January: Online Safety Bulletin for Parents

Safer Internet Day – 7th February

At Wellington School we are looking to run a series of workshops on Safer Internet Day which focus on the controversial British-American online influencer Andrew Tate. Andrew Tate may now have been banned from social media, but his message and his values can be found everywhere online. It is important that we equip our students with the skills to talk about and challenge gender inequality, gender-based violence and misogyny. We hope this will also give us a valuable opportunity to open up the wider conversation around the culture of gender-based violence. More information will follow in the next few weeks on the focus of these workshops.

We will be running The Andrew Tate workshops for certain age groups.

Instagram – New update

Many social media platforms regularly update their settings to improve user experience. In more recent times, major platforms have made significant changes in the way content is presented to users and have even implemented features to support digital wellbeing. Instagram announced many updates last year including the 'Take a Break' feature, new sensitive content control options as well as launching new technology to support age verification. Now, they have released a new feature called 'Quiet Mode' as well as additional ways to help users manage what content they see.

Quiet Mode

Released in the UK this week, 'Quiet Mode' can support teenagers with setting some boundaries on Instagram by shielding them from notifications and messages, once enabled. Instagram has stated that teenagers have spoken around how they sometimes need time away from technology to focus on areas such as school or other activities. With this feature, their online status will change to 'In quiet mode' and any notification received will be hidden until 'Quiet Mode' is turned off. Interestingly, if a direct message is also received during this time, an automatic response will be sent notifying the user that they are unavailable.

Notifications will then be shown at a time more suitable once 'Quiet Mode' is switched off. Instagram allows users to set what times they want 'Quiet Mode' to be active, allowing them to set times when they know they will be busy and need to focus on other things. Prompts will also be sent to encourage 'Quiet Mode' if there seems to be a lot of online activity at night.

Managing Recommendations and Parental Controls

Alongside this new feature, Instagram has also made some changes to how recommendations are presented to users and how they can better manage what content they see. Users are now able to 'hide multiple pieces of content in Explore' whilst expanding hidden recommendations across Reels and Search if a user has selected 'Not Interested' on a piece content.

To expand their Hidden Words feature, Instagram now lets you hide recommended posts by inputting words and topics you no longer wish to see across the platform. This could be posts around topics such as sport, health or gaming which you may have little interest in. Once in place, these types of posts should then be hidden from your recommendations.

Last year, Instagram also updated their parental control settings, giving parents more oversight of their teen's activity online whilst providing them with more control around screentime and awareness of followers. Now, with these new settings, parents have more oversight of their teen's privacy and account settings whilst receiving notifications when any setting is changed.
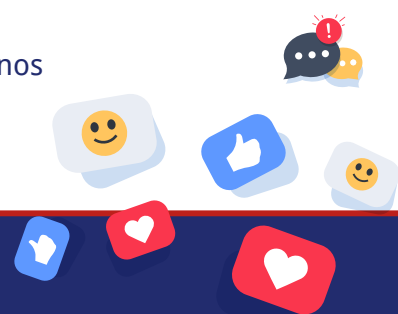
Considerations

Instagram has made some positive changes throughout the previous year and it is good to see these new updates that continue to highlight digital wellbeing for young people. While these new features can support, we remind users to continue making use of Report Harmful Content if any harmful content is encountered online as the risk of this still remains. As these features need to be set up, it is essential for conversations to be had between parents and young people around why features like this may be needed. Conversations like this encourage appropriate breaks and will encourage users to filter out material that may be unwanted or considered harmful.

National Online Safety

A reminder that all of our parents are able to access more detailed information on the National Online Safety platform, access details below.

To create a parent account, please follow https://nationalonlinesafety.com/enrol/wellington-school and complete your details. You can access National Online Safety online via any device- including via a brand-new smartphone app. To download the app, please go to:
https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/national-online-safety/id1530342372
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=uk.co.nationaleducationgroup.nos

BeReal.

