



February 2026

SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

Safeguarding Newsletter

Welcome to this month's safeguarding newsletter. February brings several key national events that support our whole-school commitment to wellbeing and inclusion: LGBT History Month, Safer Internet Day, and Children's Mental Health Week. We will be exploring these themes throughout the term as part of our gathering, helping learners build understanding, empathy, and safe habits online and offline.

As it is LGBT History Month, our safeguarding spotlight focuses on homophobic language; what it is, why it matters, and how we can work together to challenge it and promote respectful communication.

This month's Family Information Sheet looks at the connection between social media and mental health, offering guidance to help families support healthy online behaviour.

We hope you find this edition helpful as we continue working together to keep our community safe, supported, and empowered.

Access & Response Team (ART)

The Access and Response Team (ART) are the "front door" of children's and young peoples' services in South Glos.

Tel: 01454 866000 (office hours) 01454 615165 (out of hours/weekends)

E-mail: accessandresponse@southglos.gov.uk

Notes: Office hours are Mon - Thurs 9.00 – 5.00 and Friday 9.00-4.30

The Safeguarding Team

If you have any concerns about a child's welfare or safety, please speak to a member of our safeguarding team.



Mrs Rea
Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)



Miss McDonnell & Miss Black
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads (DDSL)

CONTACT THE WFA SAFEGUARDING TEAM



Safeguarding@wfa.clf.uk



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SPOTLIGHT ON: Homophobic Language

Homophobic language refers to terms of abuse that are often directed towards LGBTQ+ individuals or those perceived to be LGBTQ+. Stonewall's *School Report* found that half of LGBTQ+ learners hear homophobic slurs such as "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" frequently or often in school. Although these phrases are sometimes aimed at individuals who are actually, or are perceived to be, gay, they are more commonly used to imply that something is bad or undesirable, with no conscious link to sexual orientation.

While often dismissed as harmless banter, the unchallenged use of "gay" to mean bad or rubbish has a damaging effect on the self-esteem of LGBTQ+ young people and can also affect learners who have LGBTQ+ friends, family members, or loved ones.

This reflects broader findings from Stonewall that 45% of LGBTQ+ learners, including 64% of trans learners, experience bullying specifically because of being LGBTQ+.

At Wallscourt Farm Academy, we are committed to celebrating diversity, promoting acceptance, and ensuring that all learners feel safe, valued, and respected. We challenge all forms of homophobic language and views. All staff have received training on how to address homophobic language, and learners understand that it will not be tolerated. Families will always be informed if their child uses such language.

We also address these issues through our Personal Development curriculum including through whole-school gatherings, No Outsiders texts, Jigsaw lessons and Being a Citizen lessons, helping all learners develop empathy, understanding, and respect for others.

If you would like further information about the texts we use, how we approach these topics in an age-appropriate way, or how to continue open and supportive conversations at home, please do come and speak to us.

Useful Contacts:

North Bristol Food Bank: 0117 472 5172

Nextlink Domestic Abuse support services: Call: 0800 4700 280 Text: 0740 789 5620 or email: enquiries@nextlinkhousing.co.uk

Kooth: a free, safe and anonymous online mental health and wellbeing service for children and young people (10-18)

YoungMinds: supporting children and young people's mental health
<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SOCIAL MEDIA & MENTAL HEALTH

An estimated one-third of children have a social media account, so it's important that trusted adults know what content young people are consuming, what they're posting and the interactions they're having. On social media, it can be easy to go down 'rabbit holes' that aren't beneficial to our wellbeing. As platforms grapple with managing such 'legal but harmful' content, lives are being impacted – sometimes to tragic effect. We might be daunted by the scale of the tech giants and their content which so enthral young people, but we can still help children to be aware of their mental wellness: recognising when something isn't OK... and knowing what to do about content that upsets them.

1. UNDERSTAND THE ALGORITHM

Algorithms rank content by user interest: someone who regularly interacts with sports news, say, will see the latest results at the top of their feed. Likewise, if a user browses content that can cause harm, that's what will be recommended to them in future. Someone who's had a bad day and looks for posts which reflect their mood will find similar content being suggested to them more and more.

2. AVOID THE MAIN FEEDS

Avoiding the default feeds on social media platforms limits the amount of recommended content that's shown. Users can opt to only scroll through the accounts they follow, use restricted modes, or highlight posts that they don't want to see more of. Explore the platform safety settings to see how you can take control of what your child's phone shows them when they open the app.

3. DISCUSS WHAT THEY'VE SEEN

Chatting about what your child's seen online keeps you aware of the content they're interacting with. Don't assume that platforms are screening out inappropriate material, or even that your child would recognise content as being harmful. Discuss who they follow, what posts they like and what comes up in their feeds: if alarm bells ring, it could be time for a more in-depth talk or to seek support.

4. LEARN HOW TO HIDE CONTENT

If your child stumbles across unsuitable content on social media, there's the option to hide that post as well as indicating you'd prefer any similar material not to be suggested in future. On some platforms, you might also be able to block posts that contain specific words, which is an excellent way to start taking control of what your child sees online.

5. SET DAILY LIMITS

Phones and most apps can tell you how much they're being used. Spending too long online can mean a child misses out on other activities that are important to all-round wellbeing. You could set some family rules – for everyone to follow – around device use, such as screen time limits and tech-free spaces: involving your child in creating this agreement makes them more likely to stick to it.

6. MONITOR THEIR ACTIVITY

Keeping a discreet eye on how your child is using social media can help ensure they're not entering potentially dangerous situations. As they grow up, of course, children need space to exercise their independence – but you can still occasionally ask to see what they're looking at. Be transparent about your own social media use and try not to sound judgemental about your child's.

7. TURN OFF PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

Even for adults, it's tempting to check an email or message as soon as the alert sound pings. Push notifications encourage people to open their apps and spend time on their device, so turning them off will help your child to practise mindful use of tech. Most of us have other things that we need to focus on as a priority – and those notifications will still be there later, when we have more time.

8. USE DEVICES TOGETHER

Giving children internet-enabled devices and complete freedom to explore platforms on their own can result in exposure to hugely damaging content. You could consider making a particular area at home a designated space to use phones, tablets and so on – making it much easier to monitor what content your child is viewing and (if necessary) steer them away from any potentially harmful paths.

9. ENCOURAGE OTHER ACTIVITIES

Mental health professionals often highlight the importance of exercise, quality time with loved ones, a balanced diet and restful sleep for our mental wellbeing. Spending hours on social media can cause us to sacrifice other activities that our brains need to feel well – so encouraging your child to put down their phone and enjoy something that doesn't involve a screen can be immensely beneficial.

10. TALK ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

Most platforms default children's accounts to private, so only people they've accepted as friends can see their posts. This reduces the risk of bullying or unkind comments, but – just like offline life – the digital world can still make children feel as if they need to act or look a certain way to fit in. Talk to your child about peer pressure, and listen to any concerns so you can provide the support they need.

Meet Our Expert

Shazia Sarwar-Azim is executive headteacher at a specialist primary school and, as an emotional therapy coach, works with school leaders to focus on the SEND, mental health and wellbeing agenda. A passionate advocate for vulnerable learners, Shazia is a Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching and the author of *The Rainbow Within*, a book which supports children with SEMH needs.



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#WakeUpWednesday

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<https://aprusosocial.com/help/social-media-algorithms/>