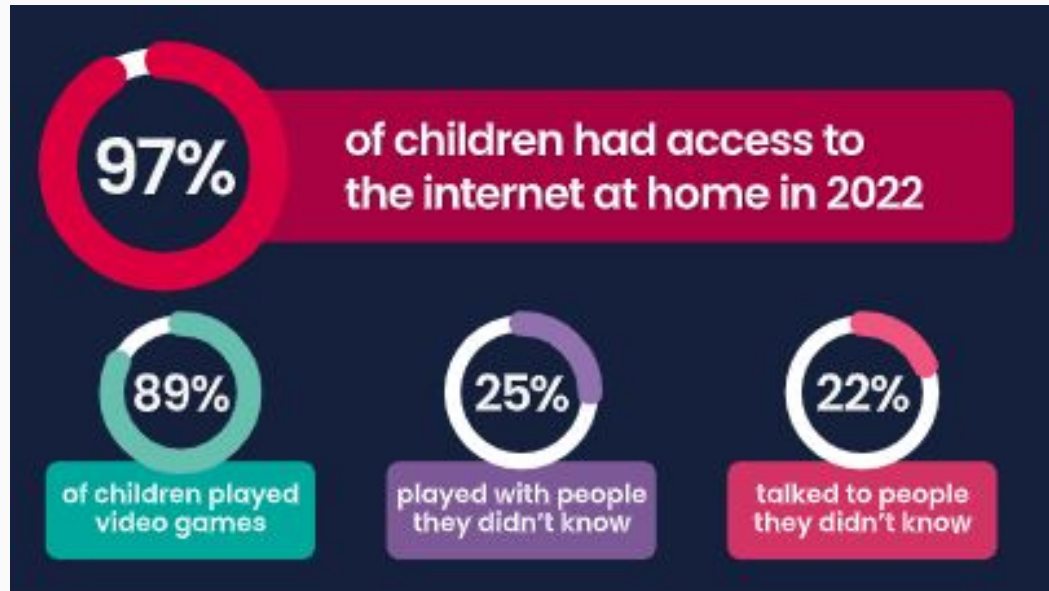


Keeping children safe on digital devices



What Parents & Carers Need to Know about OFCOM'S 'CHILDREN AND PARENTS: MEDIA USE AND ATTITUDES' REPORT 2023

Each year, Ofcom – Britain's regulatory body for communications – produces an overview of children and parents' media experiences across the previous year. The latest version has just been released, and we've pulled out some of the report's most thought-provoking findings which relate to online safety ...



<https://nationalonlinesafety.com/hub/view/guide/ofcom-s-media-use-attitudes-report-2023>



PARENTAL CONCERNS



Parents and carers **most commonly** worried about their child ...

75%



seeing age-inappropriate content

70%



being cyber-bullied online

70%



seeing pro-self-harm content

65%



giving out personal details to strangers

65%



having their data collected by companies



National
Online
Safety*

#WakeUpWednesday

Key advice

1. **Ensure you set all passwords** - children should not know them or have their own.
Passwords to unlock the device itself and any social media account password
2. **Supervise all online activity.** Any unsupervised usage poses a risk to accessing harmful content or being involved in inappropriate or unsafe communication.
3. **Check your child's browser history and app downloads.** Know exactly what they are accessing.
4. Communicate that **total privacy is unsafe at this age.**
5. **Frame device access as a privilege** that is earned through trust and responsible, kind behaviour. **Remove the device if** actions are not responsible, respectful and kind.
6. **Ensure the device is not accessible overnight.** Keep it somewhere safe where children cannot access it.

Please make an appointment to bring any device in to school for support with adjusting settings.

Group chats - multiple platforms (Whatsapp, Discord, Snapchat + gaming accounts and more)

Group chats with unknown members

If your child is added to a group chat, they have no control over who else enters the chat and has access to their mobile phone number. They can then receive direct messages and calls from a stranger. Someone may claim to be a friend of a friend or a child from a nearby school but your child has no way of knowing whether this is true or not.

Inappropriate content

Photos, videos, web links and voice notes can be sent over these platforms. There is no filter ensuring that the content your child sees is safe. Content that your child posts can be screen-grabbed or filmed and shared beyond the group they are in. The sharing of screen-grabs and films can cause significant distress. Unkind content may be shared in this manner, as well as content that is no longer in context.

