



Safeguarding bulletin – Summer term April 2024

Welcome back after a lovely, albeit quite blustery Easter break. There is a lot of content as we have had a holiday and there has been a lot of coverage of key issues in the media over the last two weeks. I hope you find some of this useful and can share this with your young people at home.

For Parents - What is County Lines?

Grooming is often associated with sexual grooming, but as we all know the process of grooming can be used for a multitude of crimes where children and young people can be exploited.

Internet Matters have put together a really useful guide for parents explaining county lines, how children are targeted, how children may be vulnerable and some resources/support.

The guide can be accessed via this link: [What is county lines? Learn about it | Internet Matters](#)

New Report - Teen Girls' Experiences of Harm Online

Internet Matters have released their latest Digital Wellbeing Index report showing that teen girls experience significantly more negative outcomes online than other children.

The report goes onto quite a lot of good detail, but some key takeaways are:

- The online world is vital for social connection and social media encourages creativity.
- Harassment of girls has become normalised for some parents and girls. This harassment includes hateful comments, bullying and inappropriate messages/images from men.
- Although social media can be positive and encourage creativity, it is also a source of sadness and social pressure, including being worried about their body shape or size.
- Here is some useful advice for both parents and young people: [How to talk about harassment and abuse online | Internet Matters](#)

Instagram to Blur Nudity in Messages (DM's)

Instagram have announced that they are going to blur nude images that are sent (via the messaging function) to users who are under 18. This is in their continuing fight to combat sexual scams, such as sextortion. I have reservations about how effective this is going to be, but it is a small step in the right direction. My biggest concern is that Instagram direct messages are now end-to-end encrypted, meaning that auto detect and report methods no longer work, so the onus is on the user (the victim) to report and hope that Instagram take the appropriate action. Unfortunately, it feels like one step forward, 2 steps back.

Children's gender transition 'built on shaky foundations,' says NHS review

[The Daily Telegraph](#) [The Times](#) [The Guardian](#)

Dr Hilary Cass has concluded that an entire field of medicine aimed at enabling children to change gender has been "built on shaky foundations". Cass, who was commissioned by NHS England in 2020 to review services for children with gender dysphoria, found that there was no good evidence to support the global clinical practice of prescribing hormones to under-18s to halt puberty or transition to the opposite sex. Her final report has endorsed a fundamental shift in approach away from medical intervention towards a holistic model that addresses other mental health problems the children may have. The findings were welcomed by Rishi Sunak who said that the lack of knowledge about the long-term impact of medical interventions meant people should proceed with "extreme caution". He added: "We acted swiftly on Dr Cass's interim report to make changes in schools and our NHS, providing comprehensive guidance for schools and stopping the routine use of puberty blockers, and we will continue to ensure that we take the right steps to protect young people. The wellbeing and health of children must come first."

Ministers to address concerns about the impact of phones on young people

[The Times](#)

The Government is to launch a consultation this month to address growing concerns about the impact of phones on young people. Proposals will include whether children who want to buy smartphones would have to prove their age in an effort to stop under-16s having the devices. The plans could be coupled with ensuring the device sold is child-friendly, a measure that recently received support from Dame Rachel de Souza, the children's commissioner for England. The consultation will also look at empowering parents more so they can monitor and control children's use of social media. Although social media apps have parental controls, few parents use them, despite their concerns, and ministers want to understand this apparent disconnect better. The proposals would build on the Online Safety Act, which is being implemented by Ofcom, that will force tech companies to take down illegal content and restrict children from seeing harmful material.

