



# ABINGDON

From: Deputy Head (Pastoral); Mark Hindley

January 2020

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 and parents regularly ask 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. You will see that for each topic there is a general paragraph, and then one or two links to interesting, relevant or thought-provoking articles, books, blogs, or videos.

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### Wellbeing

I would encourage all parents to follow the school's Wellbeing twitter feed (@Ab\_Wellbeing) where we will be tweeting about various initiatives in school as well as from experts in this field.

Please also sign up to James Shone's upcoming talk (Monday 10 February 7pm) on raising teenagers and the (free) booking link is here:

[https://abingdonschool.savoyssystems.co.uk/AbingdonSchool.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuitem\\_1428.TcsWebTab\\_139634.TcsPerformance\\_782572](https://abingdonschool.savoyssystems.co.uk/AbingdonSchool.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuitem_1428.TcsWebTab_139634.TcsPerformance_782572)

I would also draw your attention to this guide for parents from the Anna Freud centre which is about top tips for talking to secondary school children. Maintaining open channels of communication is important as boys journey through adolescence.

<https://www.annafreud.org/media/6310/secondary-parents-leaflet-final-proofed.pdf>

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I would add that our experience is always to try to broach the personal topics with open ended questions and when you are doing **shoulder to shoulder, side by side activities**. Boys often feel threatened or cornered - or embarrassed - when asked to talk face to face, and don't necessarily want eye contact. My mother always said it was over the washing up that secrets were spilled, but with dishwashers (!) do think about talking when out walking the dog, or sitting in the car, or when sitting on the sofa before bed time.

As boys (and parents) approach GCSEs I would draw your attention to the advice within this booklet: "*An emotionally healthy approach to GCSEs; a guide for parents*", produced by the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust.

<https://www.thelangton.org.uk/app/uploads/2018/05/Wellbeing-Handout-Parents.pdf>

Furthermore do take the chance to look at the *10 keys to happier living* poster produced by MHFA England. Here you will find some top tips to talk through with your sons when the optimal moment arises.

<https://mhfastorage.blob.core.windows.net/mhfastoragecontainer/7201b177eca5e811814e70106fa92171/10%20Keys%20to%20Happier%20Living%20wall%20poster.pdf?sv=2015-07-08&sr=b&sig=Q8oWaJjBg8OXGKA2ZA9ifgQLzK%2BXE5ZB5ebaMm1kC5l%3D&se=2018-09-24T20%3A58%3A57Z&sp=r>

Finally, we are running our annual pastoral advice for parents evening on Monday 27 April. Please keep this free and further details will be sent in the mailing later this term.

### **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](mailto: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.

Here are some links which you might find useful.

[http://www.childline.org.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/BeatExamStressPDF\\_wdf56569.pdf](http://www.childline.org.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/BeatExamStressPDF_wdf56569.pdf)  
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Horny-Hormonal-People-Anxieties-Sexuality/dp/1785920316>

### **Screen time...**

There are YouTube vloggers who make millions of pounds a year – PewDiePie has 60.4m subscribers and makes \$16m a year, KSI has 16m UK subscribers; these are names most of us under 25 have never heard of, but they are hugely influential on those under 18. In the world of eSports, the DOTA 2 (ask your son...) International 2017 had over 92 million viewers with a concurrent peak of 10,935,730 during the finals, which also filled a 45,000 seat stadium being watched live, and boasted a world record for the largest prize pool won - \$10,862,683 - and a total prize pool of \$24,687,919

Screen time is an area of concern for many, but with the huge amounts of money involved, it is also a future career path, either directly or tangentially. 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.

However, we all need to be very mindful of whether or not we are modelling the correct behaviour in the way we as adults use our screens... Below is a good video link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9uydDEez3c>

And here are some interesting articles that might prompt discussions:

<http://www.wired.co.uk/article/social-medias-teenage-kicks>

<http://www.wired.co.uk/article/pixx-music-age-of-anxiety>

[http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/use-of-tv-internet-and-computer-games-associated-with-poorer-gcse-rades?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=alumnewsletter](http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/use-of-tv-internet-and-computer-games-associated-with-poorer-gcse-rades?utm_medium=email&utm_source=alumnewsletter)

Finally, Vodafone has produced a super guide called "*Digital Parenting*" which is well worth a read:

[https://assets.vodafone.co.uk/cs/groups/public/documents/document/vodafone\\_digital\\_parenting.pdf](https://assets.vodafone.co.uk/cs/groups/public/documents/document/vodafone_digital_parenting.pdf)

