Safeguarding / E- safety Newsletter 2021

Number 6 - 25/02/21

Dear Parents/ Carers,

Welcome to the sixth Safeguarding / E-safety newsletter. I hope that you managed to get some rest and relaxation during the half term break last week.

I'm afraid this week's newsletter is a serious one. I am informing you of an internet site I think you need to be aware of.

OMEGLE Social Media- BE AWARE

I was very concerned this weekend to read a story on BBC news about a Social Media site called Omegle. The news report is both distressing and concerning so I wanted to share we you some details about this dangerous site.

Although this site is supposed to be for over 18's, children, some as young as 7 have been able to make accounts and use it.

Omegle is an increasingly popular live video chat website. Omegle links up random people for virtual video and text chats, and claims to be moderated - but has a reputation for unpredictable and shocking content. Omegle was initially a text-only chat that paired users at random to communicate as "strangers". However, in 2010, Omegle introduced a video mode to complement the text chat mode, which pairs together strangers who are using webcams and microphones. The video chat also has a built in text window.

According to new research Omegle grew globally from about 34 million visits a month in January 2020 to 65 million in January 2021. Global child protection groups are increasingly concerned about predators using the site to gather self-generated child sexual abuse material.

The reasons I am very concerned about this site are:

1. On TikTok alone, videos tagged with "Omegle" have been viewed more than 9.4 billion times. With TikTok having become very popular during lockdown, our children could easily follow links to Omegle.

2. Omegle has been the subject of recent viral videos from popular social media influencers including KSI, Charli D'Amelio, James Charles and Emma Chamberlain. I do not underestimate the 'influence' these famous people have on young children so worry that children may think the site is fine.

3. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), which is responsible for finding and removing images and videos of child sexual abuse online, said the results of the BBC investigation were troubling but followed a recent trend.

4. "Self-generated sexual abuse materials have been found elsewhere on the internet which has been created by predators who have captured and distributed footage from Omegle," said Chris Hughes, director at the IW foundation.

5. I have copied a short excerpt from the BBC report that shows some of the issues they found on the site:

"During the approximately 10 hours that we monitored Omegle, we were paired with dozens of under-18s, and some appeared to be as young as seven or eight. Omegle's disclaimer states that users should be 18 or over, but there is no age verification process in place."

The report went on to say that during just one two-hour period, they were connected at random with 27 individuals displaying inappropriate behaviour or adverts containing pornography.

Please check (without alerting your children to the site) if your child has Omegle on their devices or have downloaded the Omegle app.

And….

If you have any questions or would like to know anything further about developing your child's e-safety to help them safeguard themselves then please email me at the email address below.

Don't forget to let me know if there is any subject you would like covering in future newsletters.

If you have any concerns at all as well as reporting them online, please alert us to them as well so we can look into them / investigate any site issues, this will help us safeguard other children and possibly alert other parents to potential issues. Please email us at admin@dalmain.lewisham.sch.uk

Yours sincerely,
Mrs Woodhall
Safeguarding & Behaviour Lead

WHAT IS DIGITAL RESILIENCE?

A child who is digitally resilient will be able to:

! Understand when they are at risk online

Know what to do to seek help

Learn from experience

Recover when things go wrong

This involves:

• Recognising potentially risky scenarios.
• Understanding how to deal with them.
• Using these experiences to adapt what they do online in the future.

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