Dear Parents/Carers

Welcome to the latest edition of The Highfield News.

Schools Wellbeing Award

Over the past year, the school has collectively been working towards the Wellbeing Award for Schools. On 18th March an Award Verifier came in to the school to assess the work which has already been carried out and continues to run. We are delighted to announce that we have been awarded with the Wellbeing Award For Schools.

The school has always aimed to create a place where students can feel safe and secure in terms of their own wellbeing. We are committed to providing a healthy and caring environment which improves the quality of life for all students and staff. Over the past year the school has introduced a dedicated Change Team, started to offer parent classes, the school website has a dedicated area which contains lots of advice and support for students and their parents/carers, and there is a dedicated wellbeing email address for anyone to use at any time (wellbeing@highfield.herts.sch.uk).

The Award Verifier stated in their report ‘The school clearly sees Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health (EWMH) as central to its work and has done for many years. The award has allowed them to identify which areas require more attention and plan appropriate responses. The evidence provided was exceptionally clear and over and above the minimum requirements essential for the award.....’A key strength identified during verification, is the belief and commitment from the Headteacher and senior staff regarding the importance of EWMH.’

We have been working hard with students, staff, parents/carers and the Student Leadership Team to develop our offering here at school and are delighted to have been recognised for our work in this area. We look forward to developing our work over the coming years and being able to support our students, staff and their families.

Miss S Waseem
Assistant Headteacher and EWMH Lead

Year 11 And Year 10 Revision Advice For Easter

The GCSE public examinations will start on the 13th May and Year 10 mock exams will take place in June. We have worked with the Year 11 and 10 students so that they are fully prepared to complete revision over the Easter holidays.

Students will have put together a timetable during Tutor time which will include planned revision tasks. We suggest that students make the most of the Easter break by completing regular short tasks. The more work put in now, the more reward there will be in the summer; but do remember to have some time for family and friends. More information on revision tips are available on the school website:


Mrs J Clift
Assistant Headteacher

End Of Term, Early Close Reminder

Please note the school will close early on Friday 5th April. Students will be dismissed between 12.30pm and 12.40pm.

The Summer Term will commence on Wednesday 24th April.
## Students Of The Fortnight

The students of the fortnight who have been rewarded for their positive attitude or engagement in or outside of school are below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>W/C 25th February Winners</th>
<th>W/C 11th March Winners</th>
<th>W/C 25th March Winners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>• Ewan Williams • Lucy Cherry • Alex Hurst • Riley Hobbs • Kai Brett • Tyrese Waggott • Lucy Fox</td>
<td>• Zoe Kantaris • Jessica Quince • Molly Simmonds • Jack Hurst-Muggridge • Aiden Byrne • Clementine Cope • Tom Colbon</td>
<td>• Miah Weeden • Luke Valentine • Carla Brookes • Luke Jackson • Connor Herd • Cian Maestri • Aurora Smith • Ella Rose Hipgrave • Chloe Chin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>• Dylan Chahal • Ben Walden • Emily Ireland • Jateyah Bazile-Barnett • Ashley Taipi • Ethan Mahoney</td>
<td>• Dylan Chahal • Adam Kelly • Jack Gower • Rumman Johal • Liam Rayner</td>
<td>• Adam Kelly • Brynn Forster • Jack Fletcher • Emily Gudgeon • Harry Butt • Daisy Checkley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>• Beth Watling • Ellie Franklin • Louie Shrimpton • Sam Phillips • Dan Stevens</td>
<td>• Ale Tagliaferro • Lucie Owen-Stevens • Ellie-May Wiegand • Tommy Baugh • Ellen Sneddon • Pavan Chahal • James Newland</td>
<td>• Sophie Gore • Natasha Ingram • Mariella Thapar • Matty Bellamy • Michelle Erskine • Hope Monahan • Eden Loaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>• Ciaran Grenyer • George Brown • Alissa-May Bullock • Leonardo Abrunhosa • Ellie Matthews • Sophie Davies • Ruby Cascarina • Alice Gore</td>
<td>• Spike Perry • Deanna White • Naomi Gough • Neve Murdoch • Joshua Wilding • Jessica Kelly • Brandon Hargreaves • Mikolaj Ziolkowski</td>
<td>• Shaline Binoy • Ellie-Jade Glasgow • Spencer Driver • Dylan Curry • Simon Middleton • Felicity Cook-Allen • Charlie Rosendale • Holly Scoot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>• Isabelle Bangs • Sabien Pennie • Jack Staddon • Grace Crudgington • Spencer Taylor • Nile Odejimi-Riley • Ethan Salerno • Tom Blythe • Cameron Wilson • Joe Palmer • Lewis Charles</td>
<td>• Bethany Moat • Rhys Toman • Phoebe Debnam • Oliver Gobey • Kya Purchase</td>
<td>• Louis Bailey • Dylan Hough • Cameron Fraser • Nathan James • Abigail Cobb • Kyra James • Louis Leadbeater • Skye Pritchett • Billy Brown • Talia Furr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next sets of winners will be announced in the next edition of The Highfield News. Good luck!

Mrs J Garthwaite
Assistant Headteacher/Head of KS3 and KS4
**The Highfield News**

**Issue 5**

**Year 7 Football Round Up**

The Year 7 football team have been training on Monday afterschool and have shown great dedication. They have played fixtures against The Priory, Knights Templar, Fearnhill and Greneway Schools. The highlight must be winning 2-1 against local rivals Fearnhill.

Many players have had the opportunity to represent the school and they have all done fantastically well, a couple of stand out performers have been Jake Robinson and Callum Atkins.

**Year 9 Football**

The Year 9 football team have stormed Division 2 and have now been promoted to the top league. They have won all their games convincingly and are definitely ready for the challenge next season. If they play as well as they have this season they will be pushing for a district final place next season. Some stand out performers this season have been Theo Nobbs, Brandon Owen and Josh Mgguni.

**Netball Review - Year 8 And 9**

Netball club has been extremely well attended over the last two terms with students showing outstanding commitment and determination throughout. Both teams have had great results in the North Herts Netball Leagues, only losing one game each. The results are:

**Year 9:**
- Marriots 4 – Highfield 9 (w)
- Knights Templar School 10 – Highfield 6 (L)
- Meridian 5 – Highfield 7 (w)
- Fearnhill 2 – Highfield 27 (w)

The team was Hannah McCabe (Captain) Izzy Harald, Jess Notley, Katie Albon, Danielle Erskine, Michelle Erskine, Kiruneya Jeyakumar, Emma Lloyd and Bryony Gibbon

**Year 8:**
- Marriots 1 – Highfield 9 (w)
- Fearnhill 1 – Highfield 9 (w)
- Barnwell 2 – Highfield 8 (w)
- St Christophers School 3 – Highfield 3 (D)

The team was Charlotte Andrews (Captain) Kelsey Cockerton, Cara Okoh, Leah Brookes, River Moon, Natasha Nicol, Macy Manning and Emily Cairncross

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**The Pirates Of Penzance**

A huge congratulations to the seven Highfield School students who performed ‘The Pirates of Penzance’ with Young Arcadians at St Christopher’s School in February. James Newland (The Pirate King), Freya Cocks (Edith), Neve Murdoch (Kate), Lucy Cook-Allen (Mabel), Pippa Cascarina (Emily), Erin-Rose Coates (Dan) and Kaiya Braddock (Lou) were part of a superb production with the Young Arcadians, who are now in their 40th anniversary year.

**Drama News**

In February, The Highfield School’s ‘Inside Out’ Theatre Company visited St Thomas More and Pixmore Primary School to deliver a hard-hitting performance about the importance of road safety. The piece was co-directed by the Sixth Form Drama Ambassadors and was well received by students and staff alike.

Mr Rance and Miss Little would like to thank the Year 9 students for the hard work and dedication they have all shown. They were a credit to the school and to the Drama department.

Well done everyone!