### **Safe Internet use:**

More generally, please find opportunities to talk to your son about behaving as appropriately in the virtual world as he would in the real world. How many Snapchat streaks does he have going? Who has he liked on Instagram? What chat groups is he a part of and would he be happy for you to see what is said? Would he show you the photos and videos on his phone without any qualms? Does he delete his browsing history? What was the last app he downloaded? 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 empathetically and appropriately when he has his friends round, 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/>

### **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 WhatsApp. 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://recordhead.biz/10-reasons-video-games-is-good-for-you/>  
<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/>  
<http://www.farrer.co.uk/Global/Briefings/16.%20Briefing/Protecting%20Children%20and%20Young%20People%20from%20the%20Risks%20of%20Gaming.pdf>

We have also benefited, in the past, by a talk by Cam Adair who runs this helpful website called “Game Quitters”. Young people need to be aware of the lure of in game purchases and add ons which can mount up to a considerable sum of money in some cases.

<https://gamequitters.com/>

### **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...

For your information, the school policy is that boys can bring phones into school but, with the exception of the 6th form, they must be stored in bags or lockers and may not be used during the school day unless a teacher has given explicit permission. Only 6th form students can use phones during the school day.

We would highly recommend this book called “*Left to their own Devices*” written by *Care for the Family*. It navigates the whole digital landscape extremely well.

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Left-Their-Own-Devices-Confident/dp/1910012432/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=16AUO45BHXOHN&keywords=left+to+their+own+devices&qid=1579169149&s=books&srefix=leff+to+their+%2Cstripbooks%2C147&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Left-Their-Own-Devices-Confident/dp/1910012432/ref=sr_1_1?crid=16AUO45BHXOHN&keywords=left+to+their+own+devices&qid=1579169149&s=books&srefix=leff+to+their+%2Cstripbooks%2C147&sr=1-1)

Also be aware that what he seems to have on his phone might well be a facade, and he is using ‘fake’ apps to hide his real phone usage:

<https://www.teensafe.com/blog/teensafe-smartphone-app-blacklist-2018/>

### **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....

<https://www.hmc.org.uk/blog/research-teenage-use-mobile-devices-night/>  
<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://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>  
<http://www.thesleepjudge.com/different-ways-technology-affects-sleep-quality/>

### **Pornography:**

Pornography, and its effects, is an issue that concerns us greatly as a school, and is an increasingly worrying aspect of the modern world.

In 2017 PornHub had its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary: it is now the 44<sup>th</sup> biggest website in the world with 75 million users, with 75% of its use being on mobile technology. Below are links to two articles that discuss the infographics PornHub published to promote that anniversary. We do not link to these articles lightly, as the normalisation of much they discuss concerns us greatly, and the casual way that there are links on to other articles from Men's Health e-magazine raises real issues. The second article is also interesting, and worrying, for the way in which it presents the information: there is a glamorisation of pornography, and as such we have included it not only for the chilling statistics it contains, but also because of its subliminal messaging, and the ethical - or unethical - stance it adopts. *Please be aware that they use graphic and explicit language and references.* However, we have included them as they give a very frightening insight, both in terms of statistics and approach, to a very live issue in today's world, and what they discuss is worryingly everyday for most teenagers, but a world away from what might be seen as mainstream 20 years ago. We have also included these articles as they are not marginal newsfeeds or websites - BuzzFeed and Men's Health are very mainstream - the boys might even consider them to be relatively conservative and establishment. We feel these are issues that we shy away from at our peril.

<https://www.google.co.uk/amp/www.menshealth.com/sex-women/pornhub-most-popular%3Famp>  
<https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.buzzfeed.com/amphtml/benhenry/this-is-how-porn-has-changed-in-the-last-10-years>

There are also some very accessible documentaries on this topic that I would recommend to you, and exerts of which we use in our PSHCE lessons:

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>

Tyger [Drew-Honey from "Outnumbered"] Takes on... Porn  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0449dm5>

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](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 are clear 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.

**Body image 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. You only need to watch one episode of "Love Island" to see that expectations around the male body image has become a very real aspect of teen culture. Sometimes this shows itself in issues of self-esteem, sometimes in poor eating habits, sometimes in excessive training, even in demands that parents buy 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 would advise extreme caution over 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 without speaking to Mr Davis, our strength and conditioning coach, who instead will help them put together a personalised, age-appropriate training programme.

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/male-body-image-your-son-and-his-body-3200812>

<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.common sense media.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 babysitters, 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.

