



MERIDIAN COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL AND NURSERY

Learning for Life



Monday 4th February

Concerns about Online Gaming

Dear Parents/Carers

We are writing to inform you about the safeguarding risks of children playing online games, in particular the popular game "Fortnite."

Obviously it is your decision whether or not you allow your child to play these games, including Fortnite, but we wanted to make you aware of the risks and enable you to support your children at home.

You may be aware of the risks when playing Fortnite. These include:

- **Communication between players:** a chat function allows players to talk to each other either over a headset and microphone, or using messaging. Children could use it to speak to strangers, or it could put them at risk of cyberbullying
- **In-app purchases:** players can build up large bills on their parents' accounts by buying cosmetic items like outfits for your character and better-looking weapons (otherwise known as 'skins')
- **Addictive nature of the game:** anecdotal stories tell of children staying up all night to play, or falling asleep in lessons after playing for too long. Some commentators attribute this to the communal feel of the game – you can play with your friends – and the game is different every time you play, keeping it fresh

Over the past few months, we have noticed an increase in the number of issues related to Fortnite coming into school. For example we are having to deal with the impact in school of cyberbullying activities that have happened at home, such as aggressive and inappropriate language, racist comments and homophobic language towards each other. And last week there was an incident of potential grooming through children 'chatting' to a stranger they had met through online gaming. We have made these parents aware and appropriate action has been taken by these parents.

We are sure you are aware that Fortnite has an age recommendation of 12 and above, yet we are hearing about children as young as 4 years old at Meridian playing this game.

If your child is accessing online games, including Fortnite, please do ensure that you are informing them of what to do if they experience inappropriate behaviour from anyone (known or unknown to them) that they are playing with. We regularly teach children about online safety at school but it is clear that they are not

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always able to transfer this learning when they are at home. We are currently in the process of looking at a workshop for parents about how to support online safety at home – if we are able to organise this, this event will be advertised in the usual ways via newsletters, website and social media.

In the meantime, if you want any information about how to keep your child safe when playing Fortnite please visit <http://www.meridianschool.co.uk/parents/e-safety> where there are links advice and support for this game. There are also links to other information about how parents and carers can help keep their children safe online.

As part of Safer Internet Day this week, we have organised some workshops and assemblies on Friday to highlight keeping safe online and cyberbullying.

We appreciate that children will want to play games at home that involve online participation with their friends, but as a school we are struggling to manage the fallout from inappropriate activities that are happening at home. Please support the school and speak to your children about how to block or mute players that are behaving in an inappropriate manner and support them with managing these issues so that they don't spill over into school. Please be assured, that if any child were to report to school something that made us concerned about their safety, we will contact parents and carers as soon as possible to make you aware so that you can act to protect them.

Once again, it is your decision as parents and carers about what your children can access online and there is a lot of information available for parents and carers to support children in managing their online safety. We would really appreciate your support with this matter.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

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