



The Wolds and Vale Federation

Interim Headteacher

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Dear Parents and Carers

E Safety and Safeguarding Children Against Inappropriate Content

Over the past two weeks, we have had a number of children, across both schools, talking about the games and images that they are playing and seeing on screen and online. Some of these children are as young as Year 1 and Year 2.

Children have been speaking of games and images such as “Pennywise” (from a horror film “It”), Freddie Kruger (from the film “Nightmare on Elm Street”) as well as characters and games such as Roblox and Huggy Wuggy amongst others. Baldi’s Education Basics in Education and Learning has also been mentioned as has GTA and Fortnite.

It is part of Safeguarding processes and our duty of care to our children to inform you of the inappropriate content of these games and images.

The images and content of these films and games are extremely disturbing to children. Children in schools have been talking to adults using language such as “stabbing, killing, putting bodies in suitcases” and imagining that these characters are in their own houses. Children have also approached adults to talk specifically about what they are seeing, watching and playing and this is a clear sign that they are troubled by these images, characters and games.

Some children are sharing that they are watching these films and images or games with family members, others are talking about images “popping up” when they are on their tablets.

Roblox

There are reports from online E Safety organisations about a self-harm “game” being shared on the popular gaming platform Roblox. Known as “the Game”, a post appears in the chat forums and has a Word document containing rules and instructions. This has been shared widely and is now becoming more available to children as they play.

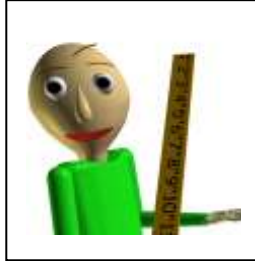
It would appear that there is an unmonitored chat facility and some children have been reporting strange conversations with unknown people. The chats have contained sexualised and explicit content and there is a high risk that these may be adults posing as children.

“The Game” appears to be a list of self-harming actions for children to complete, often in view of their family and friends. Self-harming includes cutting, starving, overdosing and bruising. There are also multiple references to “ending your own life” with methods of suicide also being shared.

There is also a reference to “players” being sent anonymous messages including the word “dare” to encourage harming other people including siblings and/or friends.

Children as young as 9 are encouraged to play this “game”.

Baldi



This is marketed as an educational game with a series of games aimed at improving learning. However, the character becomes increasingly angry and results in violence.

We have had children across our schools talking about this character and sharing that the character “stabs”, “tries to kill you” and then “respawns”.

Pennywise



Children have made accurate descriptions of the clown in the Stephen King film “It” and have shared with staff that they have seen not just images, but also have seen the entire film. The character preys on children in various despicable ways.

Some of our children have been quite exact and graphic in the images that they have described.

Huggy Wuggy and Poppy Playtime



Poppy Playtime is a horror game that involves a player investigating an unused factory whilst being observed and chased by various horror characters, the most well-known being Huggy Wuggy. This is the game’s most notorious, yet popular and most disturbing character who appears in the dark and tries to catch the player. If the payer is caught, Huggy Wuggy grins in a sinister way and eats the player.



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Both these characters and games are causing concern due to the online content but also due to reported playground style challenges based on the character. Graphic, fan made videos are popping up on You Tube and Tik Tok and children are seeing them without warning. Some are designed to be “creepy” and upsetting, others appear and jump-scare animations.

Due to the name of this character, the name is “slipping through the net” of safety filters on various platforms like content filtering and age restrictions.

Risks to Children

Children who are open to seeing, hearing and playing these inappropriate games and content and images are showing signs of behavioural dysregulation, physically unacceptable behaviour towards their friends and adults in school, being tired and restless, pale, disengaged from learning, needing to talk about images and games that they are not able to process independently and talking about the games and images becoming reality in their own homes – “I didn’t like it when Huggy Wuggy came into my house” said one Year 1 child.

Young children are still growing and learning. They are not at a level of emotional maturity that would be able to process frightening content. Horror games could hamper their emotional growth and maturity by causing unnecessary distress and anxiety. Some children are unable to disassociate their gaming world from the reality of their everyday lives. This is especially so when children are bought character toys from games and they are surrounded by them even when not gaming or watching. Having these toys – especially when they are soft and cuddly – exploits the child’s sense of security that they would feel around having soft toys, leading to increased anxiety from a seemingly innocent object.

Children have told us that they are tired as they are not sleeping due to either playing games or watching inappropriate content late into the night or thinking about the characters and images in the dark and quiet of night. This, in itself, will have a negative effect on both their physical and mental health.

Children who are not directly seeing, hearing or playing these games are also indirectly involved as they hear of characters and then actively google for them to see what they are like. They are then also becoming disturbed by what they are seeing and hearing.

When children approach staff in school, we are clearly telling them that they shouldn’t be watching these films or playing these games. We are telling them that none of these characters are real and that they are not in the real world, in their homes or in school and that they need to switch off their devices if they see anything that makes them frightened or scared and to think about something that makes them happy instead. We are also encouraging them to speak with a trusted adult at home or at school to share their concerns and how they are feeling.

The content of these games and films and images is not suitable for young children.

I would urge you, as parents and carers, to please be extremely vigilant about what your child is able to access online in terms of games and films. If your family enjoy watching horror movies or playing these types of games, please do not allow your young children to be present and watch them with you.



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The damage that this inappropriate content could do to your child now and for their futures is huge. Children could present, now or later in life, with anxiety, depression, social and emotional problems and there is a huge detriment to their education and life choices if they are not able to come into school and be physically and mentally healthy and ready to learn.

Thank you for your support with this matter.

Best wishes

Mrs Mould

Interim Headteacher