Social exclusion and cyber-bullying

The group 'admin' controls who is allowed in the group. Your child can be excluded from groups which involve their friends in school. There may be pressure to be online at certain times or your child may feel anxious about being left out of certain conversations. This can have an impact on their happiness at school and at home. Some children send hurtful messages via WhatsApp that they would not say in person. These messages can be deleted so you may not see them on the thread later.

Messages for families and schools to ensure children understand

1. Your online persona should be a reflection of your kind, respectful and responsible self. Never write, post, share or participate in communication which is discriminatory or unsafe.
2. What you do online leaves a mark. It impacts the people you communicate with. It leaves a **digital footprint**. Your messages, pictures and interactions now (aged 10-11) can be saved, stored and shared for the rest of your life.
3. **Be mindful who you share with and trust.** You may trust a friend now, but this relationship may change. Not everyone you communicate with online is who they say they are.
4. **Speak to trusted adults** with any worries or concerns. Issues can be resolved with adult help but are likely to escalate and cause more distress when kept secret.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about WHATSAPP

WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging service, with around two billion users exchanging texts, photos, videos and documents, as well as making voice and video calls. Its end-to-end encryption means messages can only be viewed by the sender and any recipients: not even WhatsApp can read them. Updates to its privacy policy in 2021 (involving sharing data with parent company Facebook) caused millions to leave the app, but the new policy was widely misinterpreted – it only related to WhatsApp's business features, not to personal messages.

UK AND EUROPE 16+ 18+ REST OF THE WORLD

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

SCAMS

Fraudsters occasionally send WhatsApp messages pretending to offer prizes – encouraging the user to click on a link to win. Other common scams involve warning someone that their WhatsApp subscription has run out (aiming to dupe them into disclosing payment details) or impersonating a friend or relative and asking for money to be transferred to help with an emergency.

DISAPPEARING MESSAGES

Users can set WhatsApp messages to disappear in 24 hours, 7 days or 90 days by default. Photos and videos can also be instructed to disappear after the recipient has viewed them. These files can't be saved or forwarded – so if your child was sent an inappropriate message, it would be difficult to prove any wrongdoing. However, the receiver can take a screenshot and save that as evidence.

ENABLING FAKE NEWS

WhatsApp has unfortunately been linked to accelerating the spread of dangerous rumours. In India in 2018, some outbreaks of mob violence appear to have been sparked by false allegations being shared on the app. WhatsApp itself took steps to prevent its users circulating hazardous theories and speculation in the early weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic.

POTENTIAL CYBERBULLYING

Group chat and video calls are great for connecting with multiple people in WhatsApp, but there is always the potential for someone's feelings to be hurt by an unkind comment or joke. The 'only admins' feature gives the admin(s) of a group control over who can send messages. They can, for example, block people from posting in a chat, which could make a child feel excluded and upset.

CONTACT FROM STRANGERS

To start a WhatsApp chat, you only need the mobile number of the person you want to message (the other person also needs to have the app). WhatsApp can access the address book on someone's device and recognise which of their contacts also use the app. So if your child has ever given their phone number to someone they don't know, that person could use it to contact them via WhatsApp.

LOCATION SHARING

The 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, allowing friends to see their movements. WhatsApp describes it as a "simple and secure way to let people know where you are." It is a useful method for a young person to let loved ones know they're safe – but if they used it in a chat with people they don't know, they would be exposing their location to them, too.

<https://nationalonlinesafety.com/hub/view/guide/whatsapp-2022>

Advice for Parents & Carers

CLICK HERE

CREATE A SAFE PROFILE

Even though someone would need a child's phone number to add them as a contact, it's also worth altering a young person's profile settings to restrict who can see their photo and status. The options are 'everyone', 'my contacts' and 'nobody' – choosing one of the latter two ensures that your child's profile is better protected.



EXPLAIN ABOUT BLOCKING

If your child receives spam or offensive messages, calls or files from a contact, they should block them using 'settings' in the chat. Communication from a blocked contact won't show up on their device and stays undelivered. Blocking someone does not remove them from your child's contact list – so they also need to be deleted from the address book.



REPORT POTENTIAL SCAMS

Young people shouldn't engage with any message that looks suspicious or too good to be true. When your child receives a message from an unknown number for the first time, they'll be given the option to report it as spam. If the sender claims to be a friend or relative, call that person on their usual number to verify it really is them, or if it's someone trying to trick your child.



