

*Blackout Education at Esher Church of
England High School*

*Parent and carer information pack
For year 7-11 pupils
Academic year 2025–26*



Contents – Esher High Parent Pack

1. Welcome & introduction
2. Who is Blackout Education
3. Why Esher High School is using Blackout
4. How Blackout works in school
5. Blackout platform – updates summer 2025
6. School mobile phone policy – what you need to know
7. Supporting healthy phone use at home and parental controls
8. Understanding algorithms and online content
9. Pupil incentives programme
10. Privacy, Permissions & Data Protection
11. Research and evidence behind this approach
12. Conclusion
13. FAQs, support links & parental control guidance

Link to website: <https://www.blackout-technologies.com/education>

Pre-note

Dear parents and carers,

This booklet has been prepared to give you clear information about how Esher High School is using the Blackout app to support students across Years 7 to 11.

For some families, this will be a re-introduction, building on the school's pilot with Years 7 and 8 last year. For others, it will be the first time you are hearing about Blackout and how it will work for your child.

The aim of this pack is to:

- explain why the school is embedding Blackout as part of its wider approach to student wellbeing, learning and safeguarding
- share the latest updates and improvements to the platform for 2025–26
- provide parents and carers with clear information about how Blackout supports the school's mobile phone policy and how you can reinforce healthy routines at home

We hope you find this guide useful, and we thank you for your continued support in helping our students develop the focus, balance and digital habits that will support them both in school and in wider life.

Esher High School & Blackout Education

Welcome & introduction

At Esher High School, we are committed to creating a learning environment where students can focus fully on their education, feel safe and supported, and develop the skills they need for life beyond school.

Smart devices play an important role in modern life, but they can also be a major source of distraction, stress and pressure during the school day. That is why we piloted the Blackout app with Years 7 and 8 last year. Feedback from staff, parents and students showed that it supported focus in lessons, reduced distractions, and helped build healthier routines.

From September 2025, we are extending Blackout across all year groups (Years 7–11). Blackout works alongside the school's mobile phone policy by blocking access to all apps during the school day, while still allowing phone calls and SMS/iMessage in emergencies*. This ensures students are contactable in extreme emergencies, while removing the distractions that interfere with learning and wellbeing.

This approach is not about banning devices altogether. Instead, it creates consistency, fairness and clarity for all students, while supporting our wider commitment to safeguarding, academic progress and student wellbeing.

In this pack you will find details about how Blackout works, the school's mobile phone policy, and practical ways you can support your child in building positive digital habits at home. Together, we can help students focus on their learning, connect more meaningfully with one another, and develop the digital discipline that will benefit them in school and in wider life.

*Footnote the permissions and settings needed for Blackout:

iOS (Apple) Permissions/ Settings = ScreenTime, Notifications (VPN if enabled on the ORG), Low Power Mode off, Background Refresh Off.

Android = Battery, Overlay, Usage, Notifications , Do not disturb, VPN for education orgs/users.

Blackout is just a data processor. We do not collect, own or process any data

About Blackout

Who we are

Blackout Education is a company working in partnership with schools to support healthier smart device use. Our team combines expertise in education, digital change management and EdTech. With experience both inside schools and in developing technology for them, we understand the challenges teachers, students, and parents & carers face every day.

Our mission

Blackout Education is about eliminating digital noise and distractions during the school day. Our purpose is not simply to restrict technology, but to help schools embed healthier digital habits as part of their wider culture. Blackout is designed to:

- Improve focus and reduce distractions
- Support attainment and progress through better engagement
- Embed safeguarding and promote student wellbeing

What makes us credible

- **Education understanding:** Our team includes former teaching staff and leaders with hands-on school experience.
- **EdTech expertise:** We bring a strong background in delivering effective digital solutions for schools.
- **Policy and research aligned:** We reflect Department for Education guidance, *Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE)*, and wider research on digital wellbeing.
- **School-driven:** We work closely with students, staff, and parents & carers, using feedback loops and surveys to make improvements.

Our purpose

We want every young person to have the confidence and skills to manage smart devices well, both in school and in life. Blackout creates the space for students to focus on learning, connect meaningfully with others, and develop positive lifelong digital habits.

Data & privacy: our commitment to safety

Blackout is built on a clear principle: we do not want or need personal data.

- No personal content is ever accessed.
- No location data or browsing history is collected.
- The app only manages access to apps during the school day.

- The minimal data collected is limited to what is required for registration (such as username, email address and device type).

This means you can be confident that Blackout is a privacy-first tool, designed to support learning and wellbeing without compromising safety or security.

