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Dear Parents and Guardians,

Prior Park is, you will know by now, a different sort of school to others. Our new Mission Statement speaks about our duty to *'steward a thriving family of communities with love for the young people they serve at their heart.'* It is in the spirit of that stewardship that I write to you today. This is a variation of the letter which was sent to all Prior Park parents last academic year. It provides some guidance, advice, and support on dealing with the tricky topics of mobile phones, parties, and illegal substances.

Mobile Phones

Many, if not most, parents at Prior, are pioneers in the realm of digital parenting. Pioneers is the upbeat way of putting it, another way might be to say that we are all somewhat making it up as we go along. There is a lot of research out there on the pros and cons of the digital world for young people. I don't propose to debate the whys and the wherefores of all the various studies. However, I will state, plainly and simply, that there are some things that we see happening to some of our young people, day in and day out, that can be addressed by parents taking a more active role in the regulation of their children's mobile phone usage.

Sleep

The single most important thing for our mental health and our mood is sleep. We know that the teenage brain needs somewhere between eight and ten hours of sleep a night¹. We also know that both social media notifications and the light from a screen immediately before sleep will have a damaging effect on a teen's ability to sleep well. We would recommend two things:

- Do all you can to limit screens in the bedroom. Do not buy the excuse that they must have their phones as an alarm clock to wake up. A proper, old school, alarm clock sorts that problem out swiftly enough. I recommend [this one](#). Make sure that PLDs, Laptops, iPads and phones stay downstairs.
- Try and encourage, and dare I say model, an hour of screen free time before going to sleep. It is shown to make a real difference to the quality of sleep that teenagers get.

By encouraging, or enforcing, these two simple things, you'll help your teen get a lot more sleep and sleep of much better quality. Not only that, but you will help other teens in your child's peer group sleep as

¹ [Sleep tips for teenagers - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

well. I regularly hear from parents who are frustrated to have their child's phone pinging at all hours of the night, from school friends on various apps. Please do regulate how late your child is on their phone, for their sake and the sake of their friends.

Screen Time

Having a limit on, or at the very least a record of, the time that your teen has spent on their phone is not unreasonable. It is a perfectly sensible measure to give you a sense of how long they are spending on their phone and what they are doing when on it. It isn't for us to tell you exactly how long your child should be on their phone, though some experts recommend around two hours of, non-work-based, screen time per day. However, by adding a screen time monitor to their phone, you can ensure that you are at least talking from an informed position when you discuss with them what you, and they, feel is a reasonable and acceptable time to spend on their phone.

'Nudes and Semi-Nudes'

There is something of an epidemic of sharing nudes amongst young people, across society and certainly not just at Prior Park College. We are though, not immune from it. It is, overwhelmingly, the case that young women are cajoled and pressured into sending nude pictures by young men. I would urge you please to talk to your children and reinforce the following messages:

- Please tell your child not to request that someone they are interested in sends them a nude – it is intrusive and not in any way flattering or flirtatious.
- Please tell your child that they should never send an unsolicited nude picture. It breaches the dignity of the person who is being sent the image.
- Please do empower your child to say no. If we have a united front from the students at our school that they will not send a nude picture, then the whole school will feel that much more secure and that much more confident in saying no.
- Please do talk to your children about the ramifications if they do send or receive nudes. To share them is a criminal offence, to show them to others is insensitive and a criminal act.

Ultimately, please talk to your child about navigating the tricky world of starting relationships in real life. So much of the world our young people inhabit is digital now, but when every aspect of life moves online, they lose something precious. They need to talk to each other, properly and not rely, solely, on the digital sphere.

It is also worth saying that, if young people don't have their phones in their rooms late at night, the likelihood of them requesting, sending, or sharing nudes, is greatly lessened.

If you try to talk to your child about any of these issues, and certainly if you try and regulate their usage of their phone, they will almost certainly tell you that:

- you are being entirely unreasonable
- that everybody else in their year has absolutely no restrictions
- that you don't understand the pressures they are under to behave like everybody else on their phones

A set of responses might be as follows:

- you love them and it is entirely reasonable to care for them and for their mental health by taking an interest in how they are using their phones
- that other students in their year most definitely do have restrictions on their phone usage
- that you really do understand the pressures they are under and that's why you are going to, for certain times of the day (and definitely the nights!), give them a break from those pressures

House Parties

We recognise that parents are often faced with tough decisions about teenage parties. Parties are a part of growing up, they are an opportunity for young people to develop friendships, work on their social skills, and a chance to have fun with their friends in a relaxed environment. It is important for our young people to have good, positive, social opportunities.

