'Adolescence' The Netflix Series – Guidance for School Staff, Parents and Carers

It has been several weeks since Adolescence, a four-part drama highlighting the potential harms of online violence, pornography and misogynistic content, was released on Netflix in the UK. The mini-series explores the difficult questions that arise when a 13-year-old boy is accused of stabbing one of his female classmates to death. It looks at different perspectives of accountability, including peers, parents, school, community, online platforms and society in general.

The series has offered an opportunity for adults to open conversations with children and young people about the importance of healthy relationships, how to keep safe online, and to explore some of these themes in more detail. Many school leaders across the country are recognising the buzz that the series is creating and calling for it to be shown in schools to help pupils understand the dangers of social media, knife crime and online extremism, including misogyny. Even the Prime Minister, Keir Starmer said that he watched the series with his teenage children and acknowledged that there is an 'issue with young boys and men' around toxic masculinity. The series is both thought provoking and insightful and encourages us to consider how our young people see themselves and how they navigate the uncertainty, peer pressure and conformity in today's virtual world.

Nationally, there are continuous conversations on the impact that social media has on our young people. There have been calls for the government to consider a smartphone ban in schools and a 'digital age of consent' as has been set by other countries which bans children under 16 from using social media. The Scottish Govt has recently released guidance on mobile phone use in schools and Fife Education Service has its own guidance with head teachers having the autonomy to determine the best approach within their own school communities. However, banning mobile phones in schools would only solve one small part of the problem.

Children and young people need to be given the skills and confidence to navigate the internet safely and to recognise harmful cultures when they see them. Children and young people should be central to any decisions made as their views and opinions on how to reduce online harm include first-hand experiences and leaving them out of the discussions may lead to important issues being overlooked.

Although some young people may have already watched 'Adolescence' without any follow-up discussion, merely showing the full series to young people in schools without any emotional scaffolding is not recommended. Showing short clips of the series in PSE and planning conversations around some of the themes with young people would be advantageous and might support a better understanding of some of these issues, for young people, staff, parents and carers, and the wider community. Some of the main themes are highlighted below and can be used to support conversations both at school and at home.

What can schools do?

1. Ensure that schools are supporting positive and healthy relationships and challenging gender-based violence and misogynistic attitudes, language and behaviours.
   - Secondary schools in Fife should be engaging with the [Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme](), which is delivered by senior pupils in PSE classes and empowers pupils to take an active bystander approach to reflect on various scenarios which tackle aspects of gender-based violence. There should be a whole school approach to supporting this initiative, which is complemented by [Equally Safe at School](), which enables schools to build and reinforce a culture that challenges violence and promotes gender equality within the curriculum, and in policies and procedures across the school community.
   - Primary Schools have access to the [Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood]() programme, which explores content on relationships, friendships, consent, emotional wellbeing and gender. They can also deliver the ['Keeping your Cool in School']() resource which empowers primary aged pupils to cope with situations they encounter and equips them to recognise and manage strong emotions.
   - All schools in Fife also have access to [Peer Mediation]() support and training for both staff and pupils, with many schools already supporting pupils to run peer mediation services to resolve low level conflict amongst their peer groups. This is provided by Scottish Mediation, who have also developed some guidance following the 'Adolescence' series.
2. Within PSE classes, also consider using clips of the Adolescence series to discuss themes such as:
   - The impact of social media and online subcultures – How online platforms can expose young individuals to harmful ideologies, such as incel culture and misogyny.
   - Mental Health and Adolescent Development – The importance of mental health support during formative years.
   - Family and Community Dynamics – Insights into the familial and community factors that can influence a young person's behaviour and wellbeing.
3. Schools should ensure that they have well established and robust mental health support systems to ensure early identification and interventions for pupils experiencing distress. Alongside the Educational Psychology and School Nurse Services, there are a number of other commissioned services which provide [Mental Health and Wellbeing Supports for children and young people.]() Please ensure that secondary pupils in Fife are also aware of the [Our Minds Matter Mental Health digital signposting information]().
4. Support professional learning and development for staff, including the ability to recognise signs of distress or radicalisation in pupils, and the need for appropriate and timely responses. The one-day Mentors in Violence Prevention capacity building training session is ideal for staff where the programme is already up and running within the school and staff are keen to support as part of a whole school approach to challenging gender-based violence. Please contact [louise.stean@fife.gov.uk]() if you are interested in attending a future session.
5. Schools should consider reviewing their policies with regards to the use of technology and social media to ensure they align with current challenges and promote a safe learning environment throughout the school community.

6. Encourage parental and community engagement. Fostering strong partnerships with parents, carers and the wider community reinforces positive development and addresses any negative external influences.

What can Parents and Carers do?

Please consider sending this helpful SWAY out to all parents and carers in your school community with children aged 10 and over, with the following text:

Dear parents and carers,

It has been several weeks since Adolescence, a four-part drama highlighting the potential harms of online violence, pornography and misogynistic content, was released on Netflix in the UK. The mini-series explores the difficult questions that arise when a 13-year-old boy is accused of stabbing one of his female classmates to death. It looks at different perspectives of accountability, including peers, parents, school, community, online platforms and society in general.

Please see the guidance below for parents and carers.

'Adolescence' - Online Harm Guidance for Parents and Carers

It has been several weeks since Adolescence, a four-part drama highlighting the potential harms of online violence, pornography and misogynistic content, was released on Netflix in the UK. ...

Go to this Sway