

What Parents and Carers Need to Know about Telegram

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to help 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 for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

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AGE RESTRICTION 17+

Telegram isn't new, but it's grown significantly in popularity over recent years, thanks to its secure nature and speedier performance than many of its competitors – including WhatsApp. While Telegram is an excellent app in terms of actual performance, like any messaging platform it brings its own challenges for parents when it comes to feeling confident about children being able to handle their own messaging conversations and contact with the outside world in general. Here's everything that trusted adults need to know about using Telegram safely.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

LACK OF AGE RESTRICTION

Telegram has a 16+ age restriction on using the service, while someone is required to be over 17 to actually download the app. Once that's accomplished, however, there's no need to provide further identification. That means there's no guarantee that under 17s aren't using the app – and no way to confidently verify that any other user actually is who they say they are.

POSSIBLE CYBERBULLYING

If your child uses Telegram, they could well be in a group with friends and peers on the app. These groups are managed by admins who can remove the option to post replies – possibly leading to instances of cyberbullying in which the victim has no ability to respond. Messages can be forