share with you the information herein. It may protect your child's safety and keep them on the right side of the law.

You may have come across the term sexting. This is when one person creates indecent images of themselves or others and shares them with another person by text, WhatsApp, email, *etc.* Between two consenting people over the age of 18, the law sees no offence. When children are involved, however, there are laws in place to protect them.

In August 2016, the UK Council for Child Internet Safety published guidance for schools on responding to incidents of sexting. The advice only covers the sharing of sexual imagery by young people and introduces the phrase 'youth produced sexual imagery' to clarify this issue. The main point of the guidance is that we must inform you as parents that creating and sharing sexual photos and videos of under-18s is illegal, even if the subjects of these images consent to their production and circulation. The law does not recognise this consent from a person under the age of 18.

The types of incidents that may lead to criminal prosecution are not limited to, but include:

- A person under the age of 18 creates and shares sexual imagery of themselves with a peer under the age of 18;
- A person under the age of 18 shares sexual imagery created by another person under the age of 18 with a peer under the age of 18 or an adult;
- A person under the age of 18 is in possession of sexual imagery created by another person under the age of 18.

Children under 13 are given extra protection from sexual abuse. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 clarifies that sexual activity with a child under 13 is never acceptable and that children of this age can never legally give consent to engage in sexual activity. Sexual activity includes participating in sexting. All young people who share sexual imagery of themselves are breaking the law.

We encourage you at home to engage in conversation with your children about this topic. We suggest 5 easy steps to help assist young people stay safe when using their phone and/or the internet:

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- Have the conversation early and often – explore the internet together;
- Get them to leave their phone downstairs at night time – constant texting and talking can affect sleep and concentration;
- Check that they know how to use privacy settings and reporting tools;
- Use parental controls to filter, restrict, monitor or report content - you can block your child's smartphone or tablet during school hours and overnight, or at other times to suit your family's wishes;
- Get them to password protect their phones with a numeric code, password or fingerprint;
- Make sure that you know the password to your child's phone;
- Be 'app-savvy' – when your child is downloading apps, look at the reviews and pay special attention to the permissions they seek. Do a web search to see if an app they are installing is from a reputable developer.

I am sad to report that we have previously had cause to intervene on issues where sexting has taken place, so please, as much as we all may want to be, try not to be of the mind-set that this does not apply to your child.

Should you need help or advice on how to do this, please do not hesitate to contact either Miss Cole (Head of Upper School and our Designated Safeguarding Lead), Mrs Nurton (Director of Sixth Form), Mr Lewis (Head of Lower School) or myself and we will be happy to support you.

Yours faithfully,

Steve Smith
Deputy Headteacher

