



ST MARY'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

a Catholic Voluntary Academy

Newbold Road • Upper Newbold • Chesterfield • S41 8AG

Headteacher: Mrs M Dengate M.Phil

Telephone: 01246 201191

Email: enquiries@stmaryschesterfield.org.uk
www.st-maryshigh.derbyshire.sch.uk

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Dear Parents/Carers

The wellbeing of our young people is always a top priority. With exam season imminent for our Year 11 and Year 13 students, we would like to take this opportunity to raise some important issues pertinent to the good mental and physical health of your child. We do realise that you will be aware of the issues raised in this letter already, however, we are hoping it will provide an opportunity for you to have a conversation with your child regarding the importance of sleep and limiting screen time.

It has become apparent that some of our students are not getting enough sleep. There are so many distractions surrounding them, that some are not going to sleep until the early hours of the morning, or sometimes even later. Students are then arriving to school, sleep deprived, and attempting to learn. It is not possible for your child to learn effectively and fulfil their academic potential if they are sleep deprived.

The NHS recommends that 11-12 year olds have 9-12 hours of sleep per night and 13-18 year olds require 8-10 hours. The effects of chronic sleep deprivation may include: concentration difficulties, mentally 'drifting off' in class, shortened attention span, memory impairment, poor decision making, moodiness and aggression, depression and an increase in risk-taking behaviours.

We appreciate that it can be difficult to coax young people off their phones, tablets and games consoles to ensure that they unwind properly to allow for a good night's sleep, but we strongly urge you to be as vigilant as possible. Experts recommend against the use of any device in the hour before bed, as the light exposure from screens prevents the brain from winding down to sleep. Please try to embed this into your evening routines at home. It is not advised that young people should have access to their mobile devices during the night.

There are so many temptations to communicate with friends via social media into the early hours, or watch videos and listen to music. All of these activities will stimulate the brain and make it even harder for them to fall asleep. Here are some ideas to help your child get the essential rest they need and reduce their screen time:

- Have a mobile phone curfew at a certain time in the evening, when all mobile phones are switched off and put in a safe place until an agreed time or the next day.
- Switch off Wi-Fi or have devices charging downstairs to remove the temptation for young people to be online when they should be asleep.
- You could speak to like-minded parents in your child's social circles to agree a rough consensus around bedtime rules – to avoid frustration and arguments.
- Check on your child when they have gone to bed at regular intervals.

There are no official UK guidelines on screen time, however, *The American Academy of Paediatrics* recommends that teenagers should not spend longer than 90-120 minutes per day online. This includes online gaming. Please try to be aware of how long your child spends playing games and what type of games they are playing. Are they appropriate? Like films, all video games carry age ratings, and it is worth paying attention to these. If you wouldn't let your child watch an 18-rated film, they shouldn't be playing an 18-rated game.

Live, Love and Learn in the Light of Christ

For more information and guidance on mental health & wellbeing, including the issues raised in this letter, please see our school website <https://www.st-maryshigh.derbyshire.sch.uk/information/mental-health-emotional-wellbeing/>

We have compiled a comprehensive directory of information leaflets, guidance, web links and contact numbers to help support our whole school community with issues including anxiety, depression, relationships, substance misuse, healthy eating, coping with exam stress and much more.

We hope that you have found this information useful and that it will lead to some productive conversations at home to improve the holistic wellbeing of your child in order for them to achieve their God given potential.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'H McKay', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the top of the signature.

Miss H McKay

Senior Assistant Head for Inclusion & Pastoral Care