Meta faces backlash for lowering WhatsApp age limit to 13

[The Daily Telegraph](#) [The Times](#)

Meta has been urged to reverse a decision to lower the minimum age for WhatsApp from 16 to 13 after it was accused of taking a "highly irresponsible" approach to child safety. Vicky Ford, a Conservative member of the education select committee, said: "Social media can be very damaging for young people. WhatsApp, because it's end-to-end encrypted, is potentially even more dangerous, as illegal content cannot be easily removed. So for Meta to unilaterally decide to reduce the age recommendation for WhatsApp, without listening to affected parents, seems to me to be highly irresponsible." Mike Baxter, principal of the City of London Academy in Southwark, south London, said he had seen pupils invite other children to WhatsApp groups and subject them to a "barrage of abuse" before removing them. "That's happening at one in the morning," he said. "That's not conducive for any 12 or 13-year-old to sleep well." Dr Kaitlyn Regehr, associate professor at University College London's Department of Information Studies, said school leaders believed "the consumption of harmful content online is moving offline and into school yards".

Teenagers are turning to online sources to learn about sex

[Daily Mirror](#) [Daily Express](#) [London Evening Standard](#) [The Independent UK](#)

A new survey has found that almost a fifth (22%) of teenagers say the internet is their main source for information about sexual health and healthy relationships, while 15% said they turned to pornography itself as their main source of information on the topic. The poll of 1,001 students aged 16 and 17 in England, by the Sex Education Forum charity, suggests that 30% of young people turned to social media as their main source of information about sexual orientation and gender identity, ahead of school (25%). The poll suggests nearly half of students learned nothing at all or not enough at school on power imbalances in relationships (49%), porn (49%) and how to access local sexual health services (46%). Over two in five reported learning nothing at all or not enough at school on attitudes and behaviour of boys and men towards girls and women (44%) and on gender identity (44%).

Most of us have felt the dread of impending exams 🖋️😞 The pressure to succeed and not let our loved ones – or ourselves – down can sometimes manifest in ways that are harmful to children’s mental and emotional wellbeing. Several studies have demonstrated that, in a vicious circle, such anxiety impacts our working memory and actually damages academic performance as result 😴

However, there are various solutions to the pre-exam jitters besides simply “getting on with it” – and a little support can go a long way in boosting young people who are suffering from this type of apprehension. To tie in with National Stress Awareness Month, this week’s #WakeUpWednesday guide has some expert tips for helping children and young people to deal with exam stress.

Please see the full sized guide (as pictured) at the end of this newsletter for help and advice.



Councils to get new powers to tackle illegal tobacco sales

[The Guardian](#) [The Times](#)

The Prime Minister is set to announce that council enforcement officers will be empowered to issue £100 on-the-spot fines to retailers breaking a new law intended to ban future generations from smoking, with the ban initially applying to anyone turning 15 this year or younger. Giving out free samples of vapes to under-18s will also be banned, while ministers will be empowered to restrict the flavouring and promotion of vapes to tackle child vaping. Professor Sir Chris Whitty writes in the Times on behalf of all other chief, deputy, and former chief medical officers to back the moves, urging MPs and peers from across the political spectrum "to support a smokefree generation and restrictions on the marketing of vapes to children".

Measles cases continue to surge

[Daily Mirror](#)

Dozens of measles cases continue to be recorded across the UK with clusters in the West Midlands and London driving the increase. Health chiefs have urged parents to vaccinate their children against the potentially fatal infection. Since October 1 last year, there have been 868 confirmed cases of measles in England, with 182 cases reported since February 24. Of these cases, 546 were in children aged 10 and under. The West Midlands and London have the highest number of infections. Dr Vanessa Saliba, UKHSA Consultant Epidemiologist, emphasised the importance of MMR vaccination, stating, "It only takes one case to get into a community with low vaccination rates for measles to spread rapidly."

Social media takes a toll on British teens' conversational skills

[The Times](#)

British teenagers are spending excessive time online, leading to a decline in their ability to hold conversations in person, according to US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy. Murthy's research trip to the UK revealed that young people recognise the importance of face-to-face interactions but feel increasingly reliant on online communication. This trend has resulted in a decrease in their comfort with in-person interaction and a subsequent decline in their social skills. Murthy emphasised the negative impact of social media on young people's happiness and mental health, urging governments to regulate its use. Campaigners are also calling for restrictions on social media to protect children's mental health.