The benefits of a good party can be considerable. However, when a party is not appropriately supervised, there can be potentially serious safeguarding consequences. Incidents of this nature can, and do, have a profound impact on individuals and larger peer groups. They also impact on school life; it is for this reason that Prior Park will get involved in events that take place outside of the school week. We believe this is an essential part of our ethos of pastoral care and we hope parents will be willing to discuss such incidents, worries, and concerns, with the school.

No parent wants their child to be unsafe and so negotiating your way around the teenage party scene can often be a challenge. We hope that the guidance below, requested by several parents, will serve as useful advice that all our parents will adopt, thereby ensuring a degree of parity and understanding between our parents as a whole. As parents you must make difficult decisions and, although they might not articulate it at the time, young people do actually appreciate boundaries.

Guidance for hosting a party

- Talking to your child when they are invited to parties so that you are clear about all the arrangements and your expectations.
- Contacting the parents of the student hosting the party to be reassured about the arrangements.
- Please feel free to share any concerns you might have about a party with your child's Tutor, Housemaster, Housemistress, or member of the College's Senior Leadership Team.
- When hosting a party, please be clear about who is invited and keep a guest list. We advise that your child, and you, avoid publishing any party details on social media.
- We strongly recommend that you are present should your child be hosting a party. Having other adults present is also a good idea.
- When deciding on a party guest list, please be mindful about the possibility of creating divisions among your child's year group if individuals or groups are left off the guest list.
- Clearly you and I would expect our children to be responsible hosts and respectful guests. Any students attending a party should, of course, adhere to the standards defined for the party,

respecting the house they are visiting and avoiding bad behaviour. The easy societal availability of alcoholic drinks (with danger of intoxication), “legal highs” (such as nitrous oxide capsules) and illegal drugs must be weighed as factors to assess for all parents.

- Please make safe collection arrangements at an agreed time after a party.
- Please be aware that students from other Bath secondary schools may also be present.

Guidance on attending parties

- Your child will be asked to attend

Guidance on the consumption of alcohol

- NHS guidance, (which can be found [here](#)) in line with advice from the UK Chief Medical Officer, highlights that: if children do drink alcohol, they should not do so until they're at least 15 years old.
- If 15- to 17-year-olds drink alcohol, it should be rarely, and never more than once a week. They should always be supervised by a parent or carer.
- If 15- to 17-year-olds drink alcohol, they should never exceed the recommended adult weekly limit (14 units of alcohol). 1 unit of alcohol is about half a pint of normal-strength beer or a single measure (25ml) of spirits. A small glass of wine equals 1.5 units of alcohol.
- If your child intends to drink alcohol, using positive practices such as incentives, setting limits, agreeing on specific boundaries, and offering advice can help.
- Make it clear in the invitation that you will provide all drinks on the night of the party - spirits can sometimes be brought in water bottles so you need to look out for this.
- As party-comers arrive, meet and greet them at the door and remove any alcohol they have brought. If you do collect any alcohol, inform them that it can be collected by their parents the following day. It is your right to remove alcohol from anyone who comes - it is your house!
- Young people might bring “gifts” for the host, which are wrapped up bottles of alcohol. Take all presents at the door and explain that they will be opened as a family tomorrow. Thank them for being so kind and generous!
- Regularly scan the house; some common places that young people put alcohol in a party include dishwashers, fridges, washing machines, ovens. Scan the garden too. If you find something, remove it, and don't make a big deal out of it.
- If someone is sick, tell their parents. If they are over 18, you might decide not to, however if you are concerned about their health and well-being it is better to err on the side of caution.

The following websites may be of use for both parents and teenagers regarding some of the issues raised in this letter. [Alcohol Concern](#), [Drink Aware](#), [Sexting and sending nudes](#) | [NSPCC](#)

This letter is sent with the very best of intentions. The post-Covid world is a challenging one, and we all want our children to grow up safely. The world that they are growing up in though is a very different one to that which you or I inhabited when their age. Mobile phone usage alone is a significant point of difference, but the comparatively easy availability of drugs and alcohol compounds the pressures to grow up very quickly. Pushing boundaries is an absolutely normal part of teenage behaviour, and in many ways doing so is absolutely to be encouraged. Equally though, it is important to have those boundaries to push against. We hope that this letter gives you some sense of the sorts of boundaries that are age appropriate for the year groups that your children are in.

That which students do outside of school very much impacts their lives within school. We want to continue to work together to ensure that the pressures on our young people are managed by all those involved in their wellbeing. Prior has an outstanding reputation for pastoral care and our sending this letter is a sign of how much we do care, and how much we want our young people to grow up safely.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Horan', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Ben Horan