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Dear Parents and Carers,

**Re. Safeguarding Against Exposure to Adult Online Content -
 Specifically, but not exclusively, Squid Game).**

School staff are very concerned about a number of children across KS2 and KS1 playing role play games and talking about the content around Netflix's Squid Game. Squid Game is strictly adult content, limited legally to 15 year old and above, so primary children should certainly not be exposed to its content. Staff have discovered that some children have been talking about it and we have had to prevent one or two individuals from encouraging others to play games inspired by it.

The school staff have been addressing the topic in school, while at the same time not causing alarm or stimulating the interest of pupils to go home and research further. As with all inappropriate on-line / social media material, no child should be exposed to such material so we would appreciate the support of every parents / carer in ensuring that this does not continue. Please make sure the children do not have any access to the content without you knowing. It is also a good idea to make sure any older siblings, extended family or friends are also actively discouraged from sharing or glamorising it.

What is Squid Game?

'Netflix's Squid Game is set to become the streaming service's most successful show of all time, with huge numbers of viewers taking to social media to discuss each new episode. The South Korean thriller features some scenes of fairly brutal violence and is rated 15 by the BBFC. It follows a group of adults who compete to win innocent-looking playground games, but who are killed if they do not succeed at the tasks.'

An unexpected success in terms of viewing figures, Squid Game's popularity is beginning to spread across various online platforms. There has been a slew of content created – ranging from memes to apps – that convey the violence of the show, so it is important for parents, carers and educators to understand the basis of Squid Game and the potential risks to young people who might be exposed to it.'

What are the hazards for children?

Squid Game's 15 rating has not prevented clips and images from the show being uploaded onto social media sites such as [TikTok](#), with the #SquidGame hashtag being viewed more than 22.8 billion times. There have been reports of children who have accounts on these platforms inadvertently viewing gory, explicit scenes from the programme, and parents and carers should be mindful of the prevalence of these uploads.

The following advice is taken from the Digi Social Website:

<https://digiisocial.com/lets-talk-squid-game-and-childrens-exposure/>

'Squid Game and Children Exposure

Squid Game – it's everywhere! My older teens and young adults have watched and loved it, enjoying the game play aspects of their childhood now made adult with a life-death twist.

They actively defended the content until we talked about how they would feel if their younger cousins were to watch it. 'Why would anyone let a child watch that?' they wondered of Squid Game content, showing adults involved in children's games but with a whole bunch of stabbing, shooting and killing to win the game and win the money. My boys' response reminded me of just how quickly childhood has changed – from theirs growing up in the early 2000's to now – not that many years later.

Of course, now, accessibility of content through socials and apps means that even if a child is not looking for it, it is likely to end up somewhere in their viewable content – through shares of friends, tagging or simply seeing it on TikTok or YouTube.

How do we protect our children?

It's complex! Even if your child is not allowed access to this content, it doesn't mean that it won't end up in the playground as some sort of well narrated game, lead by a child who is able to access that content.

And, of course, it also leans into that thrill of being a 'big kid' and doing things that are a bit edgy, a bit naughty and a bit 'grown up'. Well, until it all goes wrong that is. How many times do we say, as parents, it's all fun and games until someone goes too far and it ends up in tears? If I had a dollar for every time I said that I would be a very, very wealthy mumma!

So, protection – how do we then achieve it if it feels like holding age-inappropriate content back from our young ones is like holding off a tsunami with half a dozen sandbags?

Education. That's the answer. In so many ways in childhood we protect our children from harm by educating them, telling them about the risk, giving examples and then teaching them what to do. Here are some examples.

- *We teach our children to be safe on the road by talking about the dangers, showing our children the ways to be safe, and pointing out high risk situations as teachable moments.*
- *We teach our children how to be safe in a crowd – how to stay close, how to stay still if they get lost, and to find an adult to help them.*
- *We teach our children about their body safety and autonomy by talking about private and public parts. e help our children to understand what is safe and not safe behaviour by others.*

In each of those examples we teach our children through explaining what might happen and by teaching them a skill to help them if it does. Access to online content for us and our young ones is like breathing – it's just part of what we do. Too often we forget that this is a very adult environment now populated by children, with these children needing a highly polished skillset to not only survive but to thrive in this space.

How to talk to children about Squid Games – and other similar content

If we take the same approach as we do in most aspects of parenting, we would then talk about Squid Game not specifically by naming that content, but by talking about seeing content that's not meant for young eyes.

Naming the content – like trying to describe specifically the sort of stranger that might signal danger – isn't helpful.

Instead, we need to reflect on what it is we're most worried about with that content (highly sexualised or graphically violent content), communicate that, and also have some helpful suggestions and boundaries to put in place. This is the skeleton of how I'd approach this conversation about Squid Game with curiosity, the willingness to listen and to co-create a solution:

- *Do all your friends have the same restrictions on what they see online?*
- *What do you think about age restrictions – are they good or bad?*
- *What happens when someone sees stuff that you're not allowed to?*
- *Can that turn into games that you play at school?*
- *Give me some examples. Is there something being played at the moment that you think might not be something that I'd let you watch?*

- *How would you know if it wasn't appropriate – something that would make me feel upset for you to be playing?*
- *What could you do about it?*
- *What might go wrong if you decide not to play or ask to play the game in a way that's right for your age? Does that make you feel worried?*
- *How can I help if you see something you think you shouldn't, or if someone tells you about it? What would be useful for me to do? What would put you off telling me?*

Each one of those questions will yield some interesting conversations. Make sure you've sent your face the memo about being open to listening so that no over-horrified or disgusted looks pop up.

For most tweens and early-stage teens, feeling like they're being asked and not told is important. Usually being told to do something – or not to do something – means that the exact opposite will happen. It's also useful to talk about a similar experience that you might have had when you were young, how it made you feel, and what you did about it. I remember watching 'Nightmare on Elm Street' as a teenager at a sleepover and thinking that I'd never ever sleep again. Being able to tell a parent, knowing they wouldn't be happy about it, but counting on them not to blow a fuse was my greatest comfort as time did its thing and erased the ghastly gaping emotional torment of what I saw every time I closed my eyes.

It's going to be OK

It's hard not to feel anxious when there's lots of information around on the horrors of this, and the damage waiting to be done of that. Our young ones are growing up in a digital world with a very high risk of exposure to content that will crash into their psyche at some point – and for a while.

The greatest protective factor is a grown-up who listens before lecturing, who connects before they correct, and who shows up equally emotionally steady in the best of times and worst of times.

So, check your parent controls and check in with your child often. Talk to them about what they're watching, if it's the same or different to their friends, and how they're feeling about it. Remember – send the memo to your face before you begin. Squid Game is just another – in a long line of what have been, and will be – threat to the sacredness of our children's childhood innocence. Protect with love and controls, talk early and often, and always, always teach the skills needed to cope and seek help.

**If you are concerned about content that your child has been exposed to and its impact on their emotional state and behaviour, please be brave enough to seek help. Start with your family GP. Some children are more influenced by what they see online – usually inadvertently – and early help seeking saves lots of family and parental stress.'*

Thank you for your support

Yours sincerely



Geoff Jeffrey (Headteacher)