

Digital Parenting

by Naomi Bartholomew, Headmistress, St Catherine's Prep School

Many of us have seen the enormous benefits of technology during lockdown or times of enforced isolation this year. It has enabled us to stay connected with loved ones and to 'socialise' online. Whilst some have grown tired of the family Zoom call or quiz night, there have clearly been huge advantages to the use of technology in these challenging times. Indeed, many of our children have grown in confidence in their digital skills and we could possibly learn a thing or two from our well-educated children on this topic!

However, the risks for children are there and are potentially more prevalent than ever as many children are now equipped and confident with using video calls and messaging to stay connected with friends and family. It is more important than ever that parents are aware of the settings on any devices that their children have access to. Are you confident that you know who they are communicating with online? If you would not drop your child off at the house of their named online friend and leave them there without you, then the same rules should apply with who you feel comfortable leaving them with unaccompanied online.

For some children, moving between online friendships during lockdown and then returning to real life friendships in school has been



challenging. Some children have become used to communicating in very different ways to real conversations. Another tip I share with children in school is that if you would not tell your Grandma then you probably shouldn't be sharing or making that comment online.

Some children felt very isolated during lockdown with parents juggling the demands of working from home, endless emails and video calls and as we navigate the current uncertainties, it is key to agree some device free family time which includes everyone at home, parents as well. Even if it is a hot chocolate date and chat at the kitchen table or a quick walk, there need to be times when devices are put away and children feel able to talk or just be with you.

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