



Safe At Summerhill

At Summerhill School we are committed to Safeguarding our children and young people as well as promoting positive well-being for all.

This Safeguarding newsletter, aims to help staff, parents and students alike to be aware of the safeguarding and mental health issues, giving you useful links and resources to use if you have concerns. If you have concerns or ideas for future topics please do not hesitate to contact us on the main school number 01384 816165 or via email on studentssupport@summerhill.dudley.sch.uk

Drug Alert: Vapes Containing Spice

Vape pens containing the synthetic cannabinoid (SCRA known as Spice) have led to two recent incidents in London where young people were hospitalised. In one incident in Greenwich, five teenagers who vaped from a blue and purple "Vapresso" branded pen (containing blue liquid in a silver and black cartridge) became seriously ill. Another incident involved two teens in Merton using a vape labelled "Lemonade Vape Cookies", which may have been sold as THC. The Metropolitan Police have now confirmed that both vapes contained Spice, which is a strong synthetic form of Cannabis that can cause serious side effects. Although both incidents involved young people, adults are just as likely to suffer ill effects from taking Spice. We don't know how widespread the issue is (or if the young people involved intended to buy these drugs), but all services should share the information below with relevant partners and professionals.

Childrens Mental Health Week

Children's Mental Health Week is a mental health awareness week that empowers, equips and gives a voice to all children and young people in the UK. The theme this year is 'My Voice Matters'. My Voice Matters is about empowering children and young people by providing them with the tools they need to express themselves. As parents and carers, you play an important role in your child's mental health. This year, we want to empower children of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to work together to create a positive change for their mental health and wellbeing. Our aim is for Children's Mental Health Week, we want all children and young people to be able to say – and believe - "My Voice Matters." There are resources available for families with help and advice to help children and their mental health. Please follow this link <https://www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk/>

February Fun at the Red House Cone

While restoration work is well underway at the historic site, the visitor centre and craft studios remain open for business as usual. All of January's events are sold out, with waiting lists available for painting, glass fusing and ceramic sessions. Please see this link to see what's on [February fun at the Red House Glass Cone \(dudley.gov.uk\)](https://www.dudley.gov.uk/visiting-the-red-house-glass-cone)

What You Need to Know about Monkey

With Omegle finally shutting down in late 2023, the top spot among video chat services is up for grabs – and Monkey has its eyes set on the crown. Randomly matching its users for 15-second conversations, the platform's developers claim to have created a dynamic online space for people to make new connections and, potentially, even some new friends.

Despite these innocuous-sounding intentions, however, Monkey has been criticised for moderation which may not be comprehensive enough to defend against the obvious dangers that unregulated, random video calls pose to the younger element of the site's userbase. The guide below tells trusted adults what they need to know about Monkey.



Mrs Sprouting
Designated
Safeguarding
Lead



Mr Randle
Deputy
Safeguarding
Lead



Ms Gordon
Deputy
Safeguarding
Lead



Mr Quirke
Deputy
Safeguarding
Lead



Mr Cresswell
Deputy
Safeguarding
Lead

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about MONKEY

AGE RESTRICTION
17+

(although the lack of age verification means that someone younger could easily log in with a false date of birth)

Also known as Monkey Cool, this platform aims to fill the gap left by Omegle (which has now shut down) by placing users in random video chats with strangers. Participants use their mobile number and Snapchat username to connect to the service, where they can make matches, message other people and join group chats. The mobile version has been removed from the App Store due to safety concerns, but iPhone owners can still access the site via their web browser. The app remains available on Google Play, where its listing claims that Monkey has more than 30 million users worldwide.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

The app claims to use AI to detect sexual content or activity that violates its policies, along with having a 24/7 moderation team. However, reports in the media continue to indicate that explicit content remains commonplace on Monkey (including sexually graphic or violent material) and is therefore accessible to anybody who uses the app – including those aged under 18.



CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

The obvious risk in accepting random video chat partners is that users cannot know what or who they will see on their next connection. Talking to strangers is, of course, potentially dangerous – especially for children who might be persuaded to meet up with these people offline. The app lets users find each other by location, increasing the chances of a child being matched with a stranger from their local area.



IN-APP SPENDING

While Monkey is free to download, it nevertheless offers in-app purchases promising to unlock access to premium features. For example, users who wish to make use of 'knock knock chat' (Monkey's text-based messaging option), rather than the app's Chatroulette-style random video calling feature, will need to pay to be able to do so.



INTRUSIONS ON PRIVACY

According to Monkey's privacy policy, personal information (such as name, profile picture and date of birth), user-contributed content (any photos, texts, videos and screenshots shared) and each user's browser and IP address are collected. That is a considerable amount of data for Monkey to gather on its users – and all of this information is shared with third parties.



Advice for Parents & Carers

DISCUSS THE DANGERS

Even if you're comfortable with your child using Monkey, it's still important to talk about the potential dangers. It's crucial, for instance, that young people recognise the risks that stem from video chatting with strangers; that they understand not to share identifying information (like their street or school name); and that they know what to do if they are exposed to inappropriate content.



RESTRICT IN-APP PURCHASING

If your child is accessing Monkey via an Android device, you can prevent them from making in-app purchases through the device's settings. If you do allow your child to use the site, we'd recommend that you enable this feature: young people have been known to spend significant amounts of money in their desire to unlock more features in apps such as this.



REPORT INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Monkey states in the safety section of its site that "people are given the power" and that, to a large extent, Monkey is "self-governing." If a user is exposed to sexually explicit or inappropriate content on the platform, they can select the 'police' emoji in the top right corner of their screen to submit a report for Monkey's moderation team to review.



SPOT THE SIGNS

If you're concerned that your child is spending too much time on Monkey – or that they may have been exposed to inappropriate or distressing content – it's important to watch for potential indications that they've been affected emotionally. They could be unusually irritable or unable to concentrate, for example, or failing to complete their homework or even to eat regular meals.



Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



The National College

NOS
National Online Safety
#WakeUpWednesday