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**Sports Roundup**

*news, reviews & results*

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Mr T Rance

Subject Leader of Drama
North Herts Schools' Book Awards

A group of Highfield School students visited Fearnhill School on Wednesday 20th March for the North Herts Schools' Book Awards (NHSBA) 2019. They spent the morning with students, teachers and librarians from several local schools to decide the winning books in the younger and older age group categories.

We were welcomed by Fearnhill’s Headteacher Ms Ellis along with Ms Hunt, the Head of Library, who had organised the event.

The students split into groups to talk about the three books they had read and hear what other people had to say. Some very interesting and topical discussions followed as the shortlisted books had provided an engaging mix of real life issues, history and fantasy. While the voting slips were being counted we enjoyed a talk from Lucy Adlington, whose book The Red Ribbon was last year’s winner. Dressed in an authentic 1940’s travelling costume, with two mysterious suitcases, she took us on a fascinating journey followed by a Q&A session which the Highfield students were very eager to take part in, making thoughtful contributions and asking some very good questions.

After the talk, Ms Hunt announced the winning books in each category. This was the biggest turnout ever for the NHSBA with a total of 119 votes cast. There was a cheer when A Skinful of Shadows was announced as the winner in the older category. Frances Hardinge’s supernatural story set during the English Civil War was a very popular winner, coming ahead of two other great books: Optimists Die First by Susin Nielsen and I Am Thunder by Muhammad Khan. The voting was extremely close in the younger category but The Land of Neverendings by Kate Saunders just pipped Boy 87 by Ele Fountain and Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes. I think most of the readers acknowledged that the latter two were important and thought provoking stories, though sometimes uncomfortable to read.

We stayed to get books and bookmarks signed by Lucy Adlington who chatted to each student and gave encouragement for their own reading and writing. Everyone found it a very enjoyable and inspiring morning!

All the books from the NHSBA shortlist are available in the library and we will start shadowing the Carnegie Medal which also has a great shortlist of books (see posters in the Library and English).

Mrs C Turner
Library Manager

Spring Concert

Thank you to everyone who came to our Spring Concert. It was a fantastic evening displaying some of the wonderful musical talent at our school. Congratulations to all our performers who did the school very proud.

Mrs S Meacham and Mr T Nichols
Parent/Carer Workshops

Term Time Holidays

If you wish to take your child out of school for any reason, other than illness or a medical appointment, we would ask that you write to the Headteacher explaining your reasons for requesting the absence. Leave, however, will not normally be granted for the purposes of a family holiday.

Please be aware that it is Herts County Council Policy to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for holidays taken in term time. This is regardless of the overall level of the student’s attendance, and whether the unauthorised absence relates solely to a holiday or other unauthorised absence.

Unauthorised Absence

We would remind you that parents of students who have at least 15 sessions of unauthorised absences in the previous or current term may be issued with a Penalty Notice.

For example, this means that when the new term starts in April, unauthorised absences from the current term (January to Easter) will still be taken into account when considering whether or not to issue a Fixed Penalty Notice in the Summer Term. Please note that a session is equal to half a day so one day's absence is equal to two sessions. This means that any absence of 15 sessions (i.e. 7-8 days) or more for an unauthorised holiday may lead to the issue of a Fixed Penalty Notice without any further warning. Where the unauthorised holiday is for less than 7-8 days, please be aware that should your child’s attendance fall to 95% or lower, these unauthorised holiday absences may be taken into account when issuing a Fixed Penalty Notice.

Fixed Penalty Notice

A Fixed Penalty Notice requires each parent with parental responsibility to pay a fine of £60 within 21 days. If this fine is not paid within the time limit, the penalty rises to £120 which must be paid within 28 days. To be clear, this means that where a child has 2 parents, both with parental responsibility, each individual parent will be issued with a £60 fine. Fines to both parents will still be issued even when parents are not living together. Please be aware that these fines are issued and administered by Herts County Council and not by the School.

Who do I contact with questions?

