

Your child's mental health and wellbeing: WhatsApp guide

WhatsApp and emotional wellbeing

WhatsApp age restriction is 13+

WhatsApp is a convenient and easy way to keep in touch with others. We know that connection to others is really important in terms of our wellbeing, however we need to be aware that there are also some risks to WhatsApp use, particularly for children and young people.

Who is contacting me?

To start a chat on WhatsApp, all anyone needs is a person's phone number.

If a child has given their number to someone else who then adds them to a group chat, everyone in this group chat will now have access to their number. This means that complete strangers can contact them.

Does your child know what to do if they get a message from someone they don't know?

Secrecy and chat lock

Be aware of chat lock. Chat lock is a feature which allows WhatsApp users to keep their chats in a separate locked folder, with its own secret code. This allows users to hide conversations, even if someone checks their phone and messages. This could include messages about harmful behaviours such as self-harm and inappropriate sexual content.

Disappearing content

WhatsApp has a feature which allows messages to be sent and only be viewed once. Unfortunately, this allows users to send inappropriate and abusive content which cannot be re-opened once seen. This means there is no evidence of what has been sent. It also means that if you check your child's phone you won't see a complete picture of what they have viewed.

You can never really know what has been sent or received by your child's account.

Scams and fakes

Information sharing on WhatsApp can reach a lot of people, very quickly. This means that false information can rapidly gather momentum resulting in sharing of fake news. Children and young people may not have the critical thinking needed to understand what is real and what isn't. This also means that they may be vulnerable to scams. Internet Matters have produced a [toolkit](#) for parents and carers.

What can we do?

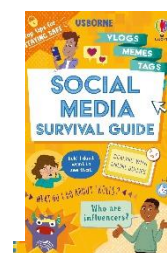
Teach them to be cautious. Guide them to ask themselves how likely a message from an unknown number is really from someone they know.

Adjust the settings. You can specify who can and cannot add them to group chats. You can do this in the '**Settings**' menu under the '**Groups**' tab.

Talk to them openly without judgment about what they are sharing and how they contribute. Consider with them how they can use group chats safely and that is okay to exit group chats if they feel uncomfortable.

Internet Matters: What is WhatsApp – A Guide for Parents
[Internet Matters](#) is a fantastic website with a huge amount of information about internet safety. There are numerous guides for parent and carers, including WhatsApp.

Social Media Survival Guide
A recommended book for children and young people aged 10+ to empower them to stay safe online when using social media.



Thriving in education

For more support and advice, please visit our [Thriving in Education website](#) or scan the QR code.



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