Dear Parent,

The digital world is moving fast and constantly changing, and for children today, is not a thing, but is a place to go and socialise, and it provides an excellent source of knowledge, opportunity and enjoyment. However, there are risks involved, for which children need support and guidance from adults. It is essential that they understand how to be a good digital citizen in order to keep themselves and others safe from harm and/or abuse.

For many parents, there is a gap between what their children know and what they know about the digital world. These tips are designed to highlight some of the areas of risk for your child.

Did you know…?

Risks are not limited to social media. Children use devices, apps and games which allow them to connect with a growing list of contacts. Some of these apps/devices/tools (including: Bluetooth and Airdrop) download information, allow remote access, and enable contact with other people without having to be connected to the internet. Be aware of what your child is doing, ensure you understand how their devices work, and consider using parental controls on devices reduce risks.

Friends are not always what they seem. People like to be popular, and many children 'collect' friends on social media/ apps. Some tips are: look at the number of 'friends' they have – is it realistic? Look at friends' connections and be wary of people only connected with your child, or those with only one or two connections. Are their friends of a similar age? Have any friends posted upsetting content?

Inactive profiles can be misleading. You may think because your child's social media profile has very little activity, that they are not posting anything. However, it is possible for posts to be hidden to certain people, so you may not be seeing everything that is happening.

Location apps can be dangerous. Many parents want to use location apps so they can locate their child at any time. However if you can find your child, it is likely that others can too. Some apps share locations even when not being used, so ensure location settings are only used when it is necessary and safe to do so; and teach your child how not to identify their location to others.

A digital footprint lasts forever. Talk to your child about what they post online about themselves, and make sure that they understand that anything posted online is permanent. Some employers and universities search for an individual digital footprint when making decisions. Make sure that both you and your child are aware that what they post now may have an impact later. Remember, information you post about your child also creates their digital footprint.

It's not all bad news! There are significant opportunities in the digital world, so start the conversation early to help your child learn how to be safe online.

Additional resources and advice can be found here:

https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/

https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/

https://www.net-aware.org.uk/