LEAVE A GROUP

If your child is in a group chat that is making them feel uncomfortable, or has been added to a group that they don't want to be part of, they can use WhatsApp's group settings to leave. If someone exits a group, the admin can add them back in once; if they leave a second time, it is permanent.



THINK ABOUT LOCATION

If your child needs to use the 'live location' function to show you or one of their friends where they are, advise them to share their location only for as long as they need to. WhatsApp gives a range of 'live location' options, and your child should manually stop sharing their position as soon as it is no longer needed.



DELETE ACCIDENTAL MESSAGES

If your child posts a message they want to delete, WhatsApp allows the user seven minutes to erase a message. Tap and hold on the message, choose 'delete' and then 'delete for everyone.' However, it's important to remember that recipients may have seen (and taken a screenshot of) a message before it was deleted.



CHECK THE FACTS

You can now fact-check WhatsApp messages that have been forwarded at least five times, by double-tapping the magnifying glass icon to the right of the message. From there, your child can launch a Google search and decide for themselves whether the message was true or not.



What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SOCIAL MEDIA & MENTAL HEALTH

1. UNDERSTAND THE ALGORITHM

Algorithms rank content by user interest: someone who regularly interacts with sports news, say, will see the latest results at the top of their feed. Likewise, if a user browses content that can cause harm, that's what will be recommended to them in future. Someone who's had a bad day and looks for posts which reflect their mood will find similar content being suggested to them more and more.

2. AVOID THE MAIN FEEDS

Avoiding the default feeds on social media platforms limits the amount of recommended content that's shown. Users can opt to only scroll through the accounts they follow, use restricted modes, or highlight posts that they don't want to see more of. Explore the platform safety settings to see how you can take control of what your child's phone shows them when they open the app.

3. DISCUSS WHAT THEY'VE SEEN

Chatting about what your child's seen online keeps you aware of the content they're interacting with. Don't assume that platforms are screening out inappropriate material, or even that your child would recognise content as being harmful. Discuss who they follow, what posts they like and what comes up in their feeds: if alarm bells ring, it could be time for a more in-depth talk or to seek support.

4. LEARN HOW TO HIDE CONTENT

If your child stumbles across unsuitable content on social media, there's the option to hide that post as well as indicating you'd prefer any similar material not to be suggested in future. On some platforms, you might also be able to block posts that contain specific words, which is an excellent way to start taking control of what your child sees online.

5. SET DAILY LIMITS

Phones and most apps can tell you how much they're being used. Spending too long online can mean a child misses out on other activities that are important to all-round wellbeing. You could set some family rules – for everyone to follow – around device use, such as screen time limits and tech-free spaces: involving your child in creating this agreement makes them more likely to stick to it.

6. MONITOR THEIR ACTIVITY

Keeping a discreet eye on how your child is using social media can help ensure they're not entering potentially dangerous situations. As they grow up, of course, children need space to exercise their independence – but you can still occasionally ask to see what they're looking at. Be transparent about your own social media use and try not to sound judgemental about your child's.

7. TURN OFF PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

Even for adults, it's tempting to check an email or message as soon as the alert sound pings. Push notifications encourage people to open their apps and spend time on their device, so turning them off will help your child to practise mindful use of tech. Most of us have other things that we need to focus on as a priority – and those notifications will still be there later, when we have more time.

8. USE DEVICES TOGETHER

Giving children internet-enabled devices and complete freedom to explore platforms on their own can result in exposure to hugely damaging content. You could consider making a particular area at home a designated space to use phones, tablets and so on – making it much easier to monitor what content your child is viewing and (if necessary) steer them away from any potentially harmful paths.

9. ENCOURAGE OTHER ACTIVITIES

Mental health professionals often highlight the importance of exercise, quality time with loved ones, a balanced diet and restful sleep for our mental wellbeing. Spending hours on social media can cause us to sacrifice other activities that our brains need to feel well – so encouraging your child to put down their phone and enjoy something that doesn't involve a screen can be immensely beneficial.

10. TALK ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

Most platforms default children's accounts to private, so only people they've accepted as friends can see their posts. This reduces the risk of bullying or unkind comments, but – just like offline life – the digital world can still make children feel as if they need to act or look a certain way to fit in. Talk to your child about peer pressure, and listen to any concerns so you can provide the support they need.