



The Redeemer Church of England Primary School

Online Safety Bulletin: WhatsApp

What is WhatsApp? WhatsApp is one of the most popular instant messaging apps, used by over 2 billion people in 180 countries. It allows you to send and receive messages, as well as make voice and video calls. You can connect with people individually or join group chats where lots of people can contribute. All you need to set up a WhatsApp account is a phone number.

What age rating is WhatsApp? The app is rated **13+** due issues of privacy and data sharing. This is was lowered from 16+ in April 2024 and led to criticism from Child Safety campaigners. People can easily be added to WhatsApp groups with strangers, making users vulnerable to online harm such as: scamming, fake news, contact from strangers and inappropriate material.

Dangers of WhatsApp

Unwanted Contact: To contact somebody on WhatsApp, all you need is their phone number. This means that your child could be at risk of receiving unwanted messages or calls from others. These numbers can be accessed just from being in a group with someone even if your child does not know who they are.

Pressure to Respond: Features that allow other users to see when your child is online, if they have read a message or when they were last active on the app—combined with frequent notifications—could make your child feel pressured to respond even when they don't want to.

Online Interaction: Group chats can be difficult social situations to navigate for young children. They can misunderstand conversations which can cause feelings of alienation and anxiety leading to arguments online which are documented for everyone to see

Location Sharing: The live location feature means that your child could reveal their current location to others. This feature can be used in groups as well as individual chats so your child could reveal this information to people that they don't know if they are in the same group.

Inappropriate Content: WhatsApp messages are end-to-end encrypted which means that the content cannot be monitored. This means that your child could see or hear harmful or upsetting content.

Cyberbullying: WhatsApp groups can be controlled by an 'admin', who can change settings, such as the name of the group, who is allowed to send messages, as well as being able to invite and remove people from the chat. This could lead to children feeling left out, being added to groups without giving permission, or being deliberately excluded or removed from groups.

Oversharing: Privacy features, such as disappearing and 'view once' messages, might mean that your child feels safe to reveal private information or images. However, there is always a risk that an unintended person might see what they have sent, for example if they are with the recipient.





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NSPCC Tips to Make WhatsApp More Safe

Get to know privacy settings: There are four main settings that you can use to help your child control who can see their information:

1. **Everyone** – allows all users to see your profile photo, about or status.
2. **My contacts** – only allows people from your phone contacts to see your profile photo, about, status, last seen and online.
3. **My contacts except...** – allows you to exclude certain people in your phone contacts from seeing your information.
4. **Nobody** – doesn't allow anyone to see your information.

To prevent children being added to groups by people they don't know, we recommend changing the group settings to 'My contacts except' and using the tick icon to select all contacts. This option means only your child's phone contacts, except those you exclude, can add your child to groups. But by selecting all contacts, it means that nobody can add your child to a group chat without first sending them an invitation. **In the same section, you can also switch off 'read receipts', which means other people cannot see when you have read their message. This might help if your child is feeling under pressure to respond to messages.**

Make use of safety features: Show your child how to block and report other users of the app or inappropriate content. For information on how to block or report on WhatsApp visit:

Talk about sharing: Talk to your child regularly about what they should and shouldn't share with others on WhatsApp. Remind your child that, even if they think what they are sending will stay private, others might save, forward or screenshot it. Talk to them about making sure others are comfortable with what they are sending and let them know they can come to you if they are worried about something they have shared on the app.

Set rules about location sharing: Talk with your child about whether it is appropriate for them to share their location with others and who they are allowed to share it with. You can disable location permissions by going into your device settings and switching off location services for WhatsApp.

Worth a Listen

Put it down! Should Children be allowed smartphones?

In this podcast issues around children and smartphones are explored. In the second half of the podcast (**from 20:55 minutes**) there is a particularly interesting conversation with a mother and her daughter (now 20) about the decisions they made around smartphones.

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2024/may/13/put-it-down-should-children-be-allowed-smartphones-podcast>