Blackout and education policy

Blackout supports schools in meeting key national guidance and priorities, including:

- **Behaviour in Schools (DfE, 2022)** – providing structure, consistency, and support for positive behaviour.
- **Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE, 2025)** – embedding digital safeguarding measures.
- **Education Endowment Foundation guidance** – reducing low-level disruption to maximise learning time.

By aligning with these frameworks, Blackout helps schools ensure that their digital wellbeing strategies are not only effective but also evidence-based and compliant with expectations set out for all schools.

Meet some of the team



Hi, I'm Sarah Gallacher. I lead customer success and change management at Blackout, supporting schools with smooth onboarding, clear communication, and meaningful reviews to maximise impact. Before joining Blackout, I taught for five years and was Head of Geography, which gave me a first-hand understanding of the realities of school life. More recently, I worked in digital transformation as a Change Manager at the Department for Education, helping institutions adopt new systems and processes successfully. My focus is on making technology adoption in schools practical, sustainable, and beneficial for both

staff and students.

Blackout Education in the media

- BBC News: *Schools adopt Blackout app to cut classroom distractions*
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckgdn57ve9eo>
- The Times: *Schools order pupils to use phone Blackout app*
<https://www.thetimes.com/life-style/parenting/article/schools-order-pupils-phone-blackout-app-xzjzdx2qz>

- ITV feature via LinkedIn: *Taking action for online activity*

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/blackout-technologies-ltd_blackout-on-itv-taking-action-for-online-activity-731070891177674753-ZGGr/

Why Blackout? Comparing different approaches

Approach	Emergency contact & Maps/ Payments (post-school)	Teaches Healthy Digital Habits	Main Issues	Why Blackout is Better
Outright Ban / Confiscation	✗	✗	Creates conflict, teachers become “phone police”, no parent contact.	Runs automatically, avoids conflict, and still allows safe access when appropriate.
Pouches (e.g. Yondr)	✗	✗	Feels punitive, costly, no emergency access, often bypassed.	Keeps phones usable for emergencies and healthy use, while teaching responsibility.
Brick Phones	✗ (calls/text only)	✗	Unrealistic, extra cost, limited access to essential apps, pupils reject them.	Allows essential tools while blocking distractions, supporting modern life.
Blackout	✓	✓	Needs initial setup but then runs automatically.	Balanced, sustainable, and proven to reduce distractions while teaching responsible tech use.

Why Esher High School is using Blackout

Smart devices are a central part of young people's lives, but when used during the school day they can quickly become a source of distraction, stress and pressure. Research shows that unrestricted access to apps and social media is linked to reduced concentration, increased anxiety and disrupted sleep.

In recent years, many schools and governments have chosen to remove smart devices altogether during the school day. While well-intentioned, this approach can feel punitive and it misses a crucial opportunity: teaching young people how to manage technology well in the real world.

Blackout takes a different path. It helps students learn to live with their devices in a healthier, more balanced way, building digital discipline and habits they will need for life, not just for school.

At Esher High School, we want students to focus fully on their learning, make the most of social time with friends, and feel confident in how they use technology. Blackout helps us achieve this balance by:

- Cutting out digital distractions during the school day, without locking devices away
- Helping students focus better, keep up with their work, and enjoy more time for hobbies, sport and friends
- Reducing social pressures and digital stress caused by constant notifications
- Encouraging students to reflect on their smart device use and develop healthier long-term habits

The aim is to create space for focus, social connection and wellbeing, while supporting students to build positive digital habits that last.

*"If we want young people to thrive, we must teach them how to use technology wisely rather than simply remove it." (Jonathan Haidt, **The Anxious Generation, 2024**)*

Blackout helps us address this challenge, ensuring that pupils are guided, not left to manage alone. By using Blackout, we are supporting our pupils to self-regulate, focus, and thrive, both online and offline.

How Blackout will work at Esher High School

At Esher High School, Blackout will be used to help students in Years 7 to 11 stay focused during the school day and develop healthier long-term smart device habits. Once a student has downloaded and set up the app, it runs passively in the background. Students do not need to take any further action. The aim is to reduce distractions while keeping essential communication open in emergencies only.

Here is how it will work in practice at Esher High:

- **Blocks distractions:** All non-essential apps (such as social media, gaming, and entertainment) will be blocked during school hours, in line with the Esher High timetable.
- **Removes notifications:** Alerts from blocked apps will not appear during the day, helping students concentrate without constant interruptions.
- **Keeps students connected in emergencies:** Students will always be able to make and receive phone calls and SMS (iMessage) if urgent contact with home is needed.
- **Switches on and off automatically:** Blackout will activate and deactivate according to the Esher High school day, returning full access to the smart device after school.
- **Protects privacy:** Blackout will not track location, store personal information, or collect browsing history. It only manages access to apps during school hours, and nothing else runs in the background once the school day ends.
- **Supports wellbeing and focus:** Students will spend their school day engaged in learning, socialising face to face, and developing smart device habits that last. Blackout also creates space for open conversations about technology both in and outside school.

