REIGATE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Digital Bulletin – Safer Internet Day

Tuesday 9th February was Safer Internet Day and we asked our Heads of School what advice they wished they were told when they were younger. This video was shown to students from First to Fifth Form on Tuesday morning. I also wanted to take this opportunity to look at some key considerations of online usage during this lockdown

Screen Time

With learning being virtual and social interactions also restricted to online platforms, it is to be expected that our screen time is obviously going to increase. However, it is still worth bearing in mind the impact that too much screen time can have. Children can come under pressure through social media to look or behave a certain way. They can also be exposed to advertising or unsuitable content. And far from encouraging them to socialise, too much time spent in a room staring at a screen can do just the opposite and harm their social development. Other potential side effects include disrupted sleep, not enough exercise and the danger of neglecting schoolwork.

Unfortunately, in the UK, there are no official guidelines on how much screen time is healthy for children. But Common Sense Media, a non-profit organisation that aims to help children thrive in a world of media and technology, advises setting a family schedule for media use. This can include weekly screen time limits, limits on the kinds of screens children can use, and guidelines on the types of activity they can do or programmes they can watch. Experts also advise parents share screen time with their children. That way, you can see what they're being exposed to and help them apply its teachings to the real world.

How to limit your child's screen time

Internet Matters has some tips to help you manage your children's screen time.
- It's important to set a good example with your own device use. Children will model their behaviour on you, so make sure you're not glued to a screen every time they see you.
- Talk to them about the amount of time they spend online and what they spend that time doing.
- Agree on an appropriate amount of time they can use their device.
- Get the whole family to unplug together and create screen-free zones of the house, such as bedrooms or the dinner table. This will encourage children to talk more and not be absorbed in a screen all the time.
- Technology can help. For example, BT's Parental Controls let you set times when children can't get online, so they can focus on doing their homework.

Online Behaviour

It is worth remembering that people can act differently online as opposed to face to face. As we are currently limited to online communication with anybody outside of our own household, it is important to be even more vigilant about how we communicate online:
- Communication should be respectful, kind and polite
- Remember that people cannot necessarily pick up on your intended tone when reading text
- Ensure that any groups/chats are not excluding any individuals
- Text is more permanent than spoken words, think carefully about what you write

Mental Health

As so much of our days are taken up with screen time, consider how we use our available time away from the computer. Exercise has been proved to have a positive impact on mental health. You may also wish to think about any creative tasks, such as art, or music. Going outside can be hugely beneficial. Apart from time away from your work, it can provide you with fresh air, sunlight and an opportunity for your eyes to focus on objects far away.

If there are any topics that you would like more information about, or if you have any concerns regarding online safety, please feel free to contact me.

Mr Nick Lobb: njl@reigategrammar.org