



# ABINGDON

From: Deputy Head (Pastoral); Mark Hindley

24 September 2021

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

As I am sure that you know, at Abingdon we have a dedicated Head of Wellbeing and he 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 the upcoming parents' pastoral webinar on Thursday 11 November 2021 at 7pm entitled "*Navigating the Teenage Years*". Mr Hindley, Mr Gooding and Mr Crisp will be talking about how we support students through the teenage journey. Bookings details will be in the Weekly Mailing in due course.

The two main websites we would like to draw your attention to are [Young Minds](#) and [The Mix](#). They both contain a wealth of information. Students also have a dedicated Wellbeing section on their Firefly dashboard which has a wide range of helpful tools, such as teenage wellbeing podcasts, useful websites and apps.

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[www.abingdon.org.uk](http://www.abingdon.org.uk)

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 pupils journey through adolescence.

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

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**. Teenagers 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 for a walk, or sitting in the car, or when sitting on the sofa before bed time.

Furthermore, do take the chance to look at the *10 keys to happier living*. Here you will find some top tips to talk through as a family when the optimal moment arises.

<https://www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys-to-happier-living>

### **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 pupils 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 the relevant Housemaster or Tutor.

Here are some links which you might find useful.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Starving-Anxiety-Gremlin-Behavioural-Management/dp/1849053413>  
[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 – Jeffree Star is worth \$200million having been launched through YouTube, and PewDiePie has 110m subscribers and makes \$16m a year, KSI has 36m subscribers; Cristiano Ronaldo has 342m followers on Instagram while The Rock has 269m; on TikTok Charli D'Amelio has 125m followers and Khaby Lame 112m... And then there are other platforms like Snapchat, Twitch, Reddit, Tumblr, WeChat, Twitter and the rest. In the world of eSports, the DOTA 2 (ask anyone younger than 25...) 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... and that was four years ago... For context, since then TikTok was launched and in four years it has been downloaded over 2 billion times. Or we could talk about snapchat with 210 million snaps every day...

<https://www.sandvine.com/hubfs/downloads/phenomena/2019-mobile-phenomena-report.pdf>

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 agree as a family limits and rules on screen time: this would involve agreeing the length of time that your children can spend on their devices – iPad, phone, computer, games console et al – as well as the times of day when they are allowed to use these devices. Crucially, we would say no gaming on weeknights.

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)

We would really recommend you watch the “*The Social Dilemma*” on Netflix which raises some very apt issues: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/09/movies/the-social-dilemma-review.html>

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 children about behaving as appropriately in the virtual world as one would in the real world. How many Snapchat streaks do they have going? Who have they liked on Instagram? What chat groups are they a part of and would they be happy for you to see what is said? Would they show you the photos and videos on his phone without any qualms? Do they delete his browsing history? What was the last app they downloaded? Some of these questions will provoke embarrassment, others scorn, and some avid denials. Whatever the answers, the way that your children interact with technology is likely to be different to the way that you use technology. In the same way as you would encourage them to behave empathetically and appropriately when they have friends round, please also engage with their 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>

<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 discuss this at home (as we will do at school in Assemblies, PSHCE, and tutor time) so that the image your children create for themselves online is appropriate, and that they are aware that they are 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 (perhaps understandably) often 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 children. This intermediary needs to have full access rights to their social networking accounts; it might be an older cousin, godparent, neighbour, favourite uncle/aunt etc – someone who you both trust and who will act as the sensible and sensitive voice of your children's cyber-conscience.

For some, social networking can become obsessive so we would advise trying to limit it, especially when they 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 missed chances from the plethora of opportunities – academic, Other Half and social – that are available in the real world.

Crucially, please limit gaming in the evenings. We feel strongly that pupils should not be gaming after 9pm at the latest on weeknights or Sundays, as this will affect their sleep and their work the next day. (See below as well on sleep.)