If you require any further clarification regarding term time holidays, Fixed Penalty Notices, or if you have any other questions to do with your child’s attendance, I can be reached by selecting the Attendance option via the School Switchboard on 01462 620500 or through the Absence email: absence@highfield.herts.sch.uk

Mrs C Thomas
Deputy Leader of Pastoral Care/Attendance Manager

HAND News

The latest issue of HAND News is available to download at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/handnews

It includes lots of information on free courses for parents/carers, inclusive activities for children, support groups and much more.

Parent/Carer Workshops

Online Safety Workshops

On the 12th March, all students from Year 7 to 13 were involved in an Online Safety Workshop throughout the day, led by Luke from ECP. The workshops were age appropriate and tailored for each year group, focusing on the following key messages, centred around students taking control of their online footprint and awareness of online grooming:

• Take control of your personal information online – don’t share it
• Keep control of the comments and images you share online – don’t share inappropriate images and comments that will put you at risk
• Keep control of your privacy – make sure your privacy settings are at the highest level (friends only, location services off, ghost mode)
• Share your concerns and worries about online content or behaviour (with a trusted adult, CEOP, worried@highfield.herts.sch.uk and/or ChildLine)

Students have been asked to complete an Online Safety survey to give us their views on the impact of the sessions and to help us plan for future sessions.

Talking about sex and relationship with your teenager: Workshop for parent and carers

On Thursday, 21st March Vanessa Rogers was at Highfield to deliver this workshop. The workshop included:

• Up-to-date information about sex education and the National Curriculum
• Useful tips on how to have positive talks about relationships, sexuality and sex at home
• Details of where to go for additional information and support
• A question and answer session for parents to learn more.

I hope those of you who attended found the session useful.

It was great to see some parents/carers attend the evening workshops for parents and carers. If you were unable to attend either of the parent/carer workshops you can find the presentations and resources presented on the evening on the school website:

http://www.highfield.herts.sch.uk/Assembly-Presentations-and-Notices

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It includes lots of information on free courses for parents/carers, inclusive activities for children, support groups and much more.
Reporting Your Child Absent
We ask that parents contact the school as early as possible on EACH day that their child is absent. This can be done via:

- Ringing the school on 01462 620500 and selecting the Attendance option (1) via the school switchboard and leaving a message
- Ringing the Absence Line direct on 01462 705104 and leaving a message
- Emailing the Absence email: absence@highfield.herts.sch.uk
- Sending a message via the schoolcomms gateway app

Nut and Seedfree Zone
Just a reminder that our school is a nutfree school, this includes sesame seeds. Please be advised that some snacks such as Nutella bars do contain nuts and should not be brought into school.

We have quite a number of students in school who have severe nut allergies and can be seriously affected by someone else who is eating, or may have recently eaten nuts.

Please encourage your child to understand that eating a nut product can have a serious effect on a student later on in the classroom.

Leading A Healthy Lifestyle
You may recall from Issue 1 of The Highfield News that following feedback from the the parent/carer questionnaires that were completed in the last academic year, we were producing a graphic to outline the work we do to help your child lead a healthy lifestyle.

The poster highlighting what we do at school can be found over the page.

Mr I Morris
Headteacher

E-Safety
National Online Safety are producing some really useful guidance for parents/ carers on a number of areas.

Please see the back of this newsletter for information and guidance on VPN’s and Apex Legends.

For regular e-safety updates, you can also follow us on:

Twitter: https://twitter.com/highfieldschool
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/thehighfieldschool/
Miss C Macrae
Deputy Headteacher

Term Dates

**Summer Term 2019**
- 23rd April 2019 - INSET Day
- 24th April 2019 - Term Starts For All Year Groups
- 27th May 2019 - 31st May 2019 – Half Term Week
- 4th July 2019 - Year 8 Parents’ Evening
- 19th July 2019 - Last Day Of Term - Early Close

**Results Days**
- 15th August 2019 - A Level Results Day
- 22nd August 2019 - GCSE Results Day

**Autumn Term 2019**
- 2nd September 2019 - INSET Day – No Students Please
- 3rd September 2019 - New Term Starts - More Details To Follow
- 28th October 2019 - 1st November 2019 – Half Term Week
- 6th December 2019 - Occasional Day
- 20th December 2019 - Last Day Of Term - Early Close

