Open letter to Parents/Carers – Social media

Dear Parents & Guardians,

The last few weeks have seen changes to the way we live our lives.

Every one of us is being asked to stay at home and only go out when necessary – from the elderly to the young.

As a result, more children and young people will be spending more time on their computers and phones. Of course the internet is a great source for information and education but I wanted to write to highlight some of issues and risks which can come with the increased use of time online.

One of the main social media platforms young people use today is Snapchat. This is an app, where people can upload a number of photos which disappear after an allotted time frame – it could be seconds or minutes. However, what many young people do not appreciate, is that a screenshot can be taken and the photo printed to keep.

Whether they are using Snapchat, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter or Whats App, if you're able, it is important to speak to your child about the risks online, not posting messages or chatting to someone online in anger or on impulse. Ask them to think before they post anything, as these messages (which could include inappropriate pictures and videos) are almost impossible to take back.

Whilst many of the posts are completely harmless, there are occasions where young people are posting inappropriate and sometimes indecent images of themselves. This is putting them at risk, so it's also important to speak to them to understand why they have done this. It could be done out of naivety or it could be something more, like bullying or harassment, so it is crucial they know where to go if they need help in any way.

It might help to remind them that:

- **It is illegal for young people to take, share or sell indecent images of themselves.**

- **It is illegal for young people to post indecent images and then demand money for them.**

If anyone contacts a young person offering money for Snapchat images, they need to report this to a trusted adult for appropriate action to be taken.

Information is available on the Wiltshire Police website to help you have those conversations.

The most important thing in this is communication. Talk about how to treat others online with respect and what is and isn't appropriate online behaviour.

I hope this advice helps in what is a difficult time. However, you are not alone and help is at hand.

Yours sincerely

Ben

Superintendent Ben Mant
Wiltshire Police Public Protection Department