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 become more astounding in their capability. However, smartphones can also lead to misjudgements, given the ease with which everyone can now 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 children’s phones so that you can gain a handle on how, and when, they are using it. We would also suggest that you insist that they cannot have it in their bedrooms after a certain time at night. This can be particularly important if they start to have a girlfriend/boyfriend. 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 at home about what is appropriate use of a phone: one particular bugbear is messaging during mealtimes and conversations...

For your information, the school policy is that pupils 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 someone seems to have on their phone might well be a facade, and they might be using ‘fake’ apps to hide their 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 a teenager 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 teenagers 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 they read a book before going to sleep. A warning (from experience...) it might also lead to you being quizzed on 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. This topic was further highlighted by the horrendous revelations that accompanied Everyone's Invited.

Four years ago, 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 - teenagers 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>

<https://fightthenewdrug.org/2019-pornhub-annual-report/>

This TED talk looks at the worrying changes in the nature of pornography:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBTb71UzPmY>

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.)

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=porn+on+the+brain+documentary&view=detail&mid=249843191231B03FE1AF249843191231B03FE1AF&FORM=VIRE>

or [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WxsY9zgrt4&has\\_verified=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WxsY9zgrt4&has_verified=1)

There is also a very interesting, quite explicit, TED talk by Cindy Gallop that she gave 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 that pornography is something that contains potential problems and is generically exploitative. Teenagers are at an age when they are curious yet vulnerable, and at an age when we need to protect them from establishing damaging habits.

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity:**

This whole area has achieved a much higher profile over the past few years, and rightly so. We cover these issues extensively in school and have launched a number of initiatives both internally and in conjunction with SHSK. As ever, we would stress the importance of the conversations had in school being backed up by conversations at home. Unfortunately there can be a lot of misinformation peddled online, and if your children tap into the wrong feeds they can be exposed to derogatory memes, language used in ways which are offensive and inappropriate, and attitudes that are discriminatory being cloaked as “banter”. We would stress that this needs to be called out and would ask you to ensure that there are open, clear conversations around misogyny, homophobia, gender issues, and white privilege/racial bias happening at home whenever possible - and that opportunities to talk about these things in the family home are taken.

Please do openly discuss issues such as Black Lives Matter, the Sarah Everard case and Everyone’s Invited. This might lead on to conversations around consent, how to be respectful, and appropriate boundaries.

The recent Panorama programme could provide a chastening, powerful starting point for the conversation on Everyone’s Invited::

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000zgwk/panorama-whos-protecting-our-kids>

The ‘signposting’ page on It Happens is also really useful and has a wide range of organisations, literature and videos on all of these topics, including online safety:

<https://www.ithappens.education/signposting-2/>

Usefully the BBC have a bite sized video on white privilege:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zrvkbqt>

And here is a podcast with Matthew Syed on the importance of diversity to organisations:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07np7xt>

### **Sexting and “self-generated indecent imagery”**

Self-generated indecent imagery - historically known as sexting - is another topic that we would encourage you to try to discuss with your children. The ‘normalisation’ of the sharing, exchanging and passing around of sexualised images by peers has been identified as a crucial part of the whole debate triggered by Everyone’s Invited. To put this into context, more than one in seven children aged 11-18 (15%) have been asked to send self-generated images and sexual messages; 7% of 11-16-year-olds have been asked to share a naked or semi-naked image of themselves; and on average, one child per primary class has been sent or shown a naked or semi-naked image online by an adult. Again, these are topics that we will cover in school, but reinforcing at home what is - and what isn’t - part of a healthy relationship is an important conversation to have, especially as often the exchange of images can be claimed to be consensual by those involved. We feel it is important that teenagers know that sharing images is not a normal, or necessary, part of flirting and/or being in a relationship, but rather is something that can leave both parties very vulnerable. Being able to talk that through at home is something we would encourage.