Parents call for ban on smartphones for under-16s

[Daily Express](#) [Daily Mirror](#) [Mirror.co.uk](#) [The Daily Telegraph](#) [The Independent UK](#) [The Times](#)

More than four in five parents believe smartphones are 'harmful' to young people, according to a survey by Parentkind. The charity is calling on political parties to include a ban on smartphones for children in their manifestos. The survey found that 58% of parents believe the government should introduce a ban on smartphones for under-16s. Concerns about online bullying and access to harmful content were cited as reasons for the ban. Parents of primary school children were more likely to support the ban, with 77% in favour. The majority of parents also felt that limiting children's access to smartphones would make their lives as parents easier. Jason Elsom, CEO of Parentkind, urged political parties to include a smartphone ban in their manifestos to protect children from the harms of excessive smartphone use.

Survey finds mobile phones having poor impact on pupil behaviour

[London Evening Standard](#)

A new survey has found some 71% of secondary school teachers in Scotland say mobile phones are having a poor impact on pupil behaviour. The Scottish Secondary Teachers Association education committee found that 90% of respondents reported pupils having detachment problems, with the same percentage stating they were concerned that pupils had been texting during lessons. Meanwhile, 80% reported pupils taking photos on their phones during class, and 60% said they were worried about social media bullying, with phones in the classroom being a factor. Teachers also said pupils had answered calls during lessons, viewed inappropriate content, and had broadcasted live recordings of lessons online. In total, almost all of the respondents told the survey their classes had been interrupted due to mobile phones.

Mother's campaign for safer mobile phones and social media

[Daily Express](#) [Daily Mirror](#)

Esther Ghey, the mother of Brianna Ghey who was tragically murdered, has outlined a five-point plan to make mobile phones and social media safer for children. She is calling on big tech companies to take action to protect children from abuse and safeguard their mental health. The plan includes selling devices with pre-installed monitoring apps, limiting screen time to two hours a day, banning under-13s from accessing social media apps, and introducing mindfulness lessons for schools to give young people resilience, self-compassion and empathy. Esther emphasises the importance of face-to-face socialisation and highlights the dangers of the dark web. In her campaign, she is supported by the mother of one of Brianna's killers.

Children downloading AI apps to create nudes

[The Daily Telegraph](#)

A new government report has warned that schoolchildren are downloading AI apps specifically designed to create nudes. The report from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) was authored by the UK Council for Internet Safety, which includes tech giants, charities, government departments and regulators to advise teachers on how to deal with the issue of pupils sharing nudes or semi-nudes. The document was recently updated to include AI-generated images, deepfakes and the topic of "sextortion" and education workers are told to deal with AI-made images in the same way as normal nudes, which includes not looking at them, not deleting them, calling the police, and not immediately informing parents. There are now calls for Ofcom, the regulator of the Online Safety Act 2023, to be more "proactive and comprehensive" in cracking down on AI nudes. The Government is also being encouraged to change the law so that it is illegal to make an AI nude or deepfake porn.



Around one in five headlines online are clickbait 🗣️🗣️ That's an estimate from experts at Stanford University, who conducted a study into this phenomenon which has gradually extended its reach to almost every corner of the internet – powered by a strategy of snagging users' attention by any means necessary rather than a legitimate desire to inform or enlighten 🗣️🗣️

As that statistic indicates, this manipulative marketing strategy is difficult to avoid online. There's still plenty that can be done though to limit its influence – especially in relation to young people, who are often more susceptible to sensationalist headlines. Today's #WakeUpWednesday guide details the potential hazards around clickbait and has expert tips for avoiding them.

Please see the above guide on what you need to know about clickbait at the end of this newsletter.

