SCOIL CHOLMCILLE SMARTPHONE & SOCIAL MEDIA VOLUNTARY CODE

What does this voluntary code mean?

The **Smartphone & Social Media Voluntary Code** is a no smartphone & no social media policy whereby parents collectively agree to not provide their children with access to smartphones or social media while in primary school.

In a recent **survey** shared with all parents/guardians (Dec 2023) on this topic and in preparation for this change **97% of respondents were in favour** of this new code with 55% opting to wait until children finish primary school (vs. confirmation time in 6th class).

Similarly students in 3rd - 6th class were also surveyed with **80% of students** saying that age 12+ is an appropriate age for a child to have their own smartphone. The majority of students also strongly agreed that having a smartphone could impacts a child's performance in school such as being distracted, concentration level, poor quality of work etc.

The internet and social media is becoming a bigger part of our children's lives, mostly for the better however it poses risks and dangers too. Our children are very often not emotionally ready to navigate the **complexities of digital devices and the digital world.** Research also shows that devices and social media are having a a detrimental impact on children's **ability to learn, focus and retain information.**

This voluntary code is born out of a need for we as parents/guardians and teachers to do everything we can to **protect our children** or as long as possible and **set them up for success** as they head into their teenage years.

Collective agreement on delaying the introduction of smartphones & social media access during the primary school years should also we expect **reduce peer pressure** amongst our children and thereby act as a **tool to support parents/guardians** when having conversations with their children about access to smartphones & social media.

Key Points:

1. This is a voluntary code - Scoil Cholmcille Parents Association, Principal and school staff respect each family's right to decide whether or not their children have access to a smartphone or social media.

2. All data collected (e.g. families who do/do not participate) remains anonymous and will only be shared on an aggregated by class basis.

3. The voluntary code does not affect basic mobile phones or similar devices (e.g. SmartWatch with no internet access or apps) which children may require to maintain contact with a parent or guardian after school hours.

4. The voluntary code does not affect the existing in-school policy whereby the use of mobile phones and smartphones are not permitted on school grounds. This new agreement is to extend this policy to now also include within the home and all social settings.

Get involved and sign up here

Useful Information & Supports for Parents

Parent/Child Discussions on Internet and Device Use:

- The National Parents Council have developed a guide to support parents to ensure their child remains safe online - Parents Guide to a Better Internet

- CyberSafeKids unveiled its 'Same Rules Apply' campaign in Feb 2024 including the attached 'Better Digital Parenting' booklet (updated in Feb 2025) which provides a common sense approach to creating safer online experiences for children - CyberSafeKids - Better Digital Parenting - Parent Guide

- CyberSafeKids also provide a useful 'Family Agreement' template about appropriate internet and device usage that families can print off, sign and display in the home - Family Agreement Example

Parental Controls & Safety Online:

- Parental control apps like Google Family Link, Screen Time and Microsoft Family can help make online safety easier. These apps let you set limits across devices, apps and platforms without needing to access these spaces separately. You can manage screen time, app access, inappropriate content restrictions and more.

- Practical tips on how to actually set up parental controls depending on what device you/your child has can be found here - Parental Controls Tips

- Advice on monitoring apps available to parents to monitor your child's activity online can be found here - Monitoring Apps - Parents Guide

- CyberSafe Kids Gadget Guide

Additional Resources:

- Be Internet Legends is an interactive game developed by Google about online safety for children aged 7-11 that allows they and their parents to explore different lands and learn about cyberbullying, scams and how not to over share personal information.

- Barnardos - Protecting & Safeguarding Children Online

- Webwise - Parents Hub

- CyberSafe Kids

- Smartphone Free Childhood Ireland

- The Gen Free : Free to be Kids Campaign

- Minister Foley welcomes support for voluntary agreements press release

- Small changes could lead to big results for children colman noctor

- Preteens too young to manage smartphone responsibility colman noctor

- "The most connected generation is the loneliest..." - Jonathan Haidt

- Smartphones-children-mental health independent.co.uk

- Growing role of AI and our children colman noctor

- The pressure to get a smartphone for my teen was immense. We found a compromise

Smartphone Alternatives:

- Basic Mobile Phones - No internet or social media access. Send/receive calls & text messages only

  - Nokia 105

  - Alcatel 1068

- Balance Phone - Samsung based smartphone with functional apps such as Spotify, Revolut, Google Maps (and WhatsApp only if parents wish to do so) but no addictive social media or gaming apps can be installed such as TikTok, Snapchat or YouTube. Set time of usage per day.

- Smartwatches **-** No internet or social media access. Safe call list set by parent/guardian with voice & video calling, text & voice messaging. GPS location enabled, 'class mode'; disable features during preferred times e.g. school/bedtime etc.). Xplora Smartwatch

- Excellent overview and detailed information on smartphone alternatives can be found <u>here</u>