

## Engaging Parents and Carers with Children's Use of Apps

The Education Safeguarding Adviser (Online Protection) and e-Safety Development Officer regularly receive queries from schools and settings regarding new and popular apps, and enquiring if template letters are available to warn parents and carers about apps, games and websites that are considered to be 'dangerous'.

As highlighted within our recent ["Online Safety Alerts – Think before you scare"](#) publication; whilst schools and settings wishing to warn their community is well intended, this approach often has the opposite effect. In many cases it can generate unnecessary fear, and can increase children's curiosity about apps etc. that they had not previously heard about.

New apps, games and websites appear online on a daily basis and it would be unrealistic to ask professionals or indeed parents and carers to be aware of and understand all of them. The sites and services that children and young people like to use will change regularly. If schools and settings raise concerns every time a new app or service appears, then they may find themselves sending daily communications to parents and carers! It is essential to acknowledge that whilst the apps, games and websites that children and young people use will change frequently, the messages and support that they need to keep themselves safe online will remain the same.

We suggest that settings considering raising awareness with parents and carers regularly about how they can be involved with their children's online lives. The recent [NSPCC #ShareAware campaign](#) is one of many excellent tools that schools and settings could use.

To support schools and settings, we have created two template letters that may help encourage parents and carers to consider safe and appropriate use of new apps and websites. Schools and settings may find these letters useful to share with parents, as both proactive and preventative measures, as well as following a specific concern.

- [Generic App Awareness Template Letter May 2017](#) – preventive approach
- [Generic App Incident Template Letter May 2017](#)
  - Note: We recommend that Schools and settings only use this letter after accessing the ["Online Safety Alerts – Think before you scare"](#) blog post

Some schools and settings have reported issues with engaging parents and carers when sending out general online safety awareness letters. One approach could be for the school/settings to work with their learners to re-write the template letters, so they are specifically written for their own parents/carers. As learners are asking their parents/carers to help them with their online use, settings may find that this will help increase engagement. Another approach could be to adapt the content within the template letters and "drip feed" the information throughout the year via other communication tools, such as newsletters, emails or an official social media presence.

The [Education Safeguarding Adviser \(Online Protection\) and e-Safety Development Officer](#) have a range of template letters that highlight particular apps; we are able to share these with Kent schools and settings following consultations regarding specific incidents.