# King Henry VIII School Pastoral Letter

Dr MB Cuthbert (Deputy Head/DSL)

15 June 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians,

In my role of Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for King Henry VIII School, I must take responsibility for the online safety of our students. As a school, and particularly through our PSHE curriculum, we work hard to educate and inform our students on how to stay safe online. In recent months, there is a social media platform, called **DISCORD**, that has caused much concern and a number of our students have been subjected to significant peer-on-peer cyberbullying abuse through this platform. We need your help to stop our students being abused by their peers and keep them safe online.
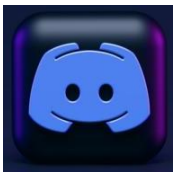
What is Discord?

Discord is a free app for mobile and PC that lets people chat via text, voice, or video in real time. Combining the internet-calling features of Skype with Reddit-like discussion boards, it's broadened from gamers-only to a social networking site for communities of all types, including those with non-gaming interests like anime, TV series, music, and more. It can also be an easy-to-use group-chatting tool for friends.

How it works?

The platform works by using servers. These are set up with a particular focus or theme as a way for people to meet up online to discuss and exchange images, links and information. These servers offer both text and voice communication via a microphone on the device you use.

Users can be invited to servers or find links online to access them. The person who set up the server usually sets some ground rules about who it is for and the expected behaviour. They can also provide strict guidelines for filtering out explicit content and ensuring their moderators' accounts are secure. We have found, due to peer pressure that student moderators struggle to uphold and apply the strict guidelines.

Guidance from the [National Online Safety](#) Website:

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

CYBERBULLYING

Discord's easy accessibility and connectivity, unfortunately, makes it an ideal place for cyberbullying to occur – especially as audio and video streams disappear once they've ended, meaning that bullying could take place without leaving any evidence. Closed groups can also be created, giving young people the opportunity to exclude their peers or send cruel messages without adult oversight.

DIFFICULT TO MODERATE

Like many private communication apps, Discord's real-time messaging can be difficult to control. The system enables content moderation through each individual server – so different groups can set their own rules for what's acceptable, and some groups may not monitor for unsuitable content. Anything that happens in an audio or video stream is also virtually untraceable once the stream has concluded.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Discord mainly hosts private groups, making it easier for unsuitable or explicit content to be shared on channels. Pornography, racism and inappropriate language can be found in some groups. Server owners are required to add an age-restriction gate to channels where 18+ content is being shared – but this solution isn't foolproof, as the platform doesn't always verify users' ages when they sign up.

ACCESSIBLE TO PREDATORS

On many chat platforms, users can lie about their age or true identity – and Discord is no exception. Predators have attempted to abuse the platform by using it to contact and communicate with underage users – by initially chatting with a child on an age-appropriate channel, for example. While Discord *has* improved its safety settings, some users will still try to bypass them for malicious reasons.

CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Discord *does* have strict Terms of Service and Community Guidelines to protect its users – but, sadly, not everyone adheres to them. Criminal activity including grooming, hate speech, harassment, exploitative content, doxxing and extremist or violent material have all been found on Discord servers over the last two years. In 2020, Discord received almost 27,000 reports of illegal activity on the platform.

Advice for Parents & Carers

REVIEW SAFETY SETTINGS

Discord has a series of safety settings, enabling users to choose who can direct message them or send them friend requests. Your child's experience on Discord will be much safer if the app's privacy and safety settings are configured to only allow messages or friend requests from server members. This will minimise the chances of potential predators from outside the group contacting them.

MONITOR ONLINE ACTIVITY

It's wise to regularly review your child's activity on Discord. This can include checking their safety settings to ensure they're correctly enabled, talking about which servers they've joined and reviewing some of their friends and direct messages. Ask if anything has made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Things can change quickly online, so plan routine check-ins and follow up frequently.