**Spring Term 2020**
- 6th January 2020 - INSET Day – No Students Please
- 7th January 2020 - Term Starts For All Year Groups
- 17th February 2020 - 21st February 2020 – Half Term Week
- 3rd April 2020 - Last Day Of Term - Early Close

**Summer Term 2020**
- 20th April 2020 - INSET Day – No Students Please
- 21st April 2020 – Term Starts For All Year Groups
- 25th May 2020 – 29th May 2020 – Half Term Week
- 17th July 2020 – Last Day Of Term - Early Close

A full calendar of events can be found on the school website: http://www.highfield.herts.sch.uk/Calendar

Lost Property
There are a number of items of lost property in the Front Office including glasses, jewellery and uniform. If your child has mislaid anything, please send them to the Front Office to look.
The Highfield School’s Guide To Being A Healthy, More Sustainable School

Working together to build a healthy, more sustainable school

Cycle Or Walk To School
We encourage those students who live close to school to walk or cycle.

Our bike racks are covered by CCTV for added security.

Keeping Hydrated
Water stations are located around the school and students are allowed to bring water in bottles to lessons.
We do not allow fizzy drinks or energy drinks to be brought into school.

Active PE Lessons And Extra-Curricular Activities
Students take part in weekly PE lessons which offer a variety of sporting activities.
We also offer an extensive extra-curricular timetable that is open to all students.

Supporting Each Other
The school has a dedicated wellbeing team who can support you if you feel you need extra support for your child in terms of their emotional health and wellbeing. They may be able to support you and your child directly in school or find a service who can offer the tailored help needed.
Contact wellbeing@highfield.herts.sch.uk
Parent/carer sessions will also be run throughout the course of the year to provide additional support.

Our Canteen Gives Students A Choice!
The canteen offers a wide range delicious and nutritious meals including a Meal Of The Day, Salad Bar, Jacket Potatoes, Pasta Bar, Sandwiches/ Wraps, Fresh Fruit Corner s and One Pots.
All drinks comply with the Government standards for schools.

The Eatwell Guide
Throughout their time at school students look at the Eatwell Guide.
They will look at the ‘8 Healthy Tips’, food swaps and talk about making better choices.

All pots used in the school canteen are made from sustainable, compostable materials.

The Highfield School’s Guide To Being A Healthy, More Sustainable School
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Did you know?

Exam stress can be really challenging, not only for children but for those that live with them. Research shows that having someone to talk to about their work can help. Support from a parent, teacher or friend can help young people share their worries and keep things in perspective.

Survey research has identified that exams are a significant source of stress and worry for pupils in secondary school. In particular, failing important examinations, and the consequences of failing these examinations, are rated as more important than a range of other personal and social worries. (Optimus education)

The NHS highlight that children and young people who experience stress may:

- worry a lot
- feel tense
- get lots of headaches and stomach pains
- not sleep well
- be irritable
- lose interest in food, or eat more than normal
- not enjoy activities they previously enjoyed
- seem negative and low in their mood
- seem hopeless about the future

What can you do?

Watch out for signs of stress and encourage your child to talk to a member of school staff or someone who they feel is supportive. If you feel your child isn’t coping, it may also be helpful for you to talk to their teachers at school.

Encourage and support your child to build and maintain healthy habits before and during the exam period, such as eating a healthy balanced diet, staying hydrated, getting enough sleep, doing exercise, having time to relax and to socialise with friends.

Remind your child that feeling nervous and anxious is normal. Support them to be organised, have a routine and build a revision timetable. Try not to add to their pressure by being flexible with them. Talk to them about how they feel, remind them of their goals in life and motivate them to stay focused. Staying calm will help them remain calm - and exams don’t last forever.
Helping your child learn self-care can help them get through tough times such as exams, challenges or adversities. Suggest ideas to them about how to take care of their physical health, mental health and to be creative. Ideas include exercising, walking, having a manicure, going for a haircut, seeing friends, having a bath, reading books, listening to podcasts or drawing.

