



The Gilberd School



OCTOBER HALF-TERM SAFEGUARDING BULLETIN 2026

As we approach the half-term break, we would like to share some important safeguarding information and practical advice for families.

The holiday period often brings greater independence, more socialising, increased online activity and additional time spent in the community. By working together, we can help ensure our young people enjoy a safe, positive and healthy break.

HALLOWEEN & BONFIRE SAFETY

Halloween and Bonfire Night are occasions many young people look forward to, but they also bring additional safety risks.

STAY SAFE THIS HALF TERM
Enjoy the time. Look out for each other. Make safe choices.

WHEN OUT WITH FRIENDS
Young people should:

- Stay in groups**
Stay in groups where possible.
- Agree a route and return time**
Agree a route and return time with parents or carers.
- Be visible in the dark**
Be visible in the dark by wearing reflective clothing.
- Carry a charged mobile phone**
Carry a charged mobile phone.
- Respect local residents and property**
Respect local residents and property.

FIREWORK SAFETY
Families attending firework celebrations are encouraged to:

- Attend organised displays**
Attend organised displays where possible.
- Keep a safe distance**
Keep a safe distance from fireworks.
- Ensure sparklers are used responsibly**
Ensure sparklers are used responsibly and supervised.
- Avoid using fireworks in public spaces**
Avoid using fireworks in public spaces, parks or streets.
- Never leave bonfires unattended**
Never leave bonfires unattended.

Safe people
Stronger communities
Brighter tomorrows

BE AWARE
BE KIND
BE SAFE

Find Out More

Essex Fire and Rescue Service Firework Safety

<https://www.essex-fire.gov.uk/bonfire-and-firework-safety>

STAYING SAFE IN THE COMMUNITY

As evenings become darker, many young people spend more time travelling independently around Colchester and meeting friends in town centres, parks and public spaces.

Safe Habits

Please remind your child to:

- Let someone know where they are going and when they expect to return.
- Stay with trusted friends whenever possible.
- Avoid isolated areas after dark.
- Keep phones charged and emergency contacts accessible.
- Trust their instincts and leave situations that feel unsafe.

CONVERSATION STARTER

"If your plans changed unexpectedly, who would you contact and what would you do?"

E-BIKES, E-SCOOTERS & ROAD SAFETY

What Parents Need To Know

We continue to see growing concerns nationally regarding electric bikes, modified e-bikes and e-scooters.

Many young people are unaware that some high-powered modified bikes are not legal for use on public roads and may present significant safety risks.

Parents Are Encouraged To:

- Ensure their child wears a helmet when cycling.
 - Discuss safe road use and visibility during darker evenings.
 - Check that lights and reflective equipment are working.
 - Be aware of the risks associated with modified e-bikes and uncertified batteries purchased online.
 - Understand that privately owned e-scooters generally cannot be used on public roads, pavements or cycle paths.
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BEFORE THEY RIDE

- Helmet fitted correctly
- Bike lights working
- Reflective clothing worn
- Brakes and tyres checked
- Route planned in advance

Useful Resources

 Think! Road Safety

<https://www.think.gov.uk>

 Safer Essex Roads Partnership

<https://saferessexroads.org>

YOUTH VAPING: A CONTINUING CONCERN

The Government has recently proposed new measures aimed at reducing youth vaping, including restrictions on packaging and displays designed to make vaping products less attractive to children.

Many young people underestimate the risks associated with vaping, particularly where nicotine is involved.



Youth Vaping
What parents and carers need to know

Vaping is increasingly common among young people. While it's often seen as less harmful than smoking, it's not risk-free – especially for young, developing brains.

What is vaping?
Vapes (also called e-cigarettes) heat a liquid (e-liquid) to create a vapour that is inhaled. The liquid often contains nicotine, flavourings and other chemicals.

Vapes come in many colours and flavours and can look like pens, highlighters or USB sticks – making them easy to hide.

