

25<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Dear Parent

## SAFEGUARDING ALERT

It's fair to say that many of us could not have managed through the last twelve months without access to electronic devices and the internet – it's been the lifeline that has helped our children stay connected to their friends and access an education. However, alongside all that is good about technology, we know that there are many risks associated with it and sadly we've seen a significant rise in young children falling victim to online harm.

We need to tell you about a few such sites that we have become aware of in recent weeks, in which Children and Young People (particularly primary school age) have been traumatised by unintentionally viewing sexualised and abusive images of children and adults. These are:



**OMEGLE** is advertised as 'a free online chat website that allows users to socialise with others without the need to register. The service randomly pairs users in one-on-one chat sessions.' The website also allows users to connect to webcams so they can be seen by the stranger they are talking to. It has an age rating of 18+ or 13 years + (with parental permissions). ***We strongly recommend that you do not let your child access this website.***



**DISCORD** is an App that lets people chat via text, voice or video in real-time. It is very popular with gamers, and with the right privacy settings and monitoring it can be used safely. The safest way to use Discord is to only accept friend requests and participate in private servers with people you know. Avoid open chat functions. Discord has an age rating of 13 years +.

We've had reports that significant numbers of children within our local schools have disclosed to teachers or parents that they have seen distressing material on these sites and been asked by strangers to share pictures and videos of themselves performing sexual acts. The Safeguarding Children Partnership is taking these reports very seriously; we are working with colleagues in Police, Education, Social Care and Health to raise awareness, provide support to children significantly affected and to identify perpetrators, where this is possible. The biggest challenge we face is that there is no registration required to use Omegle, making it difficult to trace perpetrators. Additionally, once children have seen these images, they cannot be unseen, so our primary focus must be to 'prevent' rather than 'cure'.

***We, therefore, need your help.*** Please ensure that you know what sites your child is accessing, who they are talking to and that the material they are viewing is age appropriate. We understand that some parents may not be confident using technology and may not know

how to ensure that the necessary parental controls are in place. If you are struggling, there is help available.

Our Police Safer School's Partnership offer these top tips:

1. For young children ensure they are visible to you when using technology.
2. Talk with your child, discuss expectations and behaviour, and have regular follow up talks. Encourage them to only communicate with people they know.
3. Encourage your child to be open about their online activity. It's important they are praised for sharing any problems they encounter rather than punished.
4. For young children you should know the passcode to your child's devices and carry out frequent random checks.
5. Keep technology out of the child's bedroom (especially at night).
6. Apply parental controls via the home wi-fi account and/or mobile phone provider account and, if your child is old enough to use social media, all accounts should be set to private.

There's also lots of information available online; here's a couple of links we'd recommend:

[National Online Safety Website](#) contains lots of advice, support and explainer videos to help guide you in areas such as Privacy and Security, Online gaming and Online Relationships.

[Think U Know website](#) which, amongst other things, offers advice on what to do if you come across child sexual abuse material.

We continue to work with our partners to identify other ways in which we can raise awareness and support you to safeguard your children; these will be shared through your child's school, once they are available.

If you have any questions about any of the information in this letter, or if you have concerns that your child has been affected by the issues raised, please speak to the Head Teacher or Designated Safeguarding Lead at your school. They will be able to offer advice and will be able to access the most appropriate support for you and your child.

Yours sincerely



**Gill Frame**  
**Independent Chair**  
**Cheshire West and Chester**  
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