



From: Deputy Head (Pastoral); Mark Hindley

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Dear Parents,

Pastoral Advice for Parents

A key feature of the success of Abingdon is the way that the parents and the School work together. This is of particular importance when it comes to the pastoral issues that surround the complexities of adolescence. Over the past year a number of parents have asked for advice and guidance on the school's stance in a variety of different areas. To that end, I hope that the following is useful.

Screen time...

This is an area of concern for many. Technology offers fabulous opportunities and we must never lose sight of that. However it has undoubtedly added an additional layer of complexity to teenage life. We would advise that you and your sons agree limits on screen time: this would involve agreeing the length of time that he can spend on his devices – iPad, phone, computer, games console et al – as well as the times of day when he is allowed to use these devices.

Safe Internet use:

Please find opportunities to talk to your son about behaving as appropriately in the virtual world as he would in the real world. Would he be happy for you to read his Facebook page or look at his Instagram posts? Would he show you the photos and videos on his phone without any qualms? Who does he follow on Twitter? Has he got a Tumblr page? Has he got a Tinder account? Is he part of any on-going Snapchat stories? Does he delete his browsing history? What apps has he downloaded? Do you even know what Keek, Imgur, Reddit, YikYak et al are?? Some of these questions will provoke embarrassment, others scorn and some avid denials. Whatever his answers, the way that your son interacts with technology is likely to be different to the way that you use technology. In the same way as you would encourage him to behave politely and appropriately when you have visitors, please also engage with his virtual, digital behaviour. In addition you might want to check your filters on your Wi-Fi.

Here are some links that might act as food for thought:

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/blog/15-sites-and-apps-kids-are-heading-to-beyond-facebook>
<http://fun.familyeducation.com/social-networking/cyberbullying/74548.html>
<http://www.marketingweek.co.uk/trends/teenagers-what-we-really-really-want-our-mobiles-for/4006170.article>
<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/parentsguide/>

Pornography:

Pornography, and its effects, is an issue that concerns us greatly as a school, and is an increasingly worrying aspect of the lives of the modern teenager. Unfortunately it seems increasingly endemic among teenage boys across the whole country. It is crucial that we are upfront and open about addressing these issues as pornography is now readily available and is not of the Playboy-magazine variety that was prevalent when we were growing up, but is hardcore porn that is very explicit and lurid in its content: it often sexualises violence, condones humiliation and is highly degrading. Recently there have been a couple of very accessible documentaries on this topic that I would recommend to you:

Porn on the Brain (Channel 4 by Martin Daubney, an ex-Loaded magazine editor.) Our link to this <http://online.clickview.co.uk/Share/Play?p=1f8y&v1=home.clickview.com.au>

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Tyger [Drew-Honey from "Outnumbered"] Takes on... Porn

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZZQjKfjNSk>

There is also a very interesting, quite explicit, TED talk by Cindy Gallop that she gave back in 2009:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FV8n_E_6Tpc

Our realisation of the dangers and effects of porn means that it is something which we deliberately address in PSHCE, with a particular focus on discussing it in the context of body image, sexual identity and understanding what makes for a healthy relationship.

Given all this, it is imperative that we hold a clear line with the boys to help them to realise that pornography is something that contains potential problems and is generically exploitative. Teenage boys are at an age when they are curious yet vulnerable, and at an age when we need to protect them from establishing damaging habits.

Social networking and gaming:

Social networks have become a norm in modern life. We are all aware that the image we project on Facebook may be different to that on LinkedIn, which in turn may be different on another app. However I think we would all agree that whatever the medium, inconsiderate offensive language, thoughtless barbs, and demeaning comments are never appropriate. The danger of the web is that these moments are crystallised on a screen for the world to see. Please keep reminding your son of this (as we will do at school in Assemblies, PSHCE, and tutor time) so that the image he creates for himself online is appropriate, and that he is aware that he is leaving a digital footprint.

