PARENT FACTSHEET – JUNE 2022

Keep your child safe on WhatsApp

What are the risks?

- Bullying, particularly in group chats
- Seeing content of a sexual nature, or showing violence and hatred
- Settings that allow messages to disappear after 24 hours or 7 days. This could make it harder to track bullying, and your child might share things they wouldn't otherwise because it'll disappear
- Sharing their live location, particularly with people they don't know in person
- Spam or hoax messages
- Being exposed to strangers through group chats

WhatsApp says the **minimum age** to use it is **16**, but younger children can still use it easily.

6 steps to help your child use WhatsApp safely

1. Keep their personal information and location private

By default, WhatsApp shows profile photos, status and when you last used it to all users.

Encourage your child to only share this information with their contacts, and be careful about who they talk to on the app, as anyone could pretend to be a child online.

To check and change these settings:

- On an **iPhone**, open settings in WhatsApp (the cog icon), then Account > Privacy. Tap the setting you want to change, then choose who it should be visible to
- On **Android**, tap the 3 dots in the top-right of the home screen, then > Settings > Account > Privacy. Tap the setting you want to change, then choose who it should be visible to

WhatsApp also has a feature that you can use to share your 'live location' with others. Tell your child to keep this turned off, or to only share their location with people they trust.

To check this:

- On an **iPhone**, go to phone Settings (the cog icon) > WhatsApp > Location, and tap to change if you need to
- On **Android**, go to privacy settings as above, then scroll down to 'Live location', and tap to change if you need to

2. Remind your child to be careful about what they share

It's easy to forward messages, photos and videos to others on WhatsApp. Even if your child sets a message to automatically disappear or deletes it after sharing it, the person they send it to could still screenshot it, forward it to someone else, or save it.

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So before they share anything, tell them to ask themselves: “Would I want others to see what I’m about to send?”

3. Remind your child they can leave group chats

If they see something they’re not comfortable with in a group chat, or are in a chat with someone they don’t know and are uncomfortable with, they should leave the group. To do this:

- On an **iPhone**, go into the group chat, tap the group subject, then > Exit group > Exit group
- On **Android**, go into the group chat, tap the group subject, then > Exit group > Exit

4. Make sure your child knows how to report and block people

When they first receive a message from an unknown number, they’ll have the option to report it.

If someone in your child’s contacts is upsetting them or making them uncomfortable, they can report or block them at any point (WhatsApp won’t tell the user they’ve been blocked/reported).

To do this:

- On an **iPhone**, open settings in WhatsApp, go to Account > Privacy > Blocked > Add New…, then find the contact they want to block, and tap the contact
- On **Android**, tap the 3 dots icon, then Settings, then tap Account > Privacy > Blocked contacts, tap the icon in the top right showing a person and a plus sign, search for the contact they want to block, then tap the contact to block them

To report issues like offensive or abusive content or spam:

- On an **iPhone**, open the chat with the user you want to report, tap the contact then then tap Report Contact > Report And Block
- On **Android**, open the chat with the user you want to report, then tap the 3 dots icon, then > More > Report

5. Encourage your child to watch out for spam and hoax messages

These can appear to come from contacts, as well as people they don’t know. Tell your child to watch out for messages that:

- Ask them to tap on a link, or specifically to click on a link to activate a new feature
- Ask them to share personal information like bank account details, date of birth or passwords
- Ask them to forward the message
- Say they have to pay to use WhatsApp
- Have spelling or grammar errors

6. Tell our school about any bullying they experience

Look for signs they your child may be being bullied, like being afraid or reluctant to go to school, feeling nervous, losing confidence or becoming distressed and withdrawn, or losing sleep.

Sources used in this factsheet

- Bullying and cyberbullying, NSPCC
  https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/
- Help Centre, WhatsApp
  https://faq.whatsapp.com/?locale=en_US

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