Parents & carers at Esher High will not need to manage the app on their child's smart device. Once installed, it runs automatically in the background.

Blackout App updates: Summer 2025

Based on feedback from pupils, parents & carers, and staff Blackout Education has been strengthened and improved for the new academic year. These changes build on the lessons learned from pilot programmes (including here at Esher) and are designed to reduce staff workload while making it easier to recognise and celebrate positive pupil behaviour.

At Esher High School, the following improvements will now be in place:

- **Stronger protection against workarounds** – iOS Screen Time VPN blocking now ensures pupils cannot bypass Blackout, giving staff and parents & carers greater confidence that devices remain protected.
- **Automated reports** – Schools now receive a daily CSV report highlighting both non-compliant devices and positive users, making it easier to spot and celebrate good use while quickly addressing any issues.
- **Incentives programme integration** – Positive pupil use is now central to Blackout and celebrated through certificates, postcards home, tutor group rewards, and termly prize draws.
- **Support and troubleshooting tools** – Teachers can now report and resolve issues more quickly, reducing workload and keeping the focus on teaching.
- **Reviewing surveys** – Parents & carers, staff, and pupils will be invited to share their experiences to guide further improvements.
- **Training and webinars** – Continued training opportunities and regular webinars are available to support staff and parents & carers.
- **Ongoing improvement** – These updates are part of a wider roadmap for continuous development.

We also know that ongoing training and support are essential to making any technology work well in schools. As highlighted in the Bett White Paper *Plugged in or Switched Off?* (2025):

“The main barrier to broader adoption isn’t scepticism but pragmatic challenges – primarily inadequate training opportunities.”

That is why Blackout provides webinars and training for staff, as well as support resources for parents & carers, so that everyone feels confident using the app.

School phone policy: what you need to know

At Esher High School, our phone policy is designed to support learning, wellbeing, and healthy digital habits. While mobile phones can be useful for communication, they can also distract from lessons, increase social stress, and reduce face-to-face interaction.

Below is the phone policy in full, as agreed by school leadership and governors. This explains how mobile phones and other connected devices should be managed on site, and how the Blackout app supports these expectations.

From the school behaviour policy:

8.7 Mobile Phones and School Bags

The school introduced a new app, provided by technology firm Blackout for all student phones. Every student who brings a mobile phone to school should download the Blackout app.

Mobile phones, ear buds, headphones, smart watches and other connected devices are not permitted to be used by students on site. All devices must be switched off and stored away in their bag once a student enters the blue student gate each morning. If a device is seen, used or heard when on site, it will be confiscated by the member of staff and taken to main reception. Any device that is kept in pockets, tucked into waistbands, underwear, or anywhere other than in a bag will be in breach of this policy.

There will be the following consequences if a device is confiscated.

Part 1 Students with the Blackout App downloaded and active at the time of confiscation

The phone and connected devices will be confiscated and taken to main reception. Students will get their device(s) back at the end of the day on the first occasion each term. After this chance, the phone will be kept overnight until the end of the next school day and a parent will need to collect the phone for any further confiscations in a term. It will not be handed back to the student. If this occurs on a Friday, the collection will be at the end of the Monday.

Part 2 Students who have not downloaded or who have disabled the app at the time of confiscation

The phone will be taken to main reception and kept overnight until the end of the next school day. If this occurs on a Friday, the collection will be at the end of the Monday. If a child requires their phone for transport, the parent will be notified and a cash fare will be paid by the school which will need to be repaid.

A student who disables the Blackout app during the school day will have their phone confiscated as they must have used their phone to do this, and part 2 of the consequence will be applicable.

At the end of the school day, students will only be able to use their phones once they have left the blue school gates. Students seen with their phone before this point will have it confiscated and if refusing, it will be confiscated the next day.

Part 3 Students refusing to hand their device over when it is used, seen, heard or not in a bag at any point

The student will be placed in the focus room or out of circulation. It is important to note that the rules of the focus room require students to hand their phone in. Any refusal to do this will place a student at risk of suspension.

This policy is clear that phones must be off and stored in back packs. If a student chooses to break this rule, the school will enforce the consequences stated above. Parents are not able to override this.