In this latest trending social media app the concept is that people see others in their authentic day-to-day lives, sharing candid photos without editing or applying filters. Each day at a random time, users are simultaneously notified to take a photo of exactly what they are doing at that moment. The two minute window to submit an image means there is no time to select a particularly glamorous or exciting activity. BeReal shares two pictures :a selfie and an image of their immediate surroundings.

Users can only view and react to their friends photos once they upload their own. In the attached guide you'll find tips on some of the potential risks such as strangers, location sharing and visible personal data.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about
BEREAL

BeReal is the latest trending social media app. The concept is that people see others in their authentic day-to-day lives, sharing candid photos without editing or applying filters. Each day at a random time, users are simultaneously notified to take a picture of what they're doing at that exact moment. The two-minute window to submit an image means there's no time to select a particularly glamorous or exciting activity. BeReal shares two pictures: a selfie, and an image of the immediate surroundings. Users can only view and react to their friends' photos once they upload their own.

AGE RATING
13+ from the App Store & Google Play

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

CONTINUOUS NOTIFICATIONS
Like any social media app, BeReal's developers want users to be on it regularly and scrolling for long periods. BeReal only sends one notification to post a picture each day, but there are other alerts for events such as mentions, comments, friend requests and reactions to your photo. This can cause young users to feel pressure to open the app and respond, distracting them from other activities.

CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS
When someone signs up to BeReal, it highlights anyone in their phone's contacts list who already has the app – so users can connect with friends, or invite others from their contacts. The 'Discovery' feed, meanwhile, shows posts from strangers and gives users the option to add them as friends, too. This means your child could potentially connect with – and communicate with – a stranger.

PUBLIC SHARING
As well as sharing posts with friends in the moment, the app also allows posts to be shared publicly and public content to be viewed. Before a user can see this public content, they must post their own photo first. Unfortunately, there currently seems to be a lack of moderation on the content that's being uploaded, so a young user could be exposed to posts which aren't suitable for their age.

EASY LOCATION
BeReal's default setting is to share the exact location of where a post was sent from. Given that images are usually shared within the two-minute window, anyone your child is friends with on the app will know exactly where they are (or at least, where they *were* two minutes earlier). As we've noted, this could include strangers who are intending to use this geographical information for malicious purposes.

VISIBLE PERSONAL DATA
As with any other form of social media, it's important that your child doesn't share too much personal information on their profile. BeReal allows for a photo, full name, approximate location and a short bio. It's safest to make sure that your child's profile doesn't display anything which could identify where they go to school or exactly where they live.

REPUTATIONAL DAMAGE
What your child says and does online – their digital footprint – shapes the way that other people see them. It's essential that young people understand that when they post something online, they are giving the app in question the right to do whatever they wish with that image or content, including sharing it elsewhere. This form of permission is explicitly referenced in BeReal's terms of use.

Advice for Parents & Carers

LIMIT NOTIFICATIONS
BeReal offers the option to turn off individual types of notification. Doing this will significantly reduce the number of times your child is tempted to open the app by incoming comments, uploads, friend requests and so on. Ironically, it will allow them to actually 'be real' by being present in the moment and their current environment as opposed to being engrossed on social media.

STOP AND THINK
BeReal's goal is for users to be authentic with friends, removing the pressure of that flawless photo or perfectly worded post. It's still vital, though, that children stop and think rather than uploading something risky just to meet the two-minute deadline. Point out to them what kind of information strangers could extract from an image: school crests, street names or local landmarks, for example.

KEEP IT AMONG FRIENDS
Remind your child why adding strangers to their contacts isn't a good idea, and advise them to decline any friend requests from people they don't know in real life. If something your child sees on BeReal makes them feel uncomfortable, they can report it by clicking on the three dots in the top right. The reporting tool allows them to state the reason that they're flagging up the post.

CREATE A SAFE PROFILE
Remind your child to use an avatar as their profile pic (as opposed to a photo of themselves) and use a nickname or just their first name, not their full name. Any information they add to their bio (which is optional) should be kept vague, and personal details should remain private. It's also worth turning off the geolocation feature either through the device's settings or in BeReal itself.

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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