EXPLAIN AGE FILTERING

While Discord requires users to be at least 13 to sign up, many servers geared towards older users are flagged as NSFW (not safe for work), which indicates they probably contain material that's inappropriate for children. It can be easy to click through settings without properly reviewing them, so ensure your child understands why age filtering is important and that it's there to protect them.

DISCUSS GOOD ONLINE BEHAVIOUR

The anonymity offered by the internet often leads people to communicate more openly online and behave differently than they would at school or home. It's crucial to bear in mind, though, that every internet user is still a real person. Talk to your child about the severe and lasting consequences that cyberbullying or exchanging inappropriate material online can have in the real world.

SCREEN OUT EXPLICIT CONTENT

In the privacy and safety settings, Discord users are offered the ability to filter direct messages for inappropriate content: a setting that should be enabled if your child uses the platform. Discord automatically tries to flag *images* that are explicit, but the setting must be manually enabled for text. If a young user is sent explicit content in a direct message, Discord will scan and (if necessary) delete it.

HAVE CANDID CONVERSATIONS

It can sometimes be awkward to discuss topics like grooming, pornography, racism or explicit content with your child – but it's important to ensure they're aware of the harms these things can pose. Talking openly about these subjects is a great way to help your child feel more comfortable about coming to you if they experience an unwanted encounter on Discord (or anywhere else online).

Please find further information about Discord here:

https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/esafety-news/parents-guide-to-discord-on-how-your-kids-can-use-it-safely/

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/articles/parents-ultimate-guide-to-discord

https://saferinternet.org.uk/blog/discord-security-settings-a-guide-for-parents-and-carers

I will finish this advice with a reminder about my advice shared in December 2021, with a few additions:

Guidance on social media and internet use within the home.

You only need to google for help on how to manage the social media use of your children and the internet produces an array of information and support. There are a number of particularly good sources I would like to draw your attention to:

Internet Matters: https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/social-media-advice-hub/

NSPCC: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/

Think u Know: https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/

Young Minds: https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/a-z-guide/social-media/

The greatest challenge you will face as a parent is to maintain your expectations with respect to the social media use of your child as well as reigning them in when things get out of hand.

How can you help us?

We need your vigilance, help and support to ensure that our pupils demonstrate respect for others on social media and concentrate on their learning, rather than spend hours sharing and creating gossip that can be extremely damaging to the wellbeing of our pupils. Our PSHE programme for all year groups addresses online safety. Some pupils really listen and take on board what we teach them, others, however, continue to push the boundaries both morally and legally. We do find that pupils who push the boundaries, often experience more freedoms with mobile use within the home. We always encourage parents to not allow pupils access to social media when they are undertaking schoolwork or going to bed. May I challenge you to encourage your whole family to charge all devices in a separate room such as the lounge or kitchen overnight. Ensure that you have the appropriate parental controls on all devices as well as your Wi-Fi connection.

How can going online affect our wellbeing?

There are lots of positives for children being online, however there can be negatives too. For some it can become overwhelming trying to keep up with friends, and the pressure can mount.

Many things can impact our online wellbeing, and you can take control of the choices made to reduce any negativity. Being aware of the impact of being online, just like you would be aware of the impact of offline activities, is the first step to managing your children's online wellbeing.

We can:

- manage the content that our children see,

- ensure interactions are suitable

- and manage how long they're online, in balance with other activities.

There are several things you can do to help support a child with their wellbeing online, including specific apps, and looking at settings.

Have regular conversations with your child

Give children the chance to talk about what they're experiencing online, what apps and sites they use and who they're talking to. Talking regularly, like you would about their day at school, will help your child feel relaxed and mean that when they do have any worries, they're more likely to come and speak to you. Remind them that it isn't just you that they can talk to – another trusted adult or a Childline counsellor might be easier sometimes.

