

## What Parents and Carers Need to Know about NGL

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many apps which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit [www.nationalonlinesafety.com](http://www.nationalonlinesafety.com) for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about NGL

**AGE RESTRICTION 13+**

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS?**

NGL (which stands for 'Not Gonna Lie') is an app through which users share a link to their Instagram story or Twitter account, inviting their followers to give anonymous feedback. The app includes some prewritten questions (such as 'if you could change anything about me, what would it be?'), plus the option to ask followers to simply 'send me anonymous messages'. All replies go into the user's NGL inbox, with the sender remaining anonymous – although subscribers to the app can receive hints about who each message was from.

**ANONYMITY AND OVERSHARING**

Anonymous messaging gives rise to the 'online disinhibition effect', which causes users to feel detached from their words and actions in the digital world. This can make young people in particular (as they tend to act more impulsively online) far more likely to disclose personal information on the internet, as well as making ill-advised confessions or revealing their fears and insecurities.

**PROTECTION FOR BULLIES**

Having their identity hidden makes bullies feel safe from repercussions, so anonymous chat uses one a major avenue for cyberbullying. Kids claim to use AI to filter out insulting terms, but our report sent a range of such phrases (starting with 'loser' and 'nerd', and becoming progressively more offensive) to a 'dummy' account. All of these text messages were delivered to the recipient's inbox.

**COSTLY SUBSCRIPTIONS**

NGL offers a subscription where – for a weekly fee – users can unlock hints about who's been messaging them, including the sender's approximate location and which device they used. Young people will naturally be extremely curious about who sent which message (especially if they have a lot of Instagram or Twitter followers) and may be unable to resist spending money to find out.

**INFLATED ENGAGEMENT**

In June 2022, NGL had to revise its terms of service, informing users if a message was sent by the app's developers as opposed to genuine followers. It emerged that, previously, NGL's makers had attempted to boost engagement with the app (as well as enticing users to pay for subscriptions) by sending fake anonymous messages from bots. This update was rolled out very quietly by the team.

**QUESTIONABLE SUPPORT**

NGL does have a 'report this message' button for users to flag upsetting content. After sending a message, however, an automated reply arrives stating – 'NGL is 100% anonymous and we have no way of knowing the identity of the user and would not be able to find out, even if we tried.' This did not fit our expert with confidence that the app can address bad behaviour adequately.

**ACCIDENTALLY GOING VIRAL**

The messages on NGL itself are anonymous, but users can share these messages via their Instagram story or Twitter feed – enabling all their followers (or anyone, if their accounts are set to 'public') to see them. If a young person has disclosed something embarrassing or identifiable on NGL without realising, this information has the potential to be re-shared very quickly to a far wider audience.

### Advice for Parents & Carers

**DEALING WITH NEGATIVITY**

Blocking another user on NGL will prevent them sending anonymous messages to your child in the short term – although a determined abuser could get around that obstacle simply by setting up a new Instagram account. If your child continually receives negative messages that upset them, it might be worth encouraging them to consider whether they really need to use the app at all.

**BLOCK IN-APP PURCHASES**

To avoid your child running up an eye-watering bill through an NGL subscription (or indeed any kind of costly in-app purchases), go into the settings on whatever device they use to go online and either disable the ability to make purchases or protect that function with a password. If those options aren't available, it's prudent to ensure there aren't any payment methods linked to their account.

**EXPLAIN ANONYMOUS APPS**

We understand that a conversation with your child about the risks of anonymous messaging may seem difficult to initiate (especially if you aren't that comfortable with using social media yourself); it is vital, however, that young people understand that, for some people, having their identity obscured online can make them feel more powerful and less accountable for their actions.

**THINK BEFORE SENDING**

Regardless of whether a messaging app is anonymous or not, it's a good idea to regularly talk to your child about how it's wise to think through what they're sharing before they post it. Emphasise that nothing is truly private once it's online. If the post is something your child might hesitate to say to someone face-to-face, then it's probably not the sort of thing they should be writing online either.

**Meet Our Expert**

Dr Claire Sulistand is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written numerous academic papers and worked out research for the Australian government, analysing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

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It seems people just can't resist finding out what others really think of them – whether that's for better or worse. NGL, an app which invites a user's social media followers to send them anonymous questions and feedback, flew to the summit of the App Store's charts last summer and racked up almost 30 million total downloads throughout 2022.

The brutal honesty – and outright malice – that such anonymity can encourage, however, brings obvious drawbacks for a young audience. Teens seeking validation or reassurance may instead find themselves bombarded by negative comments highlighting aspects of themselves that they were already insecure about. This week's #WakeUpWednesday guide has all the details on NGL.

NGL claims to use "world-class AI content moderation ... to filter out harmful language and bullying." At the height of its popularity last June, however, when NGL was being touted as "the hottest app in the US", NBC News conducted a test in which phrases like "Everyone hates you" and "You're a loser" arrived uncensored. Evidently, the AI is far from as robust as NGL protests.

As our #WakeUpWednesday guide this week outlines, abusive anonymous messages aren't the only pitfall that young people can encounter on NGL – with rolling subscription fees and the possibility of having their personal information re-shared online also among the primary pitfalls on this popular app where teens are encouraged to message incognito.

Please [click here](#) to download the guide