School Bags

All school bags must be a back pack/rucksack, with double/two straps. Handbags or shoulder bags are not appropriate for school and are not allowed; neither are plastic shopping bags (e.g. JD Sport bag).

Further information

If a parent needs to contact their child urgently, they can do this by phoning the school. Likewise, if a student needs to contact their parent in an emergency, they will be able to do this at the Student Reception, with a Student Wellbeing Coordinator or by asking any member of staff for support.

Blackout works in partnership with Esher High School to make sure the policy is effective, consistent, and supportive of pupil wellbeing and learning.

Supporting healthy phone use at home

Blackout helps pupils manage their smart devices during the school day, but good habits are most effective when reinforced at home. Parents & carers play an important role in creating a balanced approach to technology and encouraging positive conversations.

Here are some ideas you might find useful at home:

- Talk openly with your child about how they use their smart device in and outside of school.
- Set simple and consistent routines, such as putting devices away at mealtimes or before bedtime.
- Encourage family time without devices, whether that is sharing a meal, watching a film together, or going for a walk.
- Ask your child what they see online and use this as a way to start conversations about social media, wellbeing, and friendships.

Blackout is designed to support these conversations by creating space for pupils to reflect on their phone use and build healthier long-term habits. This is not about removing smart devices, but about teaching pupils how to live well with them.

A full list of resources for parents & carers is included at the end of this resource pack.

Parental controls

Most smart devices now include built-in parental control settings which allow you to:

- Set limits on screen time and app use
- Restrict access to certain types of content
- Manage permissions for app downloads and purchases
- Receive usage reports to help guide conversations with your child

Guides on how to set up parental controls are included at the end of this pack and are also available digitally.

Understanding algorithms and online content

Why algorithms matter for your child

Social media algorithms do not just show content, they decide what your child sees. While a young person may feel they are in control of their feed, algorithms take the lead by learning their viewing habits and creating repetitive streams of videos or posts. These can sometimes be harmful, extreme, or misleading.

Over time, this can:

- Distort reality and limit perspective
- Harm self-esteem through repeated exposure to unrealistic or negative content
- Reinforce unhealthy behaviours or interests

Recent research from UCL (2024) highlights how powerful these systems can be. When researchers created TikTok accounts to reflect typical teenage interests such as loneliness or self-improvement, within days the algorithm began showing increasingly harmful content. By the fifth day, 56% of the recommended videos included misogynistic themes such as objectification, harassment, or discrediting women, a sharp rise from just 13% at the start.

By helping pupils understand how algorithms work, we can encourage them to think critically about what appears on their feed. We want young people to question whether what they see is balanced, accurate, or healthy, and to build the skills to make thoughtful choices about how they respond.

At Esher High School, Blackout supports this by limiting exposure to distracting or harmful content during the school day, while encouraging open conversations between pupils, staff, and parents & carers about the online world.

For parents & carers, the most valuable step is to keep these conversations open. Ask your child what kinds of videos or posts appear most often, and explore together why that might be. This helps them recognise how algorithms shape their feed and gives them the confidence to question what they see online.

Conversation starters you might try at home

- "What kind of videos do you seem to get the most on your feed?"
- "Why do you think those come up more than others?"
- "Have you ever felt like you're seeing the same type of post again and again?"
- "Do you think your feed reflects what everyone else sees, or is it just for you?"

Pupil incentives programme

At Esher High School, we believe that learning healthy digital habits should be recognised and celebrated. The Blackout incentives programme is designed to reward pupils who show a positive mindset and consistent use of their smart devices during the school day.

Positive smart device use is central to how Blackout will be used in school. This is not about punishment, but about recognising pupils who take control of their device use and show leadership in building a healthier digital culture. *This also includes pupils who consistently follow the phone policy or who choose not to bring a phone into school.*

How pupils can be recognised

- Certificates and postcards home celebrating positive use
- Tutor group rewards for collective effort and consistency
- Termly prize draws with the chance to win vouchers or experiences
- End-of-year recognition for pupils who have shown ongoing commitment

This approach is fully in line with Esher High School's wider rewards and celebration policy, ensuring consistency across all areas of school life. By focusing on positive behaviours, the programme helps build confidence, motivation, and a sense of shared achievement across the school community. More details about how pupils can take part will be shared by form tutors as the term progresses.

Privacy, Permissions & Data Protection

At Esher High School, we know families need to feel confident about how technology is used in school. That is why Blackout has been designed with **privacy at its core**. The app only manages access to distracting apps during the school day — and nothing else.

