

27th June 2017

Dear Parent

Counselling and Mental Health Apps

I am very proud to say that The Lakes School has a strong reputation for keeping children safe and for its level of pastoral care and support. We know this because students, parents and Ofsted repeatedly tell us so. Staff throughout The Lakes School work hard to fulfil our mission statement of being a caring, learning community. One of our principle beliefs is in the value of face-to-face support for young people when they are in a time of need. Basic human face-to-face interaction is vital to help people feel valued, cared for and loved and we know that this is most effective when the words people speak can be read alongside facial expressions, body language, a smile here or a sigh there...all of which are fundamental to truly understanding how someone feels. Face-to-face support is at the core of what we believe when we are supporting young people.

We are aware of an increasing number of applications, or 'apps', for mobile devices that provide a 'counselling' service for young people. These are not apps that encourage relaxation through breathing exercises or reflection activities, but apps that require young people to sign up to an account with the intention of engaging with someone through a messaging service within the app itself. The nature of these apps is that someone responds to messages from the child and tries to explore and understand their feelings before providing support, guidance and/or advice. It is therefore possible that the very people responding to a young person and offering them advice is not qualified to give such advice. The app or people giving advice may not be regulated by any particular body within this country and it is possible that some young people could be giving advice to other young people. It is also possible that some of these apps could be infiltrated by people with grooming or other criminal tendencies.

The School's Position

Staff at The Lakes School are not in a position to recommend such apps to students as we believe that face-to-face support is so important. We encourage students to speak to a parent, their Form Tutor, another member of staff or a family member or friend when they require support. We feel that this is a strong position for the school to hold and we also believe that this supports parents at a time when it is possible through mobile devices for young people to live an online life that we as parents may not be fully aware of.

What can I do as a parent?

The speed of change around social media and mobile devices presents many challenges for us as parents and the school would not in any way wish to shape how parents choose to raise their child or children. However, we would like to draw your attention to the increase in these apps so that you can choose how to address this within your own family. A supportive and timely conversation to check in with your child's use of their mobile devices may just provide some reassurance that they are using their mobile device in an appropriate manner and not engaging in potentially unregulated or unfiltered exchanges with people who they have never met and therefore cannot truly trust.

What will we do at The Lakes School?

Staff at The Lakes School will continue to live to our principle of valuing face-to-face interactions. We will only ever recommend an app of any kind through a formal channel such as writing to parents, advertising it on our website or through our Facebook page. We will continue to educate our students about the dangers of the internet through assemblies and our curriculum provision. We will support the emotional health and well-being of our students by valuing a balance in life between work and play and will continue to value the importance of the arts, physical activity, the outdoors and adventure.

The caring section of our website is a useful source of information and the page on [Emotional Health](#) provides a good overview about how we support our students. Click on [Emotional Health](#) to visit the page and find out about our work.

Something to try...

Just for fun, you might like to write down your 50 ways to relax! Personal to you and accompanied with a little sketch. Take a sheet of A4 and fill it with all of your 50 ways to relax. Take out the art materials you haven't used in a while and add your sketches. You might want to think about how much time you spend actually doing those things. You might like to do this with your child or children to encourage them to think about how they truly relax and take time for themselves.

In closing, we would like to thank parents for keeping us informed about their child and about any aspects of family life outside of school that better help us care for your child. Happy young people make the best learners and the dialogue parents have with Form Tutors and other staff helps us better support all of our students.

Yours sincerely



A Cunningham
Headteacher

