

St Patrick's NS PA 'Smartphone Free Voluntary Code'

13.05.2024

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Many of you will be aware that there are growing concerns around the use of smartphones and social media among children, which is widely discussed in the media at the moment. A group of eight schools in the Greystones/Delgany area have successfully introduced a 'Smartphone Free Voluntary Code', where parents are given the option to collectively agree to delay purchasing a smartphone for their child until secondary school. Furthermore, schools in County Waterford are collectively looking to adopt a charter of a similar nature. The feedback from parents of these schools is that it will give them relief from the pressures they, and their children, feel to buy a smartphone. [\(Link 1 below\)](#)

St Patrick's NS Parents' Association feel that the 'Smartphone Free Voluntary Code' is a very positive initiative which we would like to introduce in our school, giving parents the option to agree to delay purchasing a smartphone for their child while they are pupils in St Patrick's school.

This, of course, will complement the schools existing 'Mobile Phone Policy' which states that students are not permitted to use phones or smart watches during school hours or on the school premises.

Since these codes have been introduced the DES have also issued some guidance for parents/Pas around Smartphone use for children.

Why is it being introduced?

- There is an increasing body of evidence which has shown the detrimental effects of excessive use of smartphones on the developing brain, especially on children under the age of 14, socially, emotionally and educationally. The US surgeon general recently issued an advisory warning of the **profound risks of child social media use** to their mental health and wellbeing. [\(Link 2 below\)](#)
- Dr. Mary Aiken, Ireland's foremost cyber safety expert, stated back in 2018 that smartphones should not be used by children under the age of fourteen. [\(Link 3 below\)](#)
- Our health minister, Stephen Donnelly, has said there is a direct causal relationship between access to smartphones and **increased suicide ideation**,

self-harm, anxiety and many other issues that our mental health services have to deal with. (Links 4&5 below)

- Dr. Colman Noctor, a **Psychotherapist** with a special interest in Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, and over 25 years of international clinical experience, with his research area being the impact of technology on young people's mental health, has emphasised that owning a smartphone is not a right, it is a responsibility that requires the ability for self-regulation and self-discipline, which children of primary age struggle with. (Link 6 & 7 below)
- In January 2023, a SPHE teacher, Eoghan Cleary from Temple Carrig was interviewed on the Ryan Tubridy show and shared his research findings regarding some of the detrimental impact smartphones are having on our children, in particular the **widespread viewing of pornographic content**. (Link 8 & 9)
- The National Parents Council has also highlighted the risks associated with smartphone use at a young age - **cyber bullying**, depression, access to pornographic content, vulnerability to **contact from predators** and an increased risk of suicide.
- In Ireland, the Digital Age of Consent is sixteen. It is illegal for any company or corporate body to process the personal data of a child “for the purposes of direct marketing, profiling or micro-targeting”.
- Primetime recently aired a special experiment revealing disturbing content being recommended to young TikTok users in Ireland.
- Additional links to supporting information in links 10 - 11 below.

What is the Voluntary Code?

We believe that this voluntary code will provide parents and guardians, who are concerned about their child having personal access to a smartphone, with a tool to help address the issues mentioned above.

Collective agreement to hold off on purchasing smartphones will reduce peer pressure and support parents in saying no. They will have data to respond to the possible pressure from their children, for example “75% of 4th class parents have opted in to the “Smartphone Free Voluntary Code”.

Key points:

1. The Voluntary Code does not include regular mobile phones or kid's smart watches_(with phone/message/GPS tracking capability) with no internet access.
2. All information is anonymous and results will be assimilated by class group as a percentage.
3. It recognises that every family has different priorities and opinions in relation to internet access and smartphone use.
4. If a parent /guardian alters their view subsequently and wants to purchase a personal smartphone device for their child(ren) they can do so at any stage.
5. It is not a solution in itself to the growing problem but it is potentially one tool which may be helpful to those who wish to avail of it.
6. This will not affect the current school mobile phone policy or the use of technology for educational purposes.

How to sign up:

Please complete the Aladdin poll sent via Noticeboard for EACH OF YOUR CHILDREN.

References/Further Reading

Link #1

<https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/education/2023/05/26/parents-hail-no-smartph-one-code-for-children-until-second-level-as-good-idea/>

Link #2

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2023/may/23/social-media-warning-kids-mental-health>

Link # 2 ['Children under the age of 14 should not have a smart phone' - Ireland's foremost cyber safety expert - Independent.ie](#)

Link # 3

<https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/education/2023/08/31/call-for-mobile-phone-ban-in-schools-due-to-evidence-of-damage-to-young-people/>

Link # 4

<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2023/05/31/stephen-donnely-should-school-smartphone-bans-be-considered-nationwide/>

Link # 5 [Colman Noctor: Why let a tech company decide when your child is ready to own a smartphone? \(irishexaminer.com\)](#)

Link # 6 [Colman Noctor: Is there a right time to buy your child a smartphone? \(irishtimes.com\)](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/colman-noctor-is-there-a-right-time-to-buy-your-child-a-smartphone-1.4581234)

Link # 7 <https://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22196858/>

Link # 8

<https://www.irishtimes.com/health/your-family/2022/11/05/teenagers-talk-pornography-whoever-got-a-smart-phone-is-going-to-watch-it-its-free-and-its-everywhere/>

Link # 9 [How Smartphones Affect Child Development | Psych Central](https://www.psychcentral.com/parenting/2019/07/how-smartphones-affect-child-development/)

Link # 10 [Getting to grips with the effect of smartphones on education - Independent.ie](https://www.independent.ie/news/ireland/education/getting-to-grips-with-the-effect-of-smartphones-on-education-1.4581234)

Link # 11 [Survey: Majority of primary schools have problems with smartphone and social media use outside of school \(irishtimes.com\)](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/survey-majority-of-primary-schools-have-problems-with-smartphone-and-social-media-use-outside-of-school-1.4581234)