

## The Calder Learning Trust

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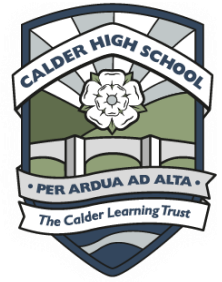
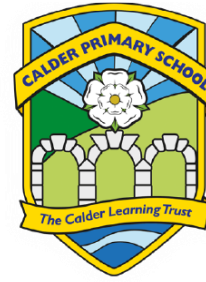
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December 2024

### Smartphone Free Childhood

Dear Parents/Carers,

As you may have seen in the news and on social media, there is a growing movement amongst parents and schools to support a campaign called 'Smartphone-Free Childhood.' You can find out more by clicking this link:

<https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/>

By 'smartphones' we refer to phones that are able to access the internet and use apps, as opposed to mobile phones that can only text and make phone calls.

In our Year 5 and 6 class the vast majority of children have a mobile phone now, mostly smartphones, and increasing numbers have been bringing them to school every day. There are now children in Years 3 and 4 with mobile phones as well. **We ask that children in Class 3 only, only bring a phone to school if they have a specific reason. Usually this is if they are walking home independently.** We then lock these phones away during the school day.

We deal with issues involving mobile phones almost every week in school now, even though these take place out of school hours. These problems can take a significant amount of time out of the school day to address or resolve and often involve different members of teaching, support and admin staff in the resolution. Parents are often unaware of an issue until it becomes a significant problem or is too late to easily resolve. In the past year in Calder Primary these have included:

- Children sending and receiving messages early in the morning, all evening and overnight with many receiving hundreds of notifications and alerts a day.
- Children being added/removed/excluded from different WhatsApp groups and groups being renamed to inappropriate names. Last year some of our Year 5/6 children found themselves added to a national WhatsApp group which was sending inappropriate and harmful content including pornographic images.
- Children sending or sharing unkind or ill-thought through messages or photos to each other that they wouldn't say or do face to face.
- Children using features such as disappearing messages, snap chat and online chat including with people they do not know in real life.
- Children with their own open access YouTube, Instagram and TikTok accounts, making and posting videos including live streaming from their bedrooms, receiving likes and messages from strangers and viewing inappropriate content from automatic algorithms. This includes inappropriate content on YouTube Kids.
- Children re-sharing content which is inappropriate, can cause distress or is illegal.
- Families falling out and threatening each other, due to children falling out on WhatsApp.
- The knock-on effect of mobile phones on children not being able to sleep and so they are tired and unable to concentrate in school or are falling asleep in lessons.
- The effects on mental health, wellbeing, family relationships and mood.

The use of smartphones is now a feature of daily life for most adults and over the last few years the age at which children are given their first smartphone has dropped significantly. Whilst smartphones can be a very helpful piece of technology for adults, they can equally expose children to a number of negative risks. There is increasing research now which shows the negative effect of smartphone use in children below the age of 14. You can read more about this on the links above and at the end of this letter but they include:

- They are highly addictive, with the lasting effects on young and developing brains being similar to that of gambling.
- They have been linked to poor mental health, depression and low self-esteem, especially in young teenagers.

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- There is potential exposure to harmful content including pornography, grooming, bullying and material that is not age appropriate.
- There is a reduction in attention spans – they are changing the way children’s brains develop and fundamentally affecting their ability to concentrate.
  - They deprive children of their innocent childhoods. Time spent on a device reduces time spent playing, interacting and developing vital social skills.
  - Children are not yet emotionally mature enough to be able to handle all the internet available all of the time.

We understand the importance of being able to contact your child as they become more independent (often in Year 6 or Year 7) walking to and from school, in order to give you peace of mind and for children to be able to call you in emergencies. Children’s phones do not need to have access to the internet to be able to do this and we would implore anyone considering a phone for this reason when their child is in Years 5, 6 or 7 to look at a phone without apps or internet access. There are some suggested suitable phones on the website link above.

Calder High School have also recognised the impact of mobile phones on young people and from September 2024 they changed their school policy so that phones must be switched off in bags throughout the day including lunchtimes and breaktimes. To support this, they have put up more clocks around the building (so phones are not needed to know the time) and reintroduced paper planners (to record and check timetables and homework). A phone is no longer deemed an essential piece of equipment in Year 7 and many high school families have moved towards non-smart phones for travel to and from school- or no phones at all!