- **No personal content accessed** – Blackout does not access photos, messages, contacts, or files stored on a student’s device.
- **No location tracking** – Blackout does not record or store student movements or GPS data.
- **No browsing history collected** – The app does not monitor internet use or search activity.
- **Minimal data collected** – Only the information needed to register the device is collected (such as username, email, and device type).
- **Restricted access** – This registration data is only visible to the school’s key admin staff who are responsible for managing the system.
- **School-day only** – Once the school schedule ends, Blackout gives full control of the device back to the student (or to parental controls, if set up at home).

Blackout is fully **GDPR-compliant** and aligns with Esher High School’s safeguarding policies. Families can be assured that the app is a **privacy-first tool**, created to support learning and wellbeing without compromising safety or security.

Research & evidence behind this approach

Why does this matter?

Constant smart device use is reshaping the way young people think, feel, and relate to the world around them. Social media and constant notifications are linked to distraction, anxiety, and pressures that affect both learning and wellbeing.

In his book *The Anxious Generation* (2024), psychologist Jonathan Haidt identifies four “foundational harms” that arise from a screen-based childhood:

- **Social deprivation:** direct, in-person interaction has sharply declined since around 2010, replaced by curated screen interactions that can lead to isolation.
- **Sleep deprivation:** night-time screen use disrupts sleep patterns, affecting emotional wellbeing and academic focus.
- **Attention fragmentation:** constant alerts and fragmented attention weaken the ability to focus deeply, learn effectively, and reflect.
- **Screen addiction:** apps and platforms are designed to keep young people engaged, often in ways that are especially harmful during key developmental years.

Key findings from wider research

- Young people in the UK receive an estimated 200 to 240 notifications each day, making it difficult to sustain focus.
- High levels of screen time are linked to disrupted sleep, increased anxiety, and lower academic progress.
- The Oxford Internet Institute found that girls aged 11 to 13 and boys aged 14 to 15 are most negatively affected by heavy social media use, reporting lower life satisfaction.

What the experts say

“Mobile phones... distract pupils from learning. We owe it to our children to remove distractions and enable them to be fully present and engaged.”

– Department for Education, 2024

“Girls aged 11 to 13 and boys aged 14 to 15 appear most negatively affected by heavy social media use, with lower life satisfaction reported.”

– Oxford Internet Institute, 2023

“Mobile phones risk unnecessary distraction, disruption and diversion.”

– UK Parliamentary debate, 2024

Why this matters at Esher High School

By drawing on this evidence, we are helping pupils focus in lessons, enjoy their social time more fully, and develop balanced habits with their smart devices. This is about preparing them not only for school, but for life. This also builds on the learning from last year's pilot with Years 7 and 8, which has helped us refine our approach as we now extend Blackout to all year groups.

Conclusion

At Esher High School, we believe that preparing pupils for life in a digital world means more than simply managing devices during the school day. With Blackout, we are giving pupils the space to focus, the encouragement to reflect, and the skills to manage their smart devices responsibly.

This work is most effective when staff, parents & carers, and pupils all play a role together. By creating consistency between home and school, and by keeping open conversations about technology, we can help young people grow in confidence, find balance, and establish healthier digital habits that last well beyond their school years.

Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to working together to help our pupils thrive both in school and beyond.

If you have any questions, please contact your school or refer to the Blackout Education website.

FAQs & support links

What if my child doesn't have a phone?

No problem. Blackout only applies to students who bring phones to school. If your child opts not to bring a phone, they won't be affected by this policy.

What if my child needs to contact me during the school day?

They can. Phone calls and SMS/iMessage remain available for emergencies only.

Does the school monitor what students do on their devices?

No. Blackout doesn't track personal activity or store browsing history. It only manages access to apps during the school day and only collects the minimal data required for setup.

What happens if my child disables the app?

Disabling Blackout counts as a breach of school expectations. Staff are notified and will follow up according to the school's policy.

What about learning apps or homework?

Blackout only runs during school hours, so students can continue to use educational apps and complete homework after school. In class, teachers may allow supervised use of specific apps when required.

Can families use device control tools at home?

Yes. You are welcome to use built-in device tools (e.g. Screen Time, Focus Modes) alongside Blackout to reinforce healthy digital habits. Guidance on setup is included at the end of this pack.

What if something isn't working correctly?

Please report any technical issues directly to the school, or consult the support section on the Blackout Education website.

Additional Q&A from Parent Webinar

What if my child is off school for the day?

The app can be manually disabled at home.

Is enrollment optional?

Participation is expected as part of the school's behaviour policy.

What if I don't want the school to keep my child's phone overnight?

Confiscation procedures are part of the school's phone policy. If your child keeps their phone off and in their bag, this will not be an issue.