Why are young people vaping?
Some of the reasons include:

- It can seem popular among friends
- Flavoured vapes can be appealing
- It may be seen as less harmful than smoking
- Some young people use vapes to cope with stress, anxiety or difficult emotions

What are the risks?
Vaping is not harmless. For young people it can:

- Affect the developing brain (nicotine can impact memory, concentration and learning)
- Lead to nicotine addiction (making it harder to concentrate and increasing anxiety)
- Cause irritation to the lungs, throat and airways
- Increase the risk of progressing to smoking traditional cigarettes
- Expose young people to unknown long-term health risks

Signs your child might be vaping
Your child may be vaping if you notice:

- Unusual sweet or fruity smells
- New items like vapes, e-liquid bottles or chargers
- Trying to hide things or being more secretive
- Frequently borrowing money
- Changes in mood, behaviour or friendship groups
- Persistent coughs or sore throat

Not all of these signs mean your child is vaping, but they can be a prompt for a conversation.

How you can help
A supportive, open approach can make a real difference.

- Have regular, honest conversations**
Ask what they know about vapes and listen to their views without judgment.
- Focus on their wellbeing**
Talk about the reasons behind vaping, such as stress or peer pressure, and explore healthier ways to cope.
- Share the facts**
Help them understand the risks in an age-appropriate way.
- Set a good example**
If you vape or smoke, be open about your reasons and consider quitting for your own health and to inspire them.
- Get support if needed**
If you're worried, seek advice from your GP, school nurse or a trusted professional.

Top tips

- Keep conversations going – short, regular chats can be more effective than one big talk.
- Be curious, not accusatory – show you're interested in their life and opinions.
- Encourage healthy habits – like regular exercise, good sleep and time with friends.
- Know where to get support – you don't have to do this alone.

Support, not judgment, helps young people make healthier choices.

Where to find more support

- NHS – Vaping and young people
www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/vaping-and-young-people
- Talk to your school nurse or GP
- YoungMinds – Advice for parents
www.youngminds.org.uk/parent
Talk to Frank – Honest information about drugs (including vapes)
www.talktofrank.com

REAL CONVERSATIONS BRIGHTER TOMORROWS

Useful Resources

 Talk to Frank

<https://www.talktofrank.com>

 NHS Vaping Advice

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/using-e-cigarettes-to-stop-smoking/>

 Action on Smoking and Health

<https://ash.org.uk>

ONLINE SAFETY

Keeping Children Safe in a Digital World

School holidays often lead to a significant increase in screen time across social media, gaming, messaging apps and streaming platforms.

Regular conversations remain one of the most effective safeguarding tools available to parents.

Topics Worth Discussing

- Who your child talks to online.
 - Privacy settings across apps and social media.
 - What to do if they receive upsetting or inappropriate content.
 - How to block and report users.
 - The importance of not sharing personal information.
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Questions To Ask At Home

- Who do you spend most time talking to online?
 - What apps are currently popular amongst your friends?
 - Do you know how to report concerns?
 - Would you tell someone if you felt uncomfortable online?
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Useful Resources

 NSPCC Online Safety Hub

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

 CEOP Parent Information

<https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/parents/>

 Internet Matters

<https://www.internetmatters.org>

ONLINE GAMING: MORE THAN JUST A GAME

Recent research from Ofcom highlights the significant role gaming plays in young people's digital lives.

Family Gaming Checklist

- Know which games your child is playing.
- Check PEGI age ratings.
- Review communication settings.
- Discuss online friendships.
- Monitor in-game spending.

Ask Your Child

- Who do you play online with?
- Do you know everyone you game with?
- Would you know what to do if somebody made you feel uncomfortable online?

Find Out More

 Ofcom Growing Up Gaming Research Summary

<https://us.list-manage.com/KNbQIFchLpa?e=2f78bd5b12&c2id=6a066f4a5a847927b2fae155b7197e01>

 PEGI Ratings

<https://pegi.info>

 Internet Matters Gaming Advice

<https://www.internetmatters.org>

WHATSAPP UPDATES FOR PARENTS

WhatsApp is introducing new parental supervision features for teenagers aged 13-17.

