

WELCOME



We are half way through the first term of this new academic year. Autumn is always a fresh start — new classes, new routines, and new opportunities to grow. It's also the perfect moment to pause and reflect on how we use technology in our everyday lives.

The online world brings countless positives: staying connected with friends, learning new skills, and exploring creative ideas. But as technology evolves so quickly, so do the risks. Each year, new apps, trends, and challenges emerge — some exciting, some less safe — and it can feel hard to keep up. That's why being informed and prepared is the best defence.

At St Benedict's, we make online safety a priority for **everyone**. This newsletter is designed to support students and parents/carers, giving practical advice, highlighting current risks, and reminding us all that help is always available if something goes wrong. We want every member of our school community to feel confident, supported, and safe when using technology.

In this Autumn edition, we focus on the rise of sextortion and image-based abuse, one of the most pressing online threats facing young people today. We'll also look at the links between digital life and mental health. Please take time to read through this newsletter together as a family. Conversations at home are one of the most powerful ways to keep young people safe online.

Together — as students, parents, and school staff — we can make this a positive and safe start to the year both in and out of the classroom.

Kind regards,

Mr J Crosthwaite

Associate SLT

Teacher of Computer Science



IN THIS EDITION WE EXPLORE:

- Sextortion and Image Abuse
- Back to School Online Safety
- Online Bullying
- Resources for parents/ carers
- Help and support

SPOTLIGHT THEME

SEXTORTION & IMAGE BASED ABUSE



When Pressure Turns Into Blackmail

One of the fastest-growing online threats facing young people today is sextortion. This is when criminals pressure, trick, or manipulate someone into sending intimate images or videos — and then threaten to share them unless money is paid.

This crime has risen sharply in the UK and worldwide over the last two years, and offenders are increasingly targeting teenagers.

How Sextortion Happens

- Offenders often pose as someone your age on apps like Instagram, Snapchat, or gaming chats.
- They may start conversations that seem friendly or even flirty, then ask for private photos.
- Some criminals use stolen or AI-generated images to make themselves look convincing.
- Once they have an image — or even if they don't — they make threats: "Pay me, or I'll send this to your friends/family."

Why This is Getting Worse

- Advances in AI and deepfake tools mean offenders can create realistic fake images or videos to intimidate victims.
- Offenders don't always need an actual photo of you — sometimes they use fakes and still manage to frighten people into paying.
- Boys are increasingly being targeted, but girls are at risk too.

What Students Should Remember

- ✓ You are not to blame. Offenders rely on shame and secrecy — but they are the ones committing a crime.
- ✓ Never send intimate images. Once shared, you lose control.
- ✓ If threatened, don't panic. Don't pay, don't send more, and don't engage.
- ✓ Save the evidence. Take screenshots or keep messages.
- ✓ Tell someone you trust. Speak to a parent, teacher, or use the Safety Hub app.
- ✓ Report it. Use in-app tools, and make a formal report at www.ceop.police.uk

A FAMILY ONLINE SAFETY CONVERSATION

What would you do if someone you didn't know messaged you online — would you reply, ignore, or block them? Why?

How do you decide what's okay to share online and what should stay private?

Have you ever seen a post or trend online that felt untrue or unsafe? How did you handle it?

BACK TO SCHOOL ONLINE SAFETY TIPS

FOR PARENTS/CARERS AND STUDENTS



Be cautious with your profile

Be careful not to give out too much info on your social media or gaming profiles.

Details like your full name, address or school's name could all help strangers to actually find you offline. A trusted adult can help you make your profiles private – so only your family and actual friends can contact you.



Keep it 'real' with online friends

Everyone enjoys adding friends and followers on social media. It's important, though, that the people you interact with online really are your friends. If they're just random people you've connected with to increase your contacts, you don't know if they could be trolls or bullies (or worse).



Report offensive in-game chat

If you game online with your mates, you'll know things can get competitive and heated on the in-game chat. Playing against people you don't know (especially if they're older) raises the risk of offensive comments and even threats.