Does Blackout affect battery life?

No. Some negative reviews online are from pupils resisting restrictions, but the app is designed to use minimal battery. Phones kept switched off in bags preserve the most battery.

Has Blackout been externally audited for security?

Yes. Blackout has undergone independent security audits and is GDPR compliant. Data is stored in the UK and EU (Dublin).

Can Blackout or the school access apps or data on my child's phone?

No. Neither the school nor Blackout can view personal data or app activity.

What if my child's phone doesn't support the app?

In this case, we recommend parental controls and ensuring the phone is kept switched off and in a bag. (follow schools phone policy)

What if my child accidentally deletes the app?

Like any app, Blackout can be reinstalled easily. The school will be notified if it has been disabled or removed.

Will this replace parents' responsibilities?

No. The school and families work together. Blackout supports pupils during the school day, while families reinforce healthy routines at home.

How will success be measured?

Feedback from staff, parents, and pupils will be collected during the academic year to review impact and guide future policy.

For the full list of parent questions and answers from our recent webinar, please visit:

[Full Parent Q&A — Esher High School's Blackout Pilot](#)

A Data story: <https://vimeo.com/1093093782?share=copy>

FAQs will be updated as and when needed.

Practical guidance for parents & carers

Internet Matters – Social Media Advice Hub

Guides and tools for supporting your child's safe and healthy use of social media.

internetmatters.org/resources/social-media-advice-hub

Internet Matters – Screen Time Tips for 11–14-Year-Olds

Age-specific strategies to help balance screen time and encourage healthy routines.

internetmatters.org/resources/screen-time-age-11-14

Childnet – Social Media Help & Advice

Practical guidance on discussing the benefits and risks of social media with your child.

childnet.com/parents-and-carers

Be Internet Legends – Parents (Google)

Interactive tools and conversation starters to help children be safe, confident, and kind online.

beinternetlegends.withgoogle.com/en_uk/parents

CEOP Education (NCA-CEOP)

Films, resources, and advice for talking about online safety with children and teens.

ceopeducation.co.uk/parents

TikTok Guardian's Guide

Overview of TikTok's safety tools, privacy settings, and how to manage your child's account.

parents.tiktokglobalshop.com/parents-guide

Snapchat Parent Guide (PDF)

A downloadable guide explaining Snapchat's safety features and privacy controls.

snap.com/en-GB/safety/snapchat-parents

Instagram Parents' Guide

Tips for setting privacy controls and keeping your child's Instagram use safe and positive.

about.instagram.com/community/parents

Meta Child Safety Actions

Information on Meta's policies and initiatives to keep young people safe across Facebook and Instagram.

about.meta.com/actions/child-safety

Report Harmful Content

A direct way to report harmful or unsafe online material to the UK Safer Internet Centre.

reportharmfulcontent.com

Reports & research

"The impact of smartphones and social media on children" UK Parliament Commons Library (May 2024)

National data on children's online habits and government action to reduce harm.

researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9870/CBP-9870.pdf

Ofcom's "A window into young children's online worlds" (April 2024)

Research on young children's use of TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, and associated risks.

ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/childrens/children-2024

UK Parliament: Screen time: impacts on education and wellbeing (May 2024)

Examines how different types of social media use affect wellbeing, and risks like violent content and misinformation.

committees.parliament.uk/work/8407/screen-time

Ofcom: Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2025 (May 2025)

Annual overview of children's media habits, attitudes, and how families manage online use.

ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/childrens/parents-children-2025

Ofcom: Children's Media Lives 2025 (May 2025)

Long-term qualitative study of UK children's media use, attitudes, and behaviours.

ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/childrens/medialives-2025

University of Cambridge: Social Media Use Among Adolescents with Mental Health Conditions (2025)

Shows how teens with anxiety and depression use social media differently and experience stronger negative effects.

cam.ac.uk/research/social-media-adolescents-mental-health-2025

WHO: Teens, Screens and Mental Health (Sept 2024)

Finds 11% of adolescents show addictive social media use patterns, with girls most affected.

who.int/publications/i/item/9789240095013

Parental Controls

Why combine Blackout with parental controls?

Evidence from Blackout pilots in schools has shown that the most effective results come when Blackout and parental controls are used together.

- **Blackout** manages access to distracting apps during the school day.
- **Parental controls** help set healthy boundaries at home and outside of school hours.

Together, they create a joined-up approach to digital wellbeing. This consistency reinforces the message that phones can be useful, but must be used responsibly. It also provides a natural opportunity for conversations between parents & carers and young people about healthy device use, supporting the wider cultural change we are working towards.