The following Parliamentary report is quite eye-opening:



[https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6109364ea51f0b14f7efeb5c/613b6ef4224bfeb57bfb0ca0\\_APPG%20on%20Social%20Media%20-%20Selfie%20Generation.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6109364ea51f0b14f7efeb5c/613b6ef4224bfeb57bfb0ca0_APPG%20on%20Social%20Media%20-%20Selfie%20Generation.pdf)

Here are one or two links that offer some practical tips:

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/teens-and-the-sexual-content-on-social-media/>

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/7-questions-parents-ask-about-nude-selfies/>

<https://parentinfo.org/article/when-teens-share-nudes>

<https://parentinfo.org/article/talking-to-your-teen-about-sexting-get-the-facts>

### **Body image and supplements:**

Body image among teenagers is no longer a gender feminine issue; for a number of reasons, all genders are much more obsessed by what they eat and how they look than ever before. You only need to watch an episode of “Love Island” to see that expectations around body image have 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 there is always a good breakfast to get your child through the day. I know that first thing in the morning most teenagers 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 not to use these without speaking to Mr Davies, 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](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 children’s social life is better than yours. As pupils 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 others that they say they are meeting, so that it is clear 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 all pupils to be doing school work over the weekend, but this would be particularly true of those 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 others 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 you know there is a party happening, 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:**

### **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 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 those 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 to never 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 at school, if you think that your children will be going somewhere where they might be exposed to these temptations, please do keep talking to them about it: they 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 pupil is found to be using drugs, whether in School or outside School, we will sanction them, and they should expect to be excluded, either permanently or temporarily, depending on the specific details of the situation. However, if your child is struggling with drug use, and needs help, please encourage them to talk to someone at School - their tutor, housemaster, the Health Centre, or a member of the SLT. If they talk to us and are proactive, then we will NOT sanction them, but put measures in place to help them, as per our policy.

The recent Channel 4 Dispatches programme 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:**

Teenagers can sometimes present a puzzling paradox: their chosen façade is often one of studied apathy or aggressive antipathy. For all that, most teenagers 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 we would appreciate your support in encouraging as much involvement in the Other Half as possible. It is also important that your teenager is learning to establish a pattern of exercise that can be maintained beyond school: the Other Half is one key means of this process.

### **COVID-19:**

The pandemic has caused a spike in anxiety across society, and this is reflected among teenagers. They are concerned about their wellbeing and the welfare of their family, friends and loved ones. There are concerns about the economy, redundancies, parents who are struggling or stressed by the pandemic, and some pupils feel anxious that they are being burdened by huge institutional debts that will be left to their generation to pay off. There is also the uncertainty of normal life being curtailed, and the news presenting a seemingly endless barrage of negativity. Inevitably there are also marked concerns about exams, heightened by the uncertainty created by the past two years of pseudo-examinations.

Many of us will be sharing these concerns, and a lot of the questions that will come up in discussion will not have any clear answer. As ever with anxiety therefore we would ask you to help your children to focus on the things that can be controlled and to make sure that they are enjoying the moment. Again, I would recommend that they talk to someone at school if they are feeling anxious, and again I would encourage them (and you) to refer to the "10 Keys to Happier Living" as a starting point for helping to try to keep perspective. (<https://www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys-to-happier-living>)

**Parenting advice:**

There are lots of resources on this. One site we would recommend is <http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/>

They also sell a good DVD -

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

**Family Issues or Circumstances:**

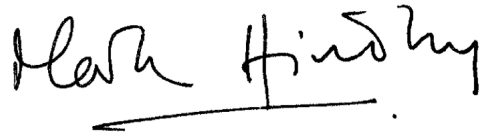
To come full circle, pastoral care is reliant on the way that parents and the school are able to work together. If there are things that are going on at home, please do let us know: the home environment inevitably impacts on performance at school. Rest assured we will deal with any information sensitively, but knowing the full picture of the 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 School Housemaster (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 the relevant tutor or housemaster, if you have any questions or queries.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Hindley