

Oughton Health

Oughton Primary School Health & Well-Being Newsletter

Edition 1, Oct 2018

Welcome to our first edition of our brand new newsletter, Oughton Health. In periodically distributing a newsletter with a focus on promoting good health, both physical and mental, as well as general good well-being, we ultimately aim to provide some tips and guidance which you may find interesting to read and, hopefully, will be useful for you and your family. Our first edition is based around the impact of smartphones/devices and social media/gaming on our physical and mental health.

The impact of smartphones/devices and social media on mental health is a topical subject at the moment, whether it's Instagram, Twitter, Facebook or any other platform being accessed, social media has been designed specifically to 'hook in' the user to either scroll more (and, in the process, view a range of targeted advertising), or to purchase something (perhaps the next 'level' in a game or some additional element). As you will be well aware, all of our favourite platforms are designed to appeal to our fast paced lives, are regularly updated with exciting new features and are generally very hard to resist for all of us!

The result? As a nation, we are spending more and more time (and often money) on our phones, using social media or playing mobile games. Most would agree that this is getting in the way of other important things we might do with our time. We are spending less time with our families and friends or pursuing 'healthier' activities such as keeping physically active, relaxing or, quite often, getting enough sleep. Because we are not as active, this can escalate into a variety of issues, in terms of our physical and mental health both for ourselves and our family. As a school, alongside schools across the country, we are seeing this in many of our pupils as they are tired and, as a result, less engaged in their learning and often irritable. These children are also finding learning harder as it is not as fast paced and therefore brain stimulating as a screen can provide. Clearly, this impacts on their learning.

This year the NHS has been supporting 'Scroll-Free September' (see www.scrollfreesepember.org), a new initiative to tackle this growing issue. A recent study revealed half of 18 to 34 year olds stated they would find it very hard, or even impossible, to give up social media for 30 days – so that was the NHS challenge! Whilst we recognise that we now into October, we are encouraging all those involved in the Oughton family, be you parents/carers, staff or pupils, to take up the challenge and see whether you can go 'scroll free' for a for a day, a week or even a month in order to see the positive lasting effect this can have on your mental well-being.



IN THIS ISSUE:

- The impact of smartphones/devices & social media on our health

Watch out for our next issue:

- Sleep - how important is it really to our health?



Research findings:

A recent study of young adults (University of Pittsburgh) suggested that heavy social media users were three times more likely to suffer depression than occasional users.

A Canadian study from the Centre of Addictions and Mental Health has examined data from over 10,000 adolescents; they found that young people who use social media more than two hours per day were significantly more likely to rate their mental health as "fair" or "poor" compared with occasional users.



And breathe...

Research shows that when we hear our phone ping, or when we're looking at the screen whether that be social media or gaming, our breathing tends to change (like an animal in stalking) becoming more shallow. This has wide implications for our physical and mental health as deeper breathing ensures the oxygen reaches the cells of the body more efficiently. This is essential for your health! Maybe try the following breathing exercise on your own or with family and see the benefits:

Breathe in for four seconds, hold for seven seconds, and then breathe out for eight seconds. This breathing exercise is known to be beneficial for a wide variety of conditions and is easy to do anywhere, anytime!

PREFER A 'LIGHTER' OPTION?

Scroll-free seem like an impossible challenge? Well, the scroll-free 'light' option might be a more realistic prospect for you and your family; this is aimed at reducing social media/gaming usage in some way, however small, in order to make a positive change.

One way to challenge smartphone addiction is to ensure you have 'time off' from your phone/device, for example one day a week (possibly a family time day); not using your device after 7pm (pupils) or 9pm (adults), or at social events (including meal times!). Perhaps you can have a separate alarm for the morning, so you can turn your phone/device off at night altogether. This could be particularly useful for your children who might be tempted to take a peek when they hear a ping or to play that last game as their friends are still playing, however well they have assured you they are going scroll-free! Perhaps you could turn connectivity off altogether at a certain time.

It can be useful to look at our habits in this way and bring in some change, if only temporarily: it promotes mental flexibility, which is good for our mental health.

So, why not take up one of the 'scroll-free' challenges, even for a short while, and see how it can benefit you and your family, both in terms of the extra time you will gain together as well as the positive impact it will have on your mental health in general. You may even decide to adopt it long term. If you do try it (and let's face it, what's the worst that can happen if you do?), please do pop in and let us know how it is going, we'd love to hear - plus you might inspire others on the edge of giving up to keep on going! Good luck!

Need further convincing? A report by Dr. Linda Papadopoulos last year points to 3 main factors when it comes to why the overuse of social media can negatively impact our own mental health and that of young people:

1. Impact on Sleep - several studies have linked sleep difficulties to screen time. Whether it's the blue light of screens affecting sleep quality and quantity or the behavioural disturbances that make us/ young people wake to check their phones or stay up later playing one more game, reduced sleep is an important issue when it comes to mental health. Sleep is crucial for the developing adolescent brain, and lack of sleep is associated with lower mood and depression. This then impacts on their schooling as they are not 'learning ready'. It can also affect their behaviour as they can be irritable and lose the ability to reason.

2. Use as life comparing tool - we are increasingly engaging in "passive use" of social media- looking at other peoples pictures and lives and comparing them to our own, not recognising that most people present the highlights of their lives more regularly than the boring stuff which appear to be the norm. We often surf other peoples pages when we are on a low, so the differential between our real lives and the idealized lives we see on screen is further amplified leading us to feel like we can't measure up and that we are missing out. The result? We feel inferior and inadequate.

3. Chasing likes on post to drive self-worth / self-esteem - so, we take dozens of pictures, edit them, post them for others to evaluate and then if we don't get enough validation through likes, comments or reposts we have to start all over again. Clearly not the recipe for good mental health!

