



## The Safeguarding Team at Belmont

If you have any concerns about a child's welfare or safety, please speak to a member of the school's safeguarding team.



Mrs Clair Veli

Designated Safeguarding Lead  
(DSL)



Miss Rachel Carroll

Deputy Designated Safeguarding  
Lead (DDSL)



Mrs Kirstin Eccles  
Mental Health Lead

Dear Mums, Dads and Carers,

Welcome to February's edition of Belmont School's Safeguarding Newsletter.

I hope you're enjoying the lighter evenings that we're experiencing- I, for one, am excited that Spring is coming and longer days are in sight.

This month's newsletter focuses on the important topic of Online Grooming and how to keep our young people safe online. There is also a handy guide on how not to be a 'Screen Zombie'.

If you're looking for further information on any of the topics raised, or any other safeguarding matters, please drop me an email at:

[clair.veli@belmont.sandmat.uk](mailto:clair.veli@belmont.sandmat.uk)

Sadly, our Family Support Worker, Amy Keen, has left Belmont School for a new challenge in her career- we wish her all the best in her new role. We are currently in the process of recruiting a new Family Support Worker and look forward to introducing them to you in next month's newsletter. In the meantime, if you need help to access support through various different agencies, as well as support in getting your child/ren into school to access the wonderful curriculum that Belmont has to offer, please contact Rachel Carroll.

[rachel.carroll@belmont.sandmat.uk](mailto:rachel.carroll@belmont.sandmat.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter. As ever, if you have a topic which you'd like us to cover in more detail, please get in touch.

*Clair Veli*

Assistant Headteacher & Designated Safeguarding Lead



### What parents need to know about

## ONLINE GROOMING

Online Grooming is when someone befriends and builds an emotional relationship with a child and communicates with them through the internet with the intent to commit a sexual offence. This type of victimisation can take place across any platform; from social media and messaging apps to online gaming and live streaming. Often it involves young people being tricked, forced or pressured into doing something they wouldn't normally do (coercion) and often the groomer's goal is to meet the victim in a controlled setting to sexually or physically abuse them. In some cases, children may be abducted or have long-lasting psychological damage.

#### CHILDREN ARE MOST VULNERABLE

Unsurprisingly, children are often most at risk as they are easy to target and unlikely to question the person who is engaging in conversation with them. Groomers will use psychological tricks and methods to try and isolate them from their families and friends and will often choose to target more vulnerable children who may be easier to manipulate. Predators will stalk apps and websites that are popular with young people and will use a 'scattergun' approach to find victims, contacting hundreds online to increase their chances of success.

#### LIVE STREAMING CONCERNS

Predators may use live video to target children in real-time using tricks, dares or built-in gifts to manipulate them. Grooming often takes the form of a game where children receive 'likes' or even money for performing sexual acts. Social media channels, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, all have live streaming capabilities, but there are many apps which children can use to live stream.

#### ANYONE CAN BE A PREDATOR

The internet has made the ability to interact with strangers online easy. Many sites and apps are reliant on individual users entering their own information when signing up. However, individuals can remain anonymous if they choose to enter inaccurate information and many online predator cases are due to groomers using impersonation techniques. Outside of their close friendship group, it's also important to note that friends of friends can also connect with your child via the app, which may include people with this intention.

#### EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENTS

Online predators will use emotive language and aim to form close, trusted bonds with their victims through showering them with compliments and making them feel good about themselves. Often victims will refer to them as their 'boyfriends' or 'girlfriends' and it can be difficult to convince some young people that they have been groomed, often leading to lasting psychological effects.



#### FROM OPEN TO CLOSED MESSAGES

Online predators may contact their victims using any number of ways including social media, forums, chat rooms, gaming communities or live streaming apps. Sometimes there is little need to develop a 'friendship / rapport stage', as the victim has already shared personal information online and is communicating openly with others. Children may also be prepared to add other online users they don't know so well to gain 'online credibility' through increasing their friends list. Predators will often seize this opportunity to slowly build a relationship and then move their conversation with the child to a more secure and private area, such as through direct messaging.

#### CAN BE DIFFICULT TO DETECT

Unfortunately, most children find the 'grooming' process (before any meeting) an enjoyable one as the predator will compliment, encourage, and flatter them to gain their trust, friendship and curiosity. This often means children fail to disclose or report what is happening. If the groomer is also previously known to the child, their family and their friends, then this can make detection even harder.





## SAFETY TIPS FOR PARENTS & CARERS

### IT'S GOOD TO TALK

It's unlikely that you can stop your child using the internet, nor can you constantly monitor their online activities, but you can talk to your child on a regular basis about what they do online. By talking openly with them about online relationships, they can quickly ascertain the kind of behaviour which is appropriate or inappropriate. Ask them whether they have any online friends or if they play online games with people they haven't met. This could then open up conversations about the subject of grooming.

### CHECK PRIVACY SETTINGS

In order to give your child a safer online experience, it is important to check privacy settings or parental controls on the networks, devices, apps, and websites they use. Disable location sharing if you can. If you use location-sharing apps to check where your child is, remember that these could always be used by strangers to follow your child without their knowledge. Ensure that you check options so that location information is never shared with anyone except those they have permission to share with.