In the same way as when we were teenagers we would take the phone into the kitchen so that our parents couldn't eavesdrop, teenagers often (perhaps understandably) don't want their parents to have full access to their social networking. Due to this our advice is for parents to negotiate a responsible adult to act as an intermediary between you and your son. This intermediary needs to have full access rights to your son's social networking accounts; it might be a favourite uncle/aunt/older cousin, godparent, neighbour etc. – someone who you both trust and who will act as the sensible and sensitive voice of your son's cyber-conscience.

For some, social networking can become obsessive so we would advise trying to limit it, especially when your sons should be doing prep, or should be getting involved in Other Half activities. The same can be said of gaming. There is evidence that gaming has some beneficial effects when played appropriately, and in moderation. It is the latter that is the key. We would all be disappointed if the lure of the virtual world meant your son absented himself from the plethora of opportunities – academic, Other Half and social – that are available to him in the real world. Again, below are some links to act as food for thought.

<http://www.ocmodshop.com/10-benefits-of-video-games/>

<http://www.livestrong.com/article/278074-negative-effects-of-video-game-addiction/>

<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2013/07/21/video-games-are-they-really-a-source-of-addiction/>

Phones:

Often phones are the chosen medium of cyber use; they are amazing tools and each year they will become more astounding in their capability. However, smartphones can also lead to misjudgements, given the ease with which boys can message, take photos, share videos, facetime, skype, and access the Internet. It is always a good idea to insist on an itemised bill for your son's phone so that you can gain a handle on how, and when, he is using it. This can be particularly important if he starts to have a girlfriend. There are also filters that can be set up on most devices themselves, to act in tandem with your Wi-Fi filter. Ironically, the best way to find out how to do this is to google the topic and find the right YouTube clip! As with Internet use in general, please also have regular conversations with your son about what is appropriate in his use of a phone: one particular bugbear is boys messaging during mealtimes and conversations...

Sleep patterns and screen usage:

There is very clear evidence that using screens before going to bed substantially impairs sleep patterns (please see below.) Furthermore, it would be naive not to recognise that allowing boys

unsupervised access to the Internet in their bedrooms is exposing them to a multitude of temptations, whether it be gaming, social networking, pornography, or anything else.

Given this, we would recommend that boys should not be allowed any electronic devices in their rooms after a certain time at night, I would suggest 10pm. Instead they should leave all their devices downstairs, even if it means they need to buy an alarm clock! One by-product might even be that the boys read a book before going to sleep. A warning (from experience...) it might also lead to your sons asking you questions about whether you check emails, the news, Rightmove etc. just before you go to sleep....

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/14/sleep-life-sleeplessness-blue-light-computers-early-death>

http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Health_Letter/2012/May/blue-light-has-a-dark-side/

<http://chriskresser.com/how-artificial-light-is-wrecking-your-sleep-and-what-to-do-about-it>

Eating and supplements:

Body image among teenagers is no longer a gender feminine issue; for a number of reasons, boys are much more obsessed by what they eat and how they look than ever before. Sometimes this shows itself in issues of self-esteem, sometimes in poor eating habits, sometimes in excessive training and a demand that parents buy them protein shakes.

Do feel free to contact us if you would like more details on any of these issues, but in brief, please make sure that your son always has a good breakfast to get him through the day. I know that first thing in the morning most teenage boys aren't at their best, but it is important to start the day well. Secondly, we do not advocate the use of supplements for training. We are lucky to have a superbly equipped gym, and a plethora of talented teachers who can advise on different training regimes. Far too many "shakes" bought off the internet are full of dangerous concoctions: we advise boys not to use these but to see a member of staff who will help them put together a personalised, age-appropriate training programme.