Fall-outs with friends can affect children online, just as they do offline, and communicating online can lead to misunderstandings with friends. Encourage your child to look at the Childline website, which has lots of great advice articles:

- [Feeling good on social media](#)

- [Coping with stress](#)

- [Worries about the world](#)

Childline's [Calm zone](#) is also packed with tools and activities to help children de-stress and discover new techniques that can support them when they're feeling down. Young people can also talk to each other about their worries on the [Childline message boards](#).

Consider that what children see online is often through a filter. It isn't just images and videos that can be [filtered or edited](#), but bodies and lives too.

I am excited to announce that I have been able to increase the size of my pastoral team with highly experienced staff for the next academic year. I look forward to sharing our new structure and processes with the whole community in September.

Many thanks for reading my pastoral letter,

Dr Cuthbert

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KHVIII Wellbeing
@KHVIIIWellbeing
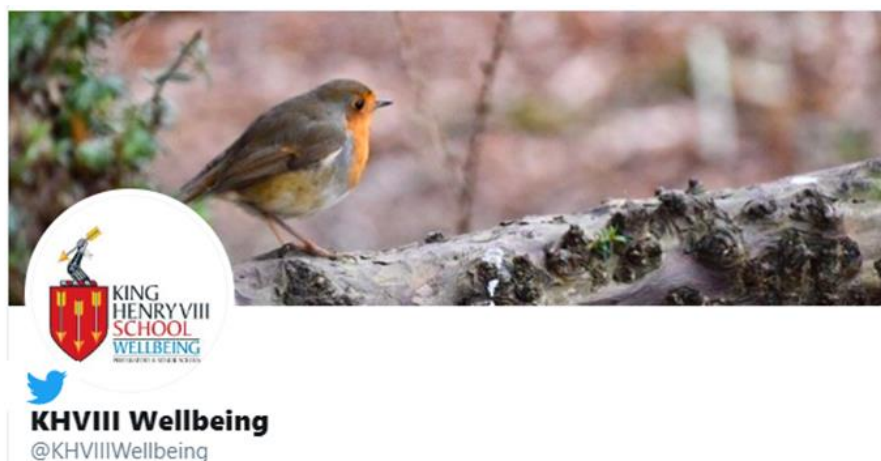
Safeguarding at BKHS KHVIII for STUDENTS

All students can expect the following from BKHS King Henry VIII Staff:

- Vigilance
- Understanding and action
- Stability
- Respect

- Information and Engagement
- Explanation
- Support
- Advocacy

If you are WORRIED or are worried about a friend, share your concerns with the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs), a trusted staff member, an anti-bullying ambassador or post a note in one of the My Concern Boxes

DESIGNATED SAFEGUARDING LEADS

Dr M Cuthbert
Deputy Head
DSL

Mrs S Cadwallader
School Nurse
DDSL

Mr P Dearden
Headmaster
DDSL

Mrs C Dowding
Deputy Head
DDSL

Emergency Help	Mental Health Support
Call 999 if you are at immediate risk *NHS Mental Health Crisis service:* **call 0300 200 0011 free 24/7 service** **https://youngminds.org.uk/** **Free text YM to 85258** **24/7 crisis support** **Samaritans call free on 116 123** **https://www.childline.org.uk/** **Call free on 0800 1111**	**https://www.kooth.com/ Free, safe and anonymous support from trained counsellors** *RISE (for children and young people)* **call 08081 966798 (select option 2) Crisis & Home Treatment team** *Dimensions Tool* **offers immediate tailored self-help support and signposting to local services.** *IAPT Website* **Coventry & Warwickshire Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service** **Tel: 024 7667 1090**

Online Safety and Other Support

https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/
to REPORT abuse
NSPCC Call for free: 0808 800 5000

https://www.childnet.com/
https://www.supportline.org.uk/problems/internet-safety/
https://nationalonlinesafety.com/

All employed Staff who are safe to work with children wear a BLACK BKHS Lanyard

GREEN lanyards are worn by visitors that are allowed to be on site without supervision

PINK lanyards are worn by visitors that are NOT allowed to be on site without supervision: report to reception