As a school, we support the growing movement across the country to change the ‘normal’ age that children are given smartphones. We urge all parents to delay giving children a smartphone until at least Year 7 and ideally until they reach the age of 14, opting instead for a text/call phone alternative and only if/when this becomes necessary.

**I am writing to our parents to urge you to hold off on giving your child a smartphone until they go to high school in order to protect our children and enable them to grow into confident and happy young people.** If your child is in Years R, 1, 2, 3 or 4 please consider this pledge before planning to buy or give your child a phone.

**For our Year 5 and 6 pupils, it’s not too late! Please reconsider the type of phone, amount of time and level of access your child currently has along with putting in place more safeguards, regular checks and conversations and limits such as taking phones away before bedtime to allow for an evening routine and reading/settling down time to aid restful sleep.** The NSPCC has some useful information on safeguards you can put in place and the age restrictions for each app/platform [here](#)

In order for this movement to be successful, **parents/carers are fundamental**. It needs our children’s parents/carers to resist the pressure from their children and their peers and to hold back on giving children smartphones in primary school. In this way we will all be working together with a wide network of parents and schools to re-set the expectation and remove social peer pressure for future years.

There is also a Smartphone-Free Childhood pledge you can sign if you are interested, which aims to pressure government change on this. You may have seen in the news that countries around the world are beginning to change their laws on this too.

**We encourage parents to discuss this letter and work together if at all possible to have a consistent approach within a year group or class.**

Research is showing that mobile phones are impacting the development of our children’s brains and we feel strongly therefore that it is our duty to start this conversation, protect their childhoods and do everything we can to enable and support them to grow into confident and happy young people and adults.

Yours Sincerely,

*K.Lambert*

Mrs K.Lambert



## Kids & smartphones – what’s the big deal?

When children first started getting smartphones a decade ago, there was no research about their impact. Now there is, and it’s overwhelming.



### HARMFUL CONTENT

Smartphones act as a gateway to pornography, violent and extreme content. Often kids don’t seek them out but are exposed to them via algorithms and messaging apps. Once seen, these things can never be unseen. 90% of girls and 50% of boys say they’re sent explicit content they didn’t want to see.



### ADDICTION

Tech companies intentionally make apps addictive, because the more time we spend, the more data they harvest, the more money they make. By leveraging dopamine circuits, they trigger brain responses akin to slot machine gambling. 1 in 4 young adults show signs of behavioural addiction to smartphones.



### ACADEMIC DISTRACTION

The average teen receives 237 smartphone notifications a day – one every few minutes – making focusing on schoolwork hard. Studies show that excessive smartphone use has negative impacts on academic performance. Children at schools with effective smartphone bans get GCSE’s 1-2 grades higher.



### GROOMING

Sites like TikTok, Snapchat and Roblox are used by sexual predators to target children with their first smartphones, blackmailing them into sharing sexual content. Sextortion is now the fastest growing crime against teens. Since 2022, there has been a 66% rise in ‘self generated’ sexual abuse imagery of children under 10.



### CYBERBULLYING

Disagreements between pupils used to stop at the school gate, now they follow kids wherever they go, 24/7. Young people who experience cyberbullying are twice as likely to attempt suicide and self-harm. One in six teens report being cyberbullied in the past month, according to the World Health Organisation.



### MENTAL ILLNESS

Rates of depression, anxiety and suicide in young people have spiked globally since 2010, when children first began getting smartphones. The first generation to grow up with smartphones are now adults – data shows that the younger they got their first smartphone, the worse their mental health today.



### OPPORTUNITY COST

Underpinning all these harms is one that is potentially the most significant of all. For the first time in human history, children are spending more time on devices than they are playing – an activity crucial to our healthy development. Smartphones are experience blockers, distracting children from engaging in the real world. The average UK 12-year-old now spends 29 hours a week – equivalent to a part-time job – on their smartphone. This leaves little time for the real world activities and relationships that enable us to learn the essential life skills we need to transition into adulthood. The average daily time that teens spend with friends has plummeted by 65% since 2010.

Join the grassroots parents movement to protect childhood from Big Tech

[www.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/join](http://www.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/join)

For all links to stats references see [www.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/the-problem](http://www.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/the-problem)

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