

# *Rethinking Smartphones*

At South Hampstead, we prioritise wellbeing. We feel strongly about protecting young people in all areas of their lives and this includes their use of mobile phones and Internet-based technology.

The digital world is vast - a giant landscape that children need a level of maturity and self-understanding to navigate safely and successfully. They need the adults in their life to support their safe and gradual exposure so that they are not overwhelmed or put at risk. The addictive nature of social media is not children's fault, but it is very real. Adults must protect young people from the harmful effects of spending too high a proportion of their down-time online.

We encourage parents to be brave about setting firm boundaries for their daughter's mobile phone ownership and use. Children rely on adults to set boundaries, remain consistent and be resilient to external pressures. Children thrive when parented authoritatively and they prefer to know where they stand when it comes to rules and expectations. We know that children want to have the same access to technology that their peers have. Therefore, we strongly encourage parents to work together to establish similar boundaries so that all pupils can be protected, and parents are able to confidently reinforce the constraints they know are right for their children.

At South Hampstead, we believe in the following principles and strongly endorse the related practices:

**OUR PRINCIPLE:** Early smartphone ownership and use enables access to social media and group messaging before young people are equipped to cope with the content and the pressures. This can lead to associated mental health risks and impaired development of vital in-person social skills.

**IN PRACTICE:** *Children before Year 9 do not need and should not have a smartphone. If children are given a smartphone after Year 9, their use should be phased in gradually, monitored and constrained. Children before Year 9 should not be allowed direct access to social media apps via other devices, such as tablets, laptops or PCs. This may include, but is not limited to Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp and Facebook. Whilst YouTube is not a conventional social media app, it contains inappropriate, unfiltered content and access should be restricted and closely monitored.*

**OUR PRINCIPLE:** Age ratings are applied to games, films and video content for good reason, based on expert understanding of developmental phases and age-appropriateness of sexual and violent content.

**IN PRACTICE:** *Children's use of media should stay within the age ratings applied by professionals. Parents should monitor and restrict their children's viewing accordingly and discuss with their children the reasons for adhering to the advice given.*

**OUR PRINCIPLE:** Children need good, uninterrupted sleep, every night. For children under the age of 13, the recommendation is 9 to 12 hours. Regular and adequate sleep supports overall health, growth and brain development. It also helps young people cope with the ups and downs of their daily lives and supports their wellbeing. The use of mobile phones and social media is incompatible with good sleep.

**IN PRACTICE:** *Children should have no access to mobile phones and other tech gadgets at least one hour before bedtime. For children younger than Year 9, this is likely to be before 8pm. Mobiles phones and other Internet accessing technology should not be allowed in the bedroom overnight. Children should be provided with an alarm clock.*

**OUR PRINCIPLE:** Children need regular and prolonged breaks from the intensity of online social interactions, especially group chats. Young people's brains need a rest from the pressure to participate, respond and react to the constant chatter of peers. It is important both that they have the time away from group communication and that they learn the skill of stepping away regularly, for their own long-term wellbeing.

**IN PRACTICE:** *Young people who have been given a smartphone should have their time on the device monitored, with enforced time away from the device. Phones should not be allowed in the same room where homework is being completed or in the bedroom at night.*

**OUR PRINCIPLE:** Children should have the freedom to play and interact safely in other family homes without being exposed to inappropriate material or having unsafe, unrestricted access.

**IN PRACTICE:** *Parents hosting playdates and sleepovers with children before Year 9 are encouraged to collect in mobile phones and tech gadgets with unrestricted access to the Internet, to ensure that the visit focuses on valuable in-person interaction and that all the children are kept safe. After Year 9, parents should still consider this action as young people are likely to benefit significantly from spending time together without the distraction of social media.*

**OUR PRINCIPLE:** Children deserve to be kept safe from sexual predators who are manipulative, skilled and persistent in employing methods to connect with young people. In the UK, the National Crime Agency estimates that there are 550,000 – 850,000 people who pose a sexual threat to the children of the UK; most of them operate online.

**IN PRACTICE:** *Children before Year 9 should not be given a smartphone and their use of tablets, laptops and PCs should be closely monitored and restricted. If children are given a smartphone after Year 9, parents should monitor their use of social media and messaging apps, ensuring that security settings are set to the maximum extent possible. Parents should converse regularly with their child about their online activity and anything that has caused them worry. Children should feel safe sharing information about things that have occurred online without fear of being in trouble or being held responsible for finding themselves in a difficult position, at the hands of an algorithm or person who has exploited their vulnerability.*

**OUR PRINCIPLE:** Children are entitled to have the freedom to make friends, to experience fallout and to have the time to navigate social knots within a timescale that is not accelerated or aggravated by online interactions.

**IN PRACTICE:** *Children should be given strong encouragement to deal with social strife off-line and in-person. They should be deterred from using group chats to replace in-person meet-ups and their use of group chats should be time limited. In-person time together, without the intrusiveness of mobile phones, should be strongly encouraged.*

**OUR PRINCIPLE:** Schools need to be phone-free spaces. This is so that young people can fully engage with all the formative experiences of the school day. They also need to learn how to be away from their phones for long stretches, enabling them to be able to do this for themselves later in life.

**IN PRACTICE:** *South Hampstead is a phone-free space, with pupils placing phones of all description in locked pouches for the duration of their school-based activities. Firm procedures and sanctions will be in place to ensure that pupils all adhere to this rule and support this important principle.*

This guidance is supported by our partners at Tooled Up Education who provide a wealth of information to support parents. If you have not yet signed up, register here using the school's unique pin: <https://www.tooledupeducation.com/register>