10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators MANAGING EXAM STRESS

At some point in their education, children are almost certain to encounter exam stress, which can cast a shadow over their mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. Mental health charity YoungMinds estimate that a staggering 87% of pupils suffer from exam stress – highlighting the urgent need to minimise its impact on children's health and happiness.

1 PRACTISE WORKLOAD WISDOM

The build up to exam season is such a busy and pressurised time in a child's education that it can be difficult for youngsters to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Encourage them to consider whether their current workload is realistic and allows them sufficient time to relax and recharge. Work with them in crafting a revision timetable that's manageable and includes breaks and occasional days off.

2 ADVISE CLEARING THE CLUTTER

A disorganised work environment is proven to negatively affect our ability to focus, as well as our emotional state. Encourage children to keep their desk, notes and revision materials tidy – creating a dedicated, well-kept study space to promote maximum focus. Foster their creativity by suggesting they incorporate vibrant colours, mind maps and even quirky drawings into their revision notes.

3 MASTER THE MATERIALS TOGETHER

Revision seems far harder when a child is uncertain where to begin or what sources to consult. Support them in confirming revision materials with their various teachers – emphasising the importance of gathering a range of resources to get a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Feeling more prepared should nurture the child's confidence and help to dispel some of their anxiety.

4 RECOMMEND CREATIVE NOTE-TAKING

Writing out notes in full – rather than simply bullet pointing – can be a strong start to a child's revision. Reinforce this idea, encouraging the use of flashcards (featuring shorter versions of previously taken notes) for effective repetition and memorisation. Discuss the power of regularly reviewing notes to help them stay in the child's memory.

5 USE VISUAL AIDS AND MNEMONICS

Encourage the use of visual aids like videos and sticky notes to enhance learning. Some children find these resources far more useful than simply reading their notes as written. Explore creating mnemonics for a fun and effective study approach – and it's also worth noting that the strategic use of colours is a proven means of triggering recall during exams.

6 GATHER A 'TECH TOOLKIT'

Technology can be a huge advantage in exam prep. Educational YouTube channels and revision websites like BBC Bitesize can be immensely powerful resources for helping children to expand and retain their knowledge. You could also recommend the use of flashcard apps and educational podcasts for revision and reminders when young people are on the go.

7 KEEP IT FUN

Revision tends to go far more smoothly if children are having fun in the process. Injecting some humour into their notes, for instance, can make details more memorable – as can relating information to their real-life experiences. Try to encourage a variety of study methods, such as incorporating physical activity (even simply taking a walk) into their revision routine.

8 SUGGEST ACTIVE REVISION STRATEGIES

Make sure children are aware of different study techniques. You could emphasise the effectiveness of spaced repetition by reviewing material regularly over time to reinforce learning and improve retention. Discuss the benefits of active recall methods – such as self-testing or explaining a concept aloud – in identifying where their strengths and weaknesses lie.

9 ENCOURAGE A POSITIVE MINDSET

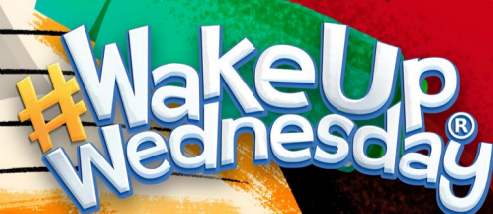
It can be easy for children's thoughts to fall into a downward spiral when they're stressed about exams. Try to foster a growth mindset by emphasising the importance of giving it their all rather than aiming for complete perfection. Positive self-talk and the use of affirmations can build confidence and reduce anxiety, while visualising success and setting realistic goals can help them stay motivated and focused.

10 HELP THEM TO SEIZE THE DAY

There are lots of things children can do on the day of their exam to reduce stress and increase their focus. Talk them through some helpful exam-day strategies – such as arriving early, reading the instructions and the questions carefully, and pacing themselves during the test. Suggest some relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or visualisation, to help them manage any nerves before and during the exam.