### MONITOR SOCIAL MEDIA & LIVE-STREAMING USE



It's important to be aware of what your child is sharing on social media and with whom. Create your own profile and become "friends" with them or follow them so that you can monitor their activity. Similarly, always check on them if they are live streaming and implement privacy controls. Choose a generic screen name and profile picture that hides their identity. You may also feel more comfortable being present each time they live stream.

### STICK TO 'TRUE FRIENDS'

Make it clear to your child that they should not accept friend requests from people they don't know and to verify friend requests with people who they do know. Encourage them to only interact and engage with 'true friends' i.e. those friends who don't ask personal questions such as close family and friends. Remind them to never agree to chat privately with a stranger or someone they don't really know and to never divulge personal information, such as mobile phone numbers, addresses, passwords or the name of their school.

### BE SUPPORTIVE

Show your child that you will support them and make sure they understand they can come to you with any concerns they may have. They need to know they can talk to you if someone does something they are uncomfortable with, whether that is inappropriate comments, images, requests or sexual comments.

### LOOK OUT FOR WARNING SIGNS



Child safety experts have identified key grooming patterns and advise parents to look out for:

- Secretive online behaviour.
- Late night internet or smartphone usage.
- Meeting new friends in unusual places.
- Becoming clingy, develop sleeping or eating problems or even bedwetting.
- Lack of interest in extra-curricular activities.
- Seem withdrawn, anxious, depressed or aggressive.
- Having older boyfriends or girlfriends
- Having new items, such as clothes or phones, unexplainably.

### Report any concerns

If you suspect a child is being abused or is in danger of being abused, please contact a Designated Safeguarding Lead, or any member of staff. You can also contact the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on: 01452 426565.

If a child is in immediate danger, call the Police immediately on 999.

# A GUIDE ON HOW NOT TO BE A SCREEN ZOMBIE

It's not always easy to tell if you've been spending too much time on your device. Mobiles phones, tablets, games consoles, TVs; the list of devices you might have access to seems never-ending and switching between them can be seamless. However, too much time on your device could lead to certain problems and could be an indicator of an addictive habit. It's important therefore that you try and manage your screen time as much as possible and avoid becoming a 'screen zombie'.

## TAKE CARE OF YOUR BRAIN

Spending too much time on social media, watching YouTube or playing games online can result in you becoming a screen zombie. This can affect your mood, how much sleep you get, how you perform at school and how you behave around others. Limiting your screen time will keep you alert, limiting your screen time will keep you alert, keep your mind focused and help to look after your own mental health and wellbeing.



## BE PRESENT, NOT A ZOMBIE

Screen zombies often find that they spend a lot of time alone in front of their tablet or their mobile phone and reduce the time they spend with their friends or talk with their family. Zombies often lack communication skills. Always try to limit your screen time as much as possible – there's so much fun you can have with others!



## SCREEN-FREE BEDROOMS

Keeping your phone in your bedroom means that it can be tempting to check every notification you get. Your phone could be the last thing you see at night and the first thing you see in the morning. This can contribute towards poor sleep and a lack of focus the next day. Try to keep your phone out of your bedroom or turn off all notifications before bedtime. This will mean you'll get a good night's rest and be ready for the next day.



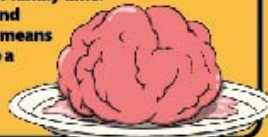
## DON'T GET TRAPPED INSIDE

Screen zombies usually find that they spend a lot of time inside as they lose interest in other things that don't include their device. It might seem obvious, but meeting your friends outside or doing outdoor activities like playing sports, trampolining, camping or just going for a walk are all healthy replacements for screen time and can help keep your mind fresh and active.



## ZOMBIE-FREE MEALTIMES

Mealtimes can be seen as a good time to sit down, relax and switch on your tablet or phone as you eat your food. But it can also mean that you're not interacting with others, sharing jokes at the dinner table or just talking about your day. Keep mealtimes for family time. Eating your food and staring at a screen means you're turning into a zombie.



## BEWARE OF OTHER DANGERS

Spending too much time on your device and online can increase your chances of potentially encountering other online dangers. This could range from viewing inappropriate or harmful content to online bullying, grooming or fake news. Controlling how much time you spend online will reduce your risk of exposure. If you do see anything that makes you upset or if you're concerned about contact with others, always report it to a trusted adult.



## BEWARE OF SNEAKY TRICKS

A lot of apps and games use certain ways of keeping you online and using their platform for long periods of time. This can include simple things like unlimited scrolling on a newsfeed, 'streaks' or uncovering hidden levels. Be mindful of how much time you're online and try to remember you're in control. You decide when you've had enough, not your device.



## SAVE YOUR PARENTS!

Even though your parents will often be the ones telling you to limit your screen time, turn off your tablet or switch off your phone, sometimes they will forget to take their own advice. So it's up to you to make sure you remind them of the dangers of becoming a screen zombie!



## UN-ZOMBIFY YOURSELF

If you think that you've already become a screen zombie, then don't worry, it's never too late to get help and support from your friends and family. Talk to your parents if you feel you've become addicted to your device, try to understand why and work with them to help you limit your screen time so that you can leave your zombie character behind.



## Meet our expert

Pete Badh is content specialist with over 10+ years in research and analysis. He has written various expert pieces around online safety for children and parents and previously worked in a specialist role for the police, contributing work which was pivotal in successfully winning high profile court cases and writing as a subject matter expert for industry handbooks.



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