The new settings allow parents and teenagers to link their accounts and manage aspects of:

- Privacy settings.
 - Group invitations.
 - Channels and Status.
 - AI content settings.
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IMPORTANT

Parents **cannot read private messages or listen to calls** using these features.

Five-Minute WhatsApp Check

- Review privacy settings.
 - Check profile visibility.
 - Review group invitation settings.
 - Check reporting and blocking features.
 - Discuss appropriate use of AI tools.
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Further Information

 WhatsApp Teen Controls

<https://us.list-manage.com/Y8sCm2pKmp7?e=2f78bd5b12&c2id=6a066f4a5a847927b2fae155b7197e01>

 WhatsApp Parental Controls Help Centre

<https://us.list-manage.com/omMihomo2GV?e=2f78bd5b12&c2id=6a066f4a5a847927b2fae155b7197e01>



WhatsApp Changes

What Parents Need to Know

New features. New risks. New ways to stay involved.
Here's a quick guide to what's changed on WhatsApp and how parents can help keep young people safe.

SAME APP.
NEW FEATURES.
BIGGER
CONVERSATIONS.

What's New on WhatsApp?

WhatsApp is always evolving. Here are some of the latest updates parents should be aware of:



Chat Lock

Users can now lock individual chats with a password, fingerprint or face ID. This can hide conversations from others who use the same device.



View Once & Disappearing Messages

Photos, videos and even messages can be set to disappear after being viewed or after 24 hours, 7 days or 90 days.



Bigger Group Chats

Groups can now have up to 1,024 members, making it easier for young people to be part of large communities — but also increasing the risk of exposure to strangers or harmful content.



Channels

A new way to follow updates from organisations, creators and communities. Channels are public and can expose young people to a wider range of content.



AI Features (Meta AI)

WhatsApp now includes Meta AI, allowing users to chat with an AI assistant, generate images and search for information. This can be helpful, but also raises questions about privacy and the type of content young people might access.

How Parents Can Monitor and Support

You don't need to read every message to make a difference. Here are practical ways to stay informed and involved:



Use device settings

On Android and iPhone, you can use parental controls to manage app downloads, screen time and who your child can contact.



Check privacy settings

Make sure your child understands and uses WhatsApp's privacy settings (e.g. who can see their profile photo, last seen, and who can add them to groups).



Talk regularly

Have open, non-judgemental conversations about who they're chatting with, what they're sharing, and how they feel online.



Know their circles

Talk about group chats and channels — who is in them, what kind of content is shared, and how to leave a group if they feel uncomfortable.



Encourage safe behaviour

Remind them not to share personal information, think before they click on links, and to tell you if something upsets them.



Explore together

Consider looking at WhatsApp's features together so you both understand how they work.

Why It Matters

These changes can be positive, but they also bring new challenges:



More private conversations

Features like Chat Lock and disappearing messages can make it harder to see what your child is talking about.



Greater exposure

Larger groups and channels can connect young people with strangers or unwanted content.



New types of content

AI tools and public channels can introduce information that isn't always accurate or age-appropriate.



Ongoing risks

As always, there are risks of cyberbullying, scams, peer pressure and inappropriate content.



The good news?

With open conversations and the right tools, parents can still play an important role in keeping their children safe on WhatsApp.



SAFER
CHILDREN.
BRIGHTER
CONVERSATIONS.
TOGETHER.



A LITTLE
AWARENESS
GOES A LONG WAY.



STAY INFORMED



STAY CONNECTED



KEEP TALKING



KEEP THEM SAFER

WhatsApp can be a positive space — with the right support.

AI, IMAGE SHARING & DIGITAL PRIVACY

Privacy Matters More Than Ever

Artificial Intelligence is developing rapidly and creating new safeguarding challenges.

The Internet Watch Foundation recently reported a significant increase in AI-generated child sexual abuse imagery. Whilst these images may be artificially created, the safeguarding harm they cause is very real.

This highlights the importance of carefully considering what photographs and personal information are shared online.



