

S4 Letter to parents - Smartphones are not "smart" by themselves

Dear Parents and Pupils

We would like to draw your attention to a topic that is of great importance in today's world: the use of smartphones and the potential risks that go along with it.

I therefore take the liberty of speaking very clearly and in detail below, as incidents in this context can lead to extremely unpleasant legal consequences for you and your children, which Leibniz-Gymnasium would like to prevent: WhatsApp is approved in the EU (not without reason) only from the age of 16 and apps with chat functions generally offer a high potential for conflict.

If parents ignore this age requirement and there is a spread of racist, extremist, violence-glorifying, pornographic or even child and youth pornographic content in class chat groups (this also includes intimate private recordings of pupils), the question of responsibility and competence for dealing with such cases arises.

We as a school take our responsibility seriously and inform your children in detail about this topic in workshops and class leader lessons. Thus, we are happy to ensure that smartphones become smart in school as a supplementary measure. However, you as parents are the primary educational institution. The polluter pays principle clearly applies here: by providing your children with smartphones with WhatsApp and other social media apps, you bear sole responsibility for your underage children.

A class chat on WhatsApp is not an official school communication platform, but a purely private matter. We teachers cannot look into these chats on pupils' mobile phones - only you as guardians may and must do that. If you provide your children with smartphones, you should definitely also discuss the problems associated with them.

If problematic incidents become known, we do not hesitate to involve the police to send a clear signal. Legally, in such cases, all members of a chat group are in possession of criminal content, not only those who have shared it.

Mobile phones must be switched off five minutes before class, in the canteen and cafeteria. The teacher giving the lesson or supervising outside the lesson may allow exceptions. If these rules are disregarded, the device or other digital storage medium may be temporarily confiscated (see house rules, point 6).

The secretary's office is of course available to report unexpected events at home. We would also like to ask you, dear parents, to only contact your children via smartphone during school hours in exceptional cases.

Yours sincerely

Uwe Schmidt
- Headmaster -

Dear Parents, Finally, I would like to ask you to do the following:

- ☒ Read this mail together with your children and watch this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vSaHc_hu2g.
- ☒ Inform your children that it is important to inform us or their parents about problematic content in order to prevent further spreading and to protect the class. Talk to the parents of such children personally in a timely manner in order to clarify these incidents and not to burden Leibniz Gymnasium.
- ☒ Recommendation: Let the class representatives be administrators in class chat groups and consistently remove problematic posts and perpetrators.
- ☒ Encourage your children to come to you promptly with online problems and take away their fear of a possible mobile phone ban. A trusting relationship is the best protection against stressful online experiences.
- ☒ Trust your child, but remember that chat functions are always a risk for contact with the whole online world, including problematic content and paedophile abuse.
- ☒ Decide carefully at what age you can allow your child to use a smartphone.
- ☒ Ensure your children have a smartphone-free sleep zone.
- ☒ Use Apple Family Sharing/Screen Time and Google Family Link for age-appropriate smartphone restriction, but note that apps with chat functions cannot be filtered.
- ☒ If you have access to Netflix, I recommend the documentary "The Social Media Dilemma", in which former employees of social media platforms explain their ethical concerns and how not to use social media for their own children until the age of 16.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely

Uwe Schmidt
- Headmaster -