Our advice? Find out how to block or mute them.



Be smart with screen time

Too much screen time, especially just before bed, can affect your quality of sleep. Losing sleep, or not sleeping well enough, messes with your concentration and energy levels. Try muting notifications so you don't get pinged late at night: you'll feel fresher and more focused the next day.



Manage online relationships wisely

Most people chat to their friends online. Just be mindful that once you send a pic or message (even if it's private), you no longer control who else might see it.

Messaging someone you've never actually met – and who might not be who they say – is definitely best avoided.



Learn to spot fake news

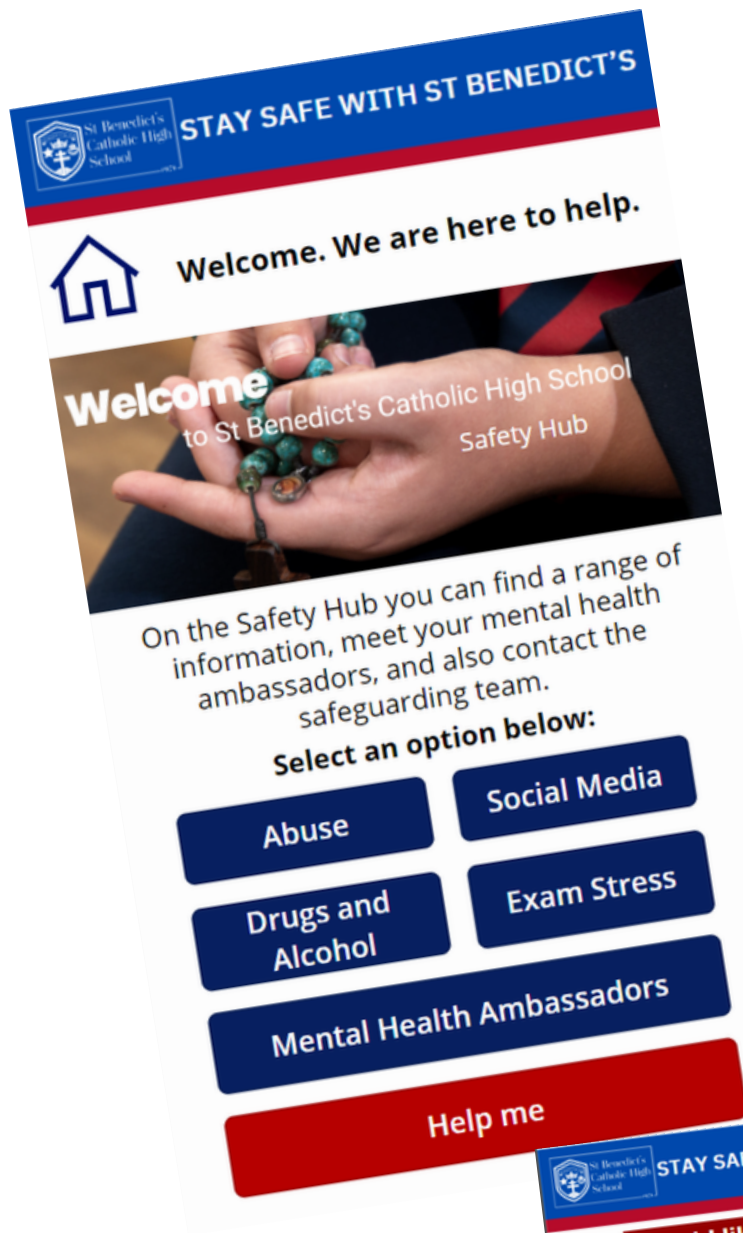
If you're looking into a topic for homework or a project, be careful not to get taken in by fake news: content that's deliberately created to mislead people. Check the story with credible sources, like the BBC or Sky News. Trust your instincts, too – if it seems too unbelievable to be true, it's probably fake.