Further Information

 IWF Parent Guide: Stopping AI Child Image Abuse

<https://us.list-manage.com/rwsf1IWInvY?e=2f78bd5b12&c2id=6a066f4a5a847927b2fae155b7197e01>

 IWF AI Image Abuse Report

<https://us.list-manage.com/ciBIO2Q1Nb?e=2f78bd5b12&c2id=6a066f4a5a847927b2fae155b7197e01>

EMERGING RISKS: ONLINE HARM GROUPS

National agencies continue to warn about online networks that manipulate and exploit vulnerable young people through coercion, grooming and emotional abuse.

These groups may operate across platforms commonly used by young people, including gaming services, social media and messaging apps.

Potential Warning Signs

- Increased secrecy online.
 - Sudden changes in behaviour.
 - Spending excessive time online.
 - Withdrawal from family or existing friendship groups.
 - Distress linked to online activity.
 - New online contacts they are reluctant to discuss.
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What Helps Most?

Research consistently shows that open communication remains one of the strongest protective factors.

Create opportunities for regular conversations about:

- Online friendships.
 - Gaming communities.
 - Group chats.
 - Concerns or worries.
 - Reporting and getting help.
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Further Information

 CEOP Parent Guidance

<https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/parents/>

 Sky News Investigation (*contains content some readers may find distressing*)

<https://us.list-manage.com/TpK72uT3E4H?e=2f78bd5b12&c2id=6a066f4a5a847927b2fae155b7197e01>

SMARTPHONES, SCREEN TIME & WELLBEING

Many families are concerned about the amount of time young people spend on phones and social media.

A growing number of schools report positive outcomes from reducing smartphone use, including improved focus, stronger relationships and greater engagement.

Healthy Digital Habits

- Keep phones out of bedrooms overnight where possible.
- Encourage screen-free meals.
- Balance online activity with hobbies and exercise.
- Create opportunities for family time away from devices.
- Model healthy technology habits as adults.

Small changes can have a significant impact on wellbeing, sleep and concentration.

ATTENDANCE, WELLBEING & STAYING CONNECTED

Recent national data shows that severe pupil absence remains significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels.

Attendance is not just about academic achievement.

Being in school provides:

- Daily contact with trusted adults.
- Access to support and guidance.
- Opportunities to maintain friendships.
- Positive routines and structure.
- Improved wellbeing and resilience.

Supporting A Positive Return After Half-Term

- Gradually reintroduce school sleep routines.
- Encourage healthy bedtime habits.
- Discuss any concerns about returning to school.
- Prepare equipment and uniform in advance.
- Contact school early if support is required.

EVERY DAY IN SCHOOL STRENGTHENS BOTH LEARNING AND SAFEGUARDING

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH

School holidays can be an opportunity for rest and recovery, but they can also be a difficult time for some young people.

Parents Can Support Wellbeing By:

- Maintaining routines.
- Encouraging physical activity.
- Creating opportunities for social connection.
- Monitoring sleep habits.
- Listening and talking regularly.

Signs That Additional Support May Be Needed

- Persistent low mood.
- Withdrawal from friends or family.
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Ongoing anxiety or distress.



Support Services

 YoungMinds

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk>

 Mind

<https://www.mind.org.uk>

 Kooth

<https://www.kooth.com>

WHERE TO GET HELP

Immediate Risk

999

Online Safety Concerns

 CEOP

<https://www.ceop.police.uk>

Child Support

Childline - 0800 1111

<https://www.childline.org.uk>

Parent Support

NSPCC Helpline - 0808 800 5000

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk>

School Support

If you have concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a student, please contact the school's safeguarding team on safeguarding@gilberd.com. Early conversations can often prevent concerns from escalating and ensure support is put in place quickly.

The vast majority of young people will enjoy a safe, happy and rewarding half-term.

Through open communication, sensible online habits, positive routines and strong partnerships between school and home, we can continue to provide the support and guidance that helps our young people thrive.

We wish all students and families a safe, enjoyable and restful October half-term.