How to set up parental controls

For iPhone users (Apple Screen Time)

1. Go to *Settings* > *Screen Time*
2. Enable Screen Time and set up Family Sharing if needed
3. Set a passcode to prevent changes
4. Configure:
 - **Downtime** (e.g. 7pm–9pm)
 - **App Limits** (e.g. social media, games)
 - **Content & Privacy Restrictions** for age-appropriate apps and media
 - **Purchasing and app installation controls**

Helpful links:

- Apple's Screen Time Guide - <https://support.apple.com/en-gb/105121>
- [YouTube: Step-by-step tutorial](#)

For Android users (Google Family Link & Digital Wellbeing)

1. Download *Google Family Link* on both parent and child devices
2. Create or link a supervised child account
3. Set up:
 - **Screen time schedules**
 - **App download/usage limits**
 - **YouTube and web content filters**
 - **Reports on app usage**
4. Use on-device *Digital Wellbeing* tools:

- **App timers**
- **Focus mode**
- **Bedtime mode**

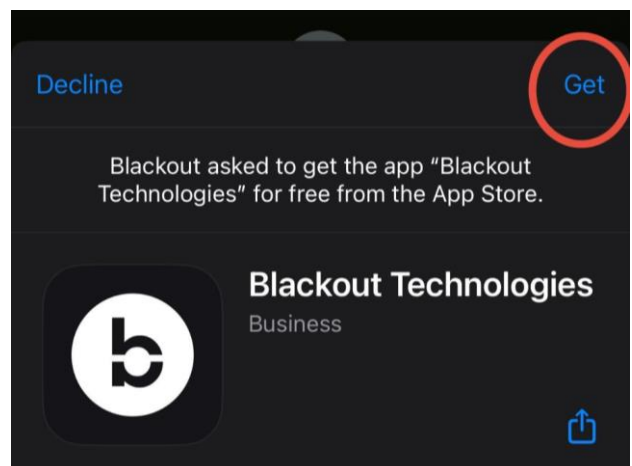
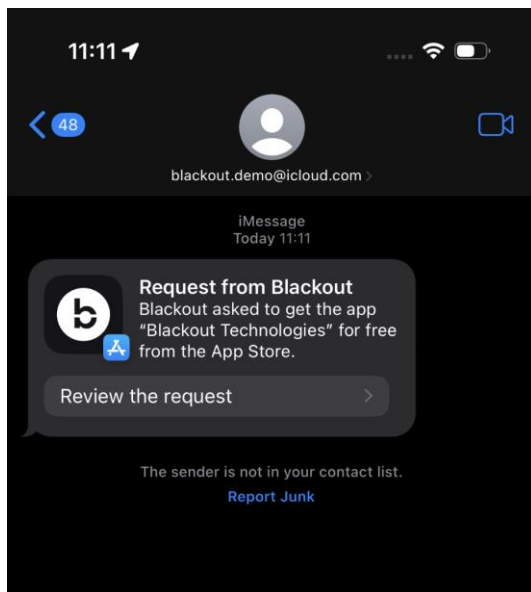
Helpful links:

- [Google Family Link Help](#)
- [YouTube: Family Link tutorial](#)

Tip: Involve your child when setting up controls. Talking through why boundaries are in place makes them more effective and helps young people develop the self-regulation skills that last beyond school.

Blackout with parental controls:

If you already have parental controls switched on, when you child downloads Blackout (or any other app the below will occur)



Glossary of Key Terms: the Blackout Dashboard

B

Background refresh

Background refresh is a phone setting that allows apps to update their content even when they're not actively being used. This means apps can fetch new data, like messages, news, or notifications in the background.

Blocked

This is a device user that is currently blocked (within a school schedule).

D

Daily report (CSV)

A daily report is emailed downloaded from the dashboard and emailed directly to schools. This shows the daily activity of the students, whether students were blocked or unblocked throughout the day and highlights any attempts to manually disable Blackout. This report helps schools track usage and can be used to reward positive behaviour or apply sanctions when needed.

Dashboard

The Blackout Dashboard is a secure online platform for school staff to monitor and manage student use of the Blackout app. It provides real-time insights of student lists, which identify the current app health status and blocking status of all students. The dashboard can be used to support rewards or interventions based on student behaviour. The dashboard can also be used to access individual student profiles and perform a number of actions (please see below - link).

Deleted (Uninstalled)

An uninstalled user is a device that has been unreachable and unblocked for 5 days, therefore it is suspected that the app has been uninstalled from the device.

Debug

This is used by the developers. It is the process of identifying and removing errors from Blackout..

Disabled (disactivated?)