To view more guides like this, click here to visit the online safety section of the school website.

REPORT IT. DON'T TOLERATE IT.

ONLINE BULLYING

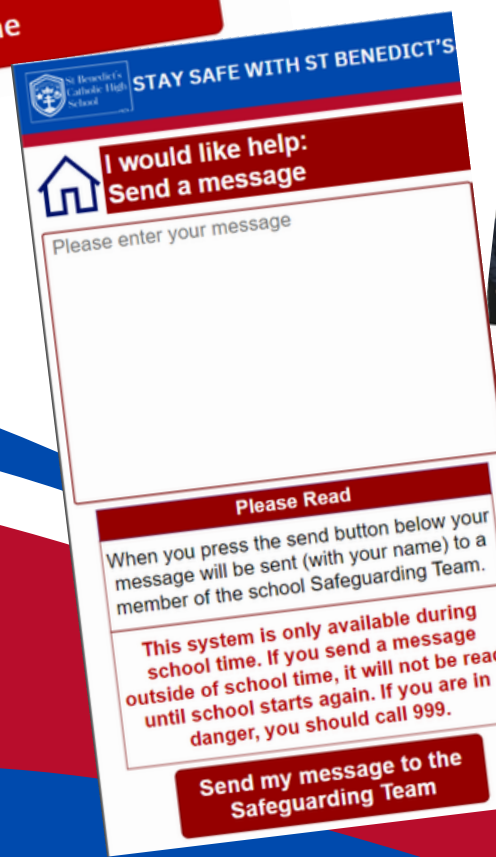


At St. Benedict's we have our **Safety Hub** app. The app (available within Microsoft Teams) is available for all pupils in the school. Currently, we have sections in the app that cover advice and guidance on:

- Mental Health
- Abuse
- Social Media
- Drugs and Alcohol (including smoking and vaping)
- Exam Stress
- and a 'Help Me' section.

HELP ME

Pupils can use this to ask for help with any safeguarding issue including bullying. If a pupil doesn't feel they can speak to a member of staff in person they can use this app and the message will then be sent to a member of the safeguarding team who will work to resolve the issue with the pupil.



» NEXT

How to report non urgent worries or concerns to the Police about online safety issues.

You can view our online safety policy by clicking here.

HELP AND SUPPORT

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS/CARERS



Dear Parents & Carers,

The online world is posing an ever-increasing risk to children, and it is important that schools, parents, and carers work together to take an active role in teaching children about online dangers. Learning how to act safely when using the internet is an incredibly important part of safeguarding our children.

I am pleased to make you aware that we have partnered with a company called National Online Safety, who provide resources for parents and carers on all aspects of online safety.

The resources include online video resources and weekly guides covering a range of topics, including:

- Online Relationships
- Fake Profiles & Social Bots
- Online Bullying
- Online Grooming
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Sexual Harassment & Violence
- Sexting
- Live Streaming
- Online Identity
- Screen Addiction
- Online Challenges
- Overspending
- Social Media Platforms
- Online Gambling
- Radicalisation, Terrorism & Extremism
- Age Inappropriate Content
- Copyright & Ownership
- Hacking
- Fake News
- Online Fraud
- Online Reputation
- Personal Data
- Pornography
- Targeted Adverts & Pop-Ups
- The Dark Web
- Games & Trends

To create your account, please follow <https://nationalonlinesafety.com/enrol/st-benedict-s-catholic-high-school> and complete your details.

Alternatively, you can scan this QR code using your phones camera to go straight to the site:



When you are set up, you will be able to set 'Parent/Carer' as your user type.

You can access National Online Safety online via any device- including a smartphone app. To download the app, please go to:

Apple devices: <https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/national-online-safety/id1530342372>

Android devices: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=uk.co.nationaleducationgroup.nos>

Alternatively, search for 'National Online Safety' in the App Store/Google Play Store.

J. Crosthwaite, Associate SLT