As pupils get older, they will often want to go out more, and stay out later. Again, this is a natural part of growing up, but it is very important that they are balancing this with the demands of school. Throughout the school, we would expect boys to do school work over the weekend, but this would be particularly true of boys in the Fifth and Sixth Form. This work is unlikely to be effective if they are out clubbing until the early hours, so we would urge you to moderate their weekends and make sure that a night out is an exciting exception, rather than the weekly norm!

**Parties:**

We all enjoy a good party, so it is important to try to ensure that partying is a positive experience, not one that leads to ambulances and damaged property! Parties can easily go wrong, especially if there are gatecrashers or if the invite becomes open ended on social media.

Given this, 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 please 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. We would always advise that an adult drops off at the party and picks up from the party, and does so at a set time. There can be pressure to arrive at a party already drunk, or having had something to drink, so dropping off and picking up in person can guard against this.

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/A-Parents-Guide-To-Teen-Parties.aspx>

<http://www.alcoholeducationtrust.org/parent-area/teenage-parties/>

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/sep/05/teenage-parties-a-parents-guide>

<https://www.verywell.com/teen-parties-setting-the-rules-2610502>

### **Alcohol and substance misuse:**

First, we invite you to sign up to the parents' drugs and substances talk on the evening of Monday 2 March. Here is the booking link for a free ticket.

<https://abingdonschool.savoyssystems.co.uk/AbingdonSchool.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem 1428.TcsWebTab 139634.TcsProgramme 784928>

### **Alcohol:**

We recognise that alcohol is something that teenagers 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 borne 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 choose 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. We would advise you never to serve spirits.

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

### **Drugs:**

This is a subject of real concern, as the phenomenon of County Lines has changed the landscape significantly with regard to the accessibility and cost of drugs, including Class A drugs.

We live in a world where it might be easier, and considerably cheaper, to access MDMA, LSD, 2CB, ketamine or other drugs to get your kick for the night, rather than getting drunk. (Ecstasy tablets can be as cheap as 3 for £10, a tab of LSD as cheap as £4, while the average price of a pint in Oxford is £4.57.) This is especially true of the festival season. While this is something we address with the boys at school, if you think that he will be going somewhere where he might be exposed to these temptations, please do keep talking to him about it: he will complain that you are moaning and worrying unnecessarily, but we are aware that these things can be present at parties from at least the Third Year upwards. Please be very realistic - the advice we are given, and frighteningly the national norm, is that drugs often begin to be available at parties in Year 10, become more readily available during Year 11, and are seen by some teenagers as very much part of the whole festival experience

post-GCSEs. The tragedy for some teenagers is that this can mean that they see drugs as a normal part of their social scene by Years 12 and 13.

Vaping has also changed the accessibility of drugs as it makes it very easy to use THC - which is the psychoactive component of cannabis. Teenagers can sometimes be deluded into thinking that because it is vaped it is somehow "safe" but we know that THC can have a multitude of negative effects, not least on mental health. It is also widely available, whether under the counter at some vape stores, online, or through social media contacts of contacts via Snapchat.

Finally, we would like to remind you of our [school policy on drugs](#). If a boy is found to be using drugs, whether in school or outside school, we will sanction him, and he should expect to be excluded, either permanently or temporarily, depending on the specific details of the situation. However, if your son is struggling with drug use, and needs help, please encourage him to talk to someone at school - his tutor, housemaster, the Health Centre, or a member of the SLT. If he talks to us and is proactive, then we will NOT sanction him, but put measures in place to help him, as per our policy.

The recent Channel 4 Dispatches program on county lines in Oxfordshire highlights just how easy it is for young people to access drugs and substances today and is well worth a watch.

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/britains-child-drug-runners>

If you are looking for a website filled with the frank facts about drugs, we would refer you to:

<https://www.talktofrank.com/>

### **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.

### **Parenting advice:**

There are lots of resources on this. One site we would recommend is <http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/> and they sell a good DVD -

<https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/family-life/parent-support/raisingteens>

### **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... contacts:**

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 with me, Mark Hindley. The Upper Master (Mr Nick O'Doherty), Middle Master (Mr Andrew Crisp) and Lower Master (Mr Adam Jenkins) would be equally happy to give age specific advice. If the questions revolve more around wellbeing or mental health issues, do also feel free to contact our Head of Wellbeing, Mr Paul Gooding.



My email address is [mark.hindley@abingdon.org.uk](mailto:mark.hindley@abingdon.org.uk), and the email for the other staff at Abingdon is [firstname.surname@abingdon.org.uk](mailto:firstname.surname@abingdon.org.uk), eg [paul.gooding@abingdon.org.uk](mailto:paul.gooding@abingdon.org.uk). Please do feel free to contact any of us, or your son's tutor or housemaster, if you have any questions or queries.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Hindley