A disabled user has manually disabled the Blackout app using the in-app toggle preventing the device from being blocked and removing the application restrictions.

Do Not Disturb

Do Not Disturb is a phone setting that silences calls, alerts, and notifications. It helps limit distractions by allowing only selected notifications, like alarms or a specific contact, to come through.

F

Family link

Family Link is a parental control app from Google that allows parents to manage and restrict their child's phone use on Android and Chromebook devices. Parents can set screen time limits, block certain apps, monitor activity, and lock devices when needed. When used alongside Blackout, Family Link strengthens the impact of the app by supporting focused phone use both in and out of school. Together, they help create a consistent and healthy approach to managing screen time at home and in the classroom

H

Healthy (green) ●

A healthy device has been invited, completed registration and has all permissions accepted. A healthy device is blocked or unblocked depending on whether the school schedule is on or off. The system is ready to enforce blocking when the schedule is on.

I

Invited (on-boarding status)

This is an on-boarding status. An invitation email has been sent to the student's school email address, but the user has not yet clicked on the embedded hyperlink to accept the invitation and in order to complete registration.

L

Last seen

This is the last time the device made contact with the Blackout server, updating its status. If a device is last seen over 48 hours ago, an administrator should check a student's device for suspected app uninstallation.

Limited (amber) ●

A limited device has setting(s) or permission(s) disabled that may affect how reliably Blackout can block the device. This might include Low Power Mode. The ability to block may be slowed or weakened.

Low power mode

Low Power Mode on a smartphone is a power-saving feature designed to extend battery life when the battery is running low. It achieves this by reducing or disabling certain power-consuming features and processes, limiting background tasks. Low power mode can put a device in a limited state and reduce the reliability of blocking.

O

Overlay (Android feature)

An overlay on Android is when one app displays content on top of another app or over the home screen. This can include things like chat bubbles, screen dimmers, or notification bars.

P

Parental Controls

Parental controls are settings that allow parents to manage and restrict their child's phone use, such as limiting screen time, blocking certain apps, or setting usage schedules. When used alongside Blackout, parental controls strengthen the impact of the app by helping students stay focused both in and out of school. Together, they create a consistent approach to healthy device habits, reinforcing boundaries set by both the school and home.

R

Registered (on-boarding status)

An invitation has been sent to a student's email address. The student has clicked the embedded hyperlink in the email. The student has now registered their device with Blackout. The user is ready to use Blackout.

S

Status

Device health status - The current operational state of the device e.g. does it have all the correct permissions (Apple/ iOS: Screen Time, Notifications, Low Power Mode, Background Refresh, Setting, VPN Android permissions: Do not disturb, VPN, Overlay, Notifications, Usage settings)

Device block status - Whether or not the device is blocked or unblocked.

Screen Time

Screen Time settings on a phone, such as those found on iPhones and Android devices, allow users to monitor and manage their device usage, including app usage, setting time limits, and scheduling downtime.

T

Tags

The tags can be used to add another layer of categorisation to students. These are optional. These can then be linked to different scheduling structures, if a single schedule does not meet the school's requirements. For example, year 11 might have a different school finish time and therefore use a different schedule or students requiring access to their phones during the school day for medical reasons may be tagged on a different schedule..

U

Unblockable

A device that cannot be blocked due to unaccepted permission(s), tampering/ disabling the device, or entering an unreachable status (e.g. switched off device or uninstalling the app).

Unblocked

An unblocked user is not currently blocked by Blackout. This could be due to valid reasons (outside school schedule) or due to app misuse (permissions removed, app disabled). Unblocked does not always mean misuse, but it should be investigated by an administrator so the reason can be understood and dealt with accordingly.

Unreachable (red) ●

An unreachable device hasn't communicated with Blackout for over 48 hours. This might be due to the app being force-closed or deleted. It may also occur if the device is switched off for an extended period. If a device shows this status, it should be investigated by an administrator to confirm where the app has been deleted or the phone has been turned off. Investigation is acutely important because the two potential outcomes are at opposite extremes on the scale of expected behaviour.

Usage settings

Usage settings are controls on a device that let users see how much time they spend on their phone or specific apps. They often include options to set screen time limits, schedule downtime, or restrict access to certain features. We use it to detect when an app is launched and whether to block.

V

VPN (Virtual Private Network)

A VPN is a tool that creates a secure, encrypted connection between a device and the internet. It's often used for privacy, security, or accessing restricted content by routing internet traffic through a different server. Some students may use VPNs to bypass restrictions set by schools or parental controls. However, Blackout is designed to detect and respond to VPN use that could interfere with its function.