Meet Our Expert

Minds Ahead design and deliver the UK's only specialist postgraduate mental health qualifications. Winner of the Social Enterprise UK: 'One to Watch' award, the charity provides training and support to education organisations and local authorities. This guide has been written by Adam Gillett – a learning and development specialist who is also Associate Vice-Principal for Personal Development at Penistone Grammar School.



The National College

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about CLICKBAIT

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Clickbait is a controversial online marketing strategy which uses sensationalist (and frequently misleading) headlines to encourage engagement with an article, image or video – often playing on users' emotions and curiosity, while much of the actual content is of questionable accuracy. Clickbait is also sometimes used to disguise scams, phishing sites and malware.

HARMFUL MISINFORMATION

Clickbait tends to play fast and loose with the truth, opting for eye-catching content over objectivity. This is particularly dangerous for younger internet users, who are generally more susceptible to that type of material. A child could be presented with fake news, misleading articles and – in some cases – outright lies without fully understanding what they're viewing and why it's harmful.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Due to the misleading nature of many examples of clickbait, what may seem to be innocuous and child friendly could actually contain age-inappropriate material such as extremist political views or violent, pornographic or sexually explicit content. This is clearly a hazard for young people, who could be upset, disturbed or influenced by exposure to such subject matter.

HIDDEN MALWARE

While most clickbait is simply trying to promote engagement to earn companies additional revenue, some of it *does* redirect to dubious sites with the potential to infect devices with viruses or malware. This could put a child's sensitive data – such as their name, their location and their date of birth – at risk of being accessed and exploited by malicious hackers.

PRIVACY PROBLEMS

Some clickbait leads to sites which could coax a child into volunteering their personal data – using pop-ups to ask them for their email address and phone number, for example, in exchange for accessing additional content or subscribing to various services. Normally, this harvested information is then sold to third parties, who often utilise it for targeted adverts and other sales schemes.

A DRAINING DISTRACTION

Clickbait encourages spiralling consumption of online content, which could easily result in a young person spending hours scrolling aimlessly instead of doing something productive or interacting with family and friends. This can leave them tired, asocial and lacking focus – and, in the long term, can negatively impact their social skills, education and mental wellbeing.

IMPACT ON BEHAVIOUR

Depending on the type of clickbait a child is interacting with, you might notice negative changes in their behaviour. Weight loss scams, for example, are common among clickbait and have the potential to influence eating habits and body image – while deliberately inflammatory 'rage bait' articles can leave impressionable young people feeling irritable, restless or argumentative.

Advice for Parents & Educators

START A CONVERSATION

The sheer volume of clickbait can make protecting children against it quite challenging. It's vital to talk to young people regularly about the types of content they encounter online, so that they understand the risks of engaging with clickbait. If you're still concerned, it may also be wise to keep an eye on children's online activity to ensure they're not being tempted by clickbait headlines.

PROMOTE CRITICAL THINKING

Encouraging children to question the legitimacy of sensational headlines and too-good-to-be-true promises will help them to become savvier online – and far less likely to be drawn in by clickbait content. These critical thinking skills will also serve to protect them in other areas of the digital world where misinformation is becoming increasingly common.

SPOT THE TELLTALE SIGNS

There are certain common elements in clickbait, including headlines and images that use shock and outrage to grab people's attention – as well as numbered lists, such as "8 Facts You Won't Believe Are True". Some clickbait combines several of these tactics to snag users' interest. Learn to recognise these techniques for yourself so you can teach children to notice them as well.

TAKE CONTROL

Many parents opt to place limits on how long their children can spend online each day, which obviously reduces the chance of exposure to clickbait. Alternatively, most internet-enabled devices have built-in controls that allow parents to manage what sort of online content their child can access – including filtering by age, which can screen out a percentage of inappropriate material.

Meet Our Expert

Carly Page is an experienced technology writer with more than 10 years in the industry. Previously the editor of tech tabloid The Inquirer, she is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant who writes for Forbes, TechRadar and Wired, among others.



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