<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2014/s4042829.htm>

<http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/03/body-image-pressure-increasingly-affects-boys/283897/>

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/boys-and-body-image-tips>

<http://www.webmd.com/parenting/raising-fit-kids/mood/healthy-body-image?page=3>

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/19/health/teenage-boys-worried-about-body-image-take-risks.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Going out:

It is a chastening moment when instead of searching for baby sitters, you realise that your son's social life is better than yours. As boys move through the school they will want to meet up with friends, often in a town rather than at someone's house. This is natural, and to be embraced as part of the process of growing up, but we would advise you to be clear on who they are meeting, where they intend to go, and agree the details of when they will return or be picked up. Do ring the parents of the other boys and girls they say they are meeting so that your son knows that everyone is in communication and that parents can't be played off against one another.

Parties:

The need for parents to communicate with one another is especially important when it comes to parties. If you are organising a party then we would strongly advise you to be clear about the ground rules you want to establish, and do share those with the parents of the other boys and girls invited, especially when it comes to agreeing when people should be picked up. Teenagers are wired - biologically and by evolution - to be more prone to risk taking than adults: they will sometimes get it wrong, particularly when they are at the age and stage when they are experimenting with alcohol. In these situations we would advise that you have a very clear list, including contact details, of who is responsible for those who have been invited.

On the other hand, if your son has been invited to a party, do check who is the responsible adult, and do contact the hosts to check on details. No one will consider this rude, but will rather be reassured that their ground rules will be clearly reinforced before the event.

Alcohol:

We do recognise that alcohol is something that boys need to learn about, and that they need to learn to drink responsibly. This, along with smoking, drugs and addictive behaviour, is something that we address at a number of regular points in PSHCE, tutor time and in Assemblies. However the brunt of the practical side of this (!) will be born by you, the parents. There has been lots of relatively recent thought and research into this that we would point you towards. (The link below might serve as a good starting point.)

That said, parties are a dangerous environment for boys and girls to be experimenting with alcohol. We would advise you to think very carefully before offering any alcohol, and if you chose to do so, ensure that all the parents of the students invited are aware of this and have given their permission. If in any doubt, we would urge you to err on the side of no alcohol, but if there is alcohol it should be distributed by an adult who has an overview of who has drunk what, and there should be clear parameters as to how much each person is allowed to drink.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7856595.stm>

Exercise and the Other Half:

Teenage boys can sometimes present a puzzling paradox: their chosen façade is often one of studied apathy or aggressive antipathy. For all that, most boys are happiest when they are busy and doing lots. The burst of endorphins that exercise produces is invaluable for many of them, and even though they moan before the fact, the more they can keep their Other Half commitments going, the more fulfilled they will feel. We would, as ever, really appreciate your support in this. The Other Half is an area of life at Abingdon that we feel is very important, so please do encourage your sons to remain as gainfully employed as possible. It is also important that all boys learn to establish a pattern of exercise that can be maintained beyond school: the Other Half is one key means of this process.

Stress and emotional difficulties:

It is undeniable that incidences of stress, emotional difficulties and/or sleeping problems are more prevalent among school students than they once were. These can be difficult to deal with, both for the young person suffering and for the family desperate to support their loved one. Please be aware that we do have a team of school counsellors (school.counsellor@abingdon.org.uk) who are trained in dealing with such issues and we provide a strong support network for boys who are under stress or depressed. Again, if you have further questions about this area, please don't hesitate to contact me, Phoenix Counselling Consortium, or your son's Housemaster or Tutor.

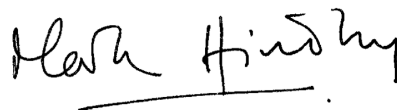
Family Issues or Circumstances:

To come full circle, pastoral care is reliant on the way that parents and the School are able to work together. If there are things that are going on at home, please do let us know: the home environment inevitably impacts on a boy's performance at school. Rest assured we will deal with any information sensitively, but knowing the full picture of a boy's situation is crucial.

And finally...:

If there are questions and queries that spring from what we have said or any other areas that you would like to discuss, please do get in touch. The Upper Master (Mr O'Doherty), Middle Master (Rev. Paul Gooding) and Lower Master (Mr Jenkins) would be equally happy to give age specific advice.

Yours sincerely



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