

ST MARY'S BENTWORTH CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Dear parents,

As we approach the end of our first half term and look ahead to Christmas, many families begin to think about special gifts or milestones for their children, especially for those in Year 5 and 6, who are nearing the transition to Secondary school. One common consideration at this stage is whether to give a smartphone as a Christmas or "moving up" gift.

Before making that decision, I'd like to gently invite you to pause and reflect on the information shared on the newsletter, parent briefings and during Bring a grown up to school day. While smartphones are part of modern life, evidence increasingly shows that early smartphone use carries significant risks to children's wellbeing.

Research, highlights growing concerns around cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, distraction from learning, and mental health impacts. The culture of carrying cameras and constant connectivity can also distort self-image and heighten anxiety. These patterns remind us that children's brains are still developing, and the instant, addictive design of platforms can make it difficult for young people to manage screen time and online pressures. Children are particularly vulnerable to the designs aimed at monetising and grabbing their attention.

I'd like to share with you a link to a podcast by Jonathan Haidt, a renowned social psychologist. He talks about the profound effects of social media on the younger generation and explains how the presence of mobile phones and platforms like TikTok is reshaping childhood and distorting attention spans. <https://www.thehighperformancepodcast.com/hp-podcast/jonathan-haidt>

For families seeking a safe, practical way to stay connected, a simple and safe "brick phone" – one that allows calls and texts but not apps or internet access – can meet communication needs without the associated risks. Here is a link to a useful guide to alternatives - <https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/alternatives>

Together with other primary schools in the area we are working together to support the Smartphone Free Childhood movement. At the heart of this movement is a commitment to helping children grow up with healthier norms around technology.





Many parents of this school and other local primary schools have chosen to sign the SFC parent pact to help collectively reduce peer pressure around smartphone ownership. As headteachers we are encouraged to see many pacts made by parents at local schools. You can learn more at <https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org.uk>

Together, we can give our children the chance to enjoy their childhood fully – building real-world friendships, curiosity and resilience, without the potential pressures of digital life.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support.

Kind regards,

Mrs Jo Ayres

Headteacher