

# Stoke Park Primary School—Safeguarding Newsletter

No.6

Dear Parents/Carers,

Thank you to those of you who completed the safeguarding questionnaire in the last newsletter. We only received 8 completed questionnaires and would really like to hear from more parents. The survey link is on page 2 of this newsletter - please complete it if you can. It should take no more than 5 minutes.

Today is International day against homophobia, biphobia and transphobia—an important day that aims to coordinate international events that raise awareness of LGBTQ+ rights violations and stimulate interest in LGBTQ+ rights work worldwide. Still, more than one-third of all countries criminalize same-sex relationships. LGBTQ+ people face prejudice, discrimination, stigma, hostility and violence. They are denied legal protections, essential health care, civil and human rights, including a right to bodily autonomy. The 'spotlight on' feature in this newsletter is on the use of homophobic language and the impact this can have on members of the LGBTQ+ community and their families and friends.

Thanks for reading.

Mrs Higgitt

## Spotlight on: Homophobic Language

Homophobic language means terms of abuse that are often used towards LGBT+ or those thought to be LGBTQ+. A Stonewall survey across many schools found the most common form of homophobic language heard in schools is 'that's so gay' and 'you're so gay'. 99% of gay young people report hearing the casual use of these phrases in school.

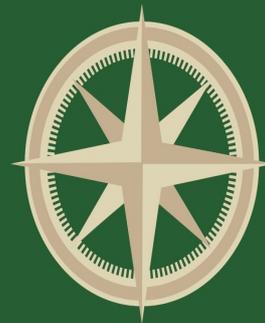


These comments are sometimes directed towards people who are actually, or perceived to be, gay. However, they are most often used to mean that something is bad or rubbish, with no conscious link to sexual orientation at all.

Whilst often dismissed as banter, the unchallenged use of 'gay' to mean bad or rubbish has a profoundly negative effect on gay young people's self-esteem. It also affects pupils who have gay friends, family or loved ones.

The Stonewall survey also found that nearly half of LGBT pupils including 64 per cent of trans pupils – are bullied for being LGBTQ+ in Britain's schools.

As a school we are committed to ensuring that we celebrate diversity and promote acceptance and will always challenge any homophobic views. All staff at Stoke Park have had training about how to challenge the use of homophobic language and the children know that homophobic language will not be tolerated. Parents will always be informed if their child uses such language. We also tackle these views through our PSHE curriculum and assemblies.



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### The Safeguarding team.

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



Mrs Higgitt—Designated safeguarding Lead (DSL)



Mrs Lambert—Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (DDSL)

Or contact **First Response** on: 01179036444



### **National Online Safety Hub**

The school now subscribes to The National Online Safety Hub. The hub contains a wealth of useful information to support schools and parents in keeping children safe online. As members of the hub, our parent community can access all the resources too. These include: Parent guides (like the one attached), explainer videos and training on how to keep your children safe online.

To access the hub and all its resources, parents simply need to follow the link below and self enrol:

<https://nationalonlinesafety.com/enrol/stoke-park-schools>

If you have any problems with accessing the hub, please speak to Mrs Higgitt.

### **Safeguarding Parent Survey**

We would love to hear your views about safeguarding at the school. Please complete this short survey to help us understand how we can improve our safeguarding practice.

<https://forms.gle/DVUhJUtRBib9enZq9>

### **Useful contacts:**

**First Response:** To report any safeguarding concerns. This can be done anonymously. 01179036444

**North Bristol Foodbanks** (0117 9791399) For areas covered see here: <https://northbristol.foodbank.org.uk/locations/>

**Young Minds:** supporting children and young people's mental health

**Mind:** adult mental health support and information

**Refuge:** domestic abuse support

**Saneline:** Emotional Support: 07984 967 708 (leave name and number and someone will call you back)

**Bristol Mindline:** 0300 123 3393 (in the day); 0800 808 0330 (after 7pm)



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# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about GROUP CHATS

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Occurring through messaging apps, on social media and in online games, group chats are among the most popular ways that young people engage with their peers online. Involving, by definition, three or more individuals, these groups allow users to send messages, images and videos to everyone in one place. While they are useful for helping friends, people with shared interests or members of a club to communicate and coordinate activities, they can also leave young people feeling excluded and bullied – as well as providing opportunities for inappropriate content to be shared and viewed.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### BULLYING

Unkind comments or images which are purposely aimed at an individual can be shared freely in a group chat – allowing and often encouraging others to join in the bullying behaviour. If this content is shared in a group of their peers (especially a larger group), it serves to amplify the hurt, embarrassment, anxiety and isolation that the victim feels.

### EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION

This common issue with group chats can happen in several ways: starting a new group, for instance, but deliberately excluding a certain child. Likewise, the chat may take place on an app which one child doesn't have access to, meaning they can't be involved. A child can also feel isolated when a group chat is used to discuss or share images from an event that everyone else but them attended.

### INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some discussions in group chats may include inappropriate words, swearing and unsuitable images or videos. These could be viewed by your child if they are part of that group, whether they actively engage in it or not. Some chat apps have a disappearing message function, so your child may be unable to report something they've seen because it can only be viewed once or for a short time.

### SHARING GROUP CONTENT

It's important to remember that – while the content of the chat is private between those in the group – individual users can easily share a message, photo or video with others outside of the group or screenshot what's been posted. The risk of something your child intended as private becoming public (and potentially going viral) is higher if there are people they don't know well in the group.

### UNKNOWN MEMBERS

Within larger group chats, it's more likely your child will be communicating with people they don't really know. These strangers may be friends of the host, but not necessarily friendly toward your child. It's wise for young people not to share personal details and stay aware that they have no control over the messages and images they share after they've put them online.

### NOTIFICATIONS AND FOMO

A drawback of large group chats is the sheer number of notifications. Every time someone in the group messages, your child's device will be 'pinged' with an alert; potentially, this could mean hundreds of notifications a day. Not only is this highly distracting, but young people's fear of missing out on the latest conversation results in increased screen time as they try to keep up with the chat.

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## Advice for Parents & Carers

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### CONSIDER OTHERS' FEELINGS

Group chats are often an arena for young people to gain social status. This could cause them to do or say things on impulse, which could upset others in the group. Encourage your child to consider how other people might feel if they engaged in this behaviour. If your child does upset a member of their group chat, support them to reach out, show empathy and apologise for their mistake.

### PRACTISE SAFE SHARING

In any online communication, it's vital for young people to be aware of what they're sharing and who might potentially see it. Discuss the importance of not revealing identifiable details like their address, their school or photos that they wouldn't like to be seen widely. Remind them that once something is shared in a group, they lose control of where it may end up and how it might be used.

### GIVE SUPPORT, NOT JUDGEMENT

Remind your child that they can confide in you if they feel bullied or excluded in a group chat, instead of responding to the person who's upset them. Validate their hurt feelings and help to put them back in control by discussing how they'd like to handle the situation. On a related note, you could also empower your child to speak up if they're in a chat where others are being picked on.

### AVOID INVITING STRANGERS

Sadly, many individuals online hide their true identity to gain a child's trust – for example, to gather information on them, to exchange inappropriate content or to coax them into doing things they aren't comfortable with. Ensure your child understands why they shouldn't add people they don't know to a group chat – and, especially, to never accept a group chat invitation from a stranger.

### BLOCK, REPORT AND LEAVE

If your child is in a chat where inappropriate content is being shared, advise them to block the users sending the material, report them to the host app or platform and exit the group. If any of this content could be putting a minor at risk, contact the police. Emphasise to your child that it's OK for them to simply leave any group chat that they don't feel comfortable being a part of.

### SILENCE NOTIFICATIONS

Having a phone or tablet bombarded with notifications from a group chat can be a massive irritation and distraction – especially if it's happening late in the evening. Explain to your child that they can still be part of the group chat, but that it would be healthier for them to turn off or mute the notifications and catch up with the conversation at a time which better suits them.

## Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing Internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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