Self-care works best as a routine to help your child feel energised and deal with pressures well. Talk to your child about the importance of doing things they enjoy and that make them feel happy. Bounce ideas around with them, put them in the calendar and support them as they do them.

Encourage your child to make self-care a priority, remind them about it every so often and help them with what you can do together. Doing self-care activities together not only helps your child to cultivate good habits, it also helps your mind and body be at its best. Ideas don’t need to be time consuming or elaborate, and sometimes they might be indulging! Get started by cooking healthy meals together, pursuing hobbies, taking pride in each other’s appearance, having fun, getting outdoors, volunteering, or by watching a feel-good film.

Research shows that we need to build self-care habits from an early age so that when your child hits difficulties and roadblocks, they are able to navigate them skilfully and stay strong and steady. Self-care for teenagers is crucial with all the hormone changes, mood swings, struggles with self-image, self-esteem and building independence.

Self-care is anything you enjoy doing that helps make you happy and maintains your physical, mental or emotional health. Self-care helps parents and teens deal with life’s everyday pressures in a more positive and rewarding way. Recent research has revealed that teaching teenagers how to balance their own needs now will help them in the future, while reducing some of the strain on their lives right now. Self-care can lead to healthier, happier, more adjusted young people. Studies have demonstrated that when parents practice self-care, it’s been shown that teens are encouraged to do the same, and take this positive habit into later life. So, your self-care helps teach your child how to look after themselves better.
What parents need to know about VPNs

Although a great privacy tool in the right hands, VPNs can be dangerous for children and let them bypass restrictions you have on web browsing.

What is a VPN?

A Virtual Private Network (VPN) is a privacy tool used to hide internet activity from prying eyes. Without a VPN, internet traffic is sent directly from your computer or smartphone, letting anyone in-between you and a website or service that you’re accessing (such as a wireless hotspot owner or your ISP) see what you’re doing. With a VPN, a secure tunnel is created between your computer or phone and what’s known as the endpoint. The endpoint is merely the part of the internet where your connection comes out and can be in the same country as you or located anywhere else in the world.

Using a VPN has two main effects. First, as the tunnel is fully encrypted, nobody between you and the final endpoint can see what you’re up to. Secondly, as all of your traffic looks as though it’s coming from the endpoint, you can further avoid being tracked and monitored, hiding your real location from everyone.

VPNs have many legitimate uses. For example, running a VPN when on a wireless hotspot or hotel network that you don’t trust, gives you additional security. There’s also improved privacy by using a VPN, preventing ad networks and the like from tracking you and blocking according to a list of what’s not allowed. With a VPN, the secure tunnel that’s created means that web traffic can’t be viewed, so parental control tools work by looking at the sites that a child is trying to visit, and then blocking according to a list of what’s not allowed. With a VPN, the secure tunnel that’s created means that web traffic can’t be viewed, so parental control tools work by looking at the sites that a child is trying to visit, and then blocking according to a list of what’s not allowed.

What are the risks?

There are three main issues with VPN usage by children, potentially affecting their privacy (and yours), and opening them up to seeing inappropriate content.

1) Viewing age-inappropriate content

Parental control tools work by looking at the sites that a child is trying to visit, and then blocking according to a list of what’s not allowed. With a VPN, the secure tunnel that’s created means that web traffic can’t be viewed, so parental control tools work by looking at the sites that a child is trying to visit, and then blocking according to a list of what’s not allowed. With a VPN, the secure tunnel that’s created means that web traffic can’t be viewed, so parental control tools work by looking at the sites that a child is trying to visit, and then blocking according to a list of what’s not allowed.

2) Malware infections

Installing any unknown application is fraught with danger, and the same applies to many free VPN applications. In an investigation, it was found that 38% of free Android VPNs contained malware, with 75% also designed to track activity. By installing suspect software, a child may be opening themselves up to being spied on and their private details being stolen. If you use a shared device with a child, an infection can also affect you. Malware can spread, and the child’s device can become an active participant in the network. There’s a chance that a dodgy VPN will use your computer and internet bandwidth, too. Back in 2015, the free Hola VPN extension was found to be secretly selling its users’ bandwidth via another service and, in some cases, users’ internet connections were being used for illegal activity.

3) Free VPNs can spy on people

The best commercial VPNs are built around privacy and have strict rules about hiding activity, not spying on users and not logging data. These tools are built for adults who wish to protect their anonymity. Children often go for free VPNs that they might have in place. No liability is entered into. Current as of the date of release: 20.03.19

What parents can do

Although the risks might seem entirely different, the protection from VPNs is the same for all of the threats.

Filter VPN sites

Check the parental controls software that you’re using to see if there’s a filter to block VPN/Proxy traffic. If this is selected, it will prevent most known VPNs from working, along with proxy websites.

Block VPN applications

Stopping and removing any VPN applications running on a child’s device is a must. If you have parental control software that can restrict application use, make sure that you investigate any application that your child wants to install and block all VPNs. If you’ve recently enabled any applications, go back and check what they’re used for and remove any VPNs that you find. If you don’t have software to check what’s running on a child’s devices, then you should manually check. Searching for an application with VPN in the name is a good idea. Look out for tell-tale signs, too: computers and phones will usually display a different connection symbol when a VPN is connected. You can also use a child’s computer to try and view a restricted website to ensure that filtering is still in place.

Monitor your child’s online activity

In order to prevent your children from falling prey to inappropriate content, it’s important to monitor your child’s internet usage and have open and honest discussions with them about their online activities.

Meet our expert

This guide has been written by David Ludlow. David has been a technology journalist for more than 20 years, covering everything from internet security to the latest computing trends and the smart home. A father of two (a nine-year-old and six-year-old), he’s had to control and manage how his children access online services and use apps.
At National Online Safety we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information they need to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children. This guide focuses on one platform of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

**APEX LEGENDS**

APEX LEGENDS is a multiplayer battle royale video game which is free to play. In this game, twenty teams consisting of three players each are deployed onto an island from a dropship, where they compete against each other to be the last team standing. Each player on the squad gets to choose a ‘Legend’ to play with; one of eight unique characters with a specialised skillset in either ‘Offense’, ‘Support’ or ‘Recon’. The players begin with no weapons or equipment and have to comb through an ever-shrinking play area for these, all the while killing enemies to emerge as the victorious trio. The game is currently available on PC, PlayStation 4 and Xbox One.

**What parents need to know about APEX LEGENDS**

**VIOLENCE**

Realistic versions of modern day firearms and gunsfire, coupled with intense bloodlust, bleeding and blood stains on screen and large explosions make this game appear more violent than the less graphic Fortnite. A game similar to Apex Legends. Players use a variety of modern military weapons such as sniper rifles, machine guns, knives and frag grenades. Besides frantic gun battles, players also get to perform finishing moves on weakened enemies. These include electrocution, stabbing them with knives, blinding them with flashlights, and using chemical gas attacks on multiple opponents before ‘finishing them off’. These attacks are often shown in close up and the victim’s perspective also. In light of this, PEGI has rated this game suitable for children 16 and older in the UK and Europe, while in the US it is rated 13+. Overexposure to such violence can cause distress to younger children.

**PLAYING WITH STRANGERS**

Since Apex Legends is an online game with a squad of three players, your child will need two other friends to play alongside. If your child is online, then your child will have to play with strangers. Play can only be conducted with others who have compatible hardware, such as headphones and microphones and this always carries the risk that they might encounter unacceptable graphical or text-based chat settings of the game, which they cannot control.

**IT CAN BE ADDICTIVE**

Children love to play battle royale games, due to their competitive nature. However, the chance to play with friends against 57 other players might put undue pressure on your child to play at a certain time when their friends are online. This might also mean that quitting half way through the game could cause distress to your child and their team mates. Children might therefore feel compelled to play the game until they achieve their desired results. Even though a typical game might last around twenty minutes, children may feel angry if they lose and decide to play another round.

**PREVENT YOUR CHILD FROM COMMUNICATING WITH STRANGERS**

Communicating with teammates is an essential and enjoyable part of the game. Parents should encourage their children to play the game with friends they know, in order to avoid communicating with strangers in their team. Your child should always check the player before joining a game, and you should talk to your child about the risks of playing with strangers.

**ABUSIVE PLAYERS & CHEATERS**

As with any online game, there is a risk of players using intimidation and abusive language. This risk is increased if when children play games with strangers. Another potential threat is the hacker who makes encouraging children to cheat in the game and make money off them.

**IN-GAME PURCHASES**

Although anyone with an EA account can download and play this free for fun, it does allow players to make a variety of in-game purchases with real money. Range anywhere between £7.99 and £79.99, players can purchase Apex Coins, the primary currency players use in these in-game purchases allow the players to unlock cosmetic upgrades for characters as well as new Legends. Apex Legends updates quickly than regular gameplay. Apex coins can be purchased with Apex Packs. These packs allow players to unlock rare items. Unlike many other battle royale style games, there are no duplicate items in ‘loot boxes’, which can incentivise children to purchase more frequently. Online games containing such ‘Crafting Materials’ and ‘Legends Tokens’ can also be used to unlock these upgrades through regular gaming.

**GAMEPLAY VIDEOS**

In order to better understand and improve their game, children might be tempted to use sites such as YouTube and search for Apex Legends gameplay videos. This might introduce them to obscene language used by gamers in these videos. Many videos on YouTube do not have age ratings and the ones that do display warnings for age restricted content are easy to bypass. In addition, children may be further exposed to inappropriate content when watching other suggested videos that pop up on YouTube. Watching videos online of players opening their loot boxes on Apex Legends is one of the latest crazes. Although there is little risk attached to this, it may encourage your child to purchase loot boxes.

**Top Tips for Parents**

**JUDGE FOR YOURSELF**

Before exposing your child to any game involving violence, it may be a good idea to judge the appropriateness and impact of that game by playing online sites of it first or even by playing the game yourself. If you deem it suitable, only then allow your child to play the game. Moreover, you can take steps to ensure that the age restriction set by the game is being met, such as ensuring that children are playing the game. You can also carry out regular spot checks in the conversation history between your child and their online friends.

**MONITOR SEARCH ENGINES**

In order to prevent your children from falling prey to obscene language. It is important to monitor social media and search engine usage. Parents can restrict access to non-updated content by blocking certain websites. With the help of activity logs, parents can ensure that their children are not using any app or browsing any website which could affect their age. Parents can also look up safe search engines and browsers for children that have built-in filters and pre-screened child friendly content. When your child plays games online, it’s important to have open and honest discussions with them regarding their activities and encourage positive behaviour towards others, as you would in real life.

**RESTRICT PAYMENT METHODS**

If you do not want your children to make any in-game purchases or microtransactions, you must ensure that none of your debit/credit cards are linked to their player account or console. If your child plays the game on PlayStation 4 or Xbox One, you have the option of creating an Adult Guardian and will be able to change this in your settings. Further to this, if you suspect your child has accessed an adult gaming platform, you can contact the player account to prevent them from making any unsolicited purchases. You can then take steps to ensure that you don’t password protect your account and your child make unwanted purchases. If your child did not create an account, it’s unlikely that you’ll be able to claim refunds.

**LIMIT GAME TIME**

With any new game that becomes an overnight success, it is important for parents to keep an eye on your children and see how it affects them. If you think your child’s becoming addicted to playing the game, you should consider controls on 18+ or Xbox One to stop your child from playing. If your child has still access to the time they play the game for, this is particularly difficult to leave when playing through the game, you can find more information on setting up the amount of time they play the game for. For parents who are unable to monitor the number of matches your child plays, rather than the time the game is played for. As games, open and honest conversations with your child are critical. If your child’s playing the game for too much time, set up boundaries and be clear about what is and isn’t acceptable.

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