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Dear Parents

I want to make you aware of something we are becoming worried about in school.

At home, before lockdown and now during lockdown, children are playing online games. Part of me knows this is a good thing because it means children are having contact with each other, they can chat, message and play games together.

Unfortunately, these games mean that children create characters and become the character. They steal, kill, ignore and block each other. They are in a virtual world, which means they are detached from reality (again, not a bad thing at the minute!). However, they are forgetting that there are real people behind these characters. So, when they are stealing, killing, ignoring and especially when they are blocking each other, this is really hurting their friends and is causing great upset and anxiety. In normal times children would come to school and see each other face to face, which would reassure them that whatever went on in the game last night was not carried over to real life. Occasionally, adults in school would need to step in and unpick a situation that had occurred. We would talk to the children involved and try to make them realise that by ignoring or blocking someone it makes them feel rejected and lonely. They wouldn't do that to anyone on the playground or at the park or face to face.

If this happens continually it is classed as bullying, specifically cyberbullying. Meaning, I am aware that there are instances of cyberbullying at the moment. This is very difficult for us to deal with in school as not all of the children are here.

I would like to ask parents to read <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-games/>

- Share this information with your children.
- Make sure their children are not spending hours on these games - they need "real" social interaction with their household during this time.
- Talk to your children about how they may be treating characters – reminding them there are real people behind them.

Together we can help to reduce anything that may be causing extra anxiety at this time.

Yours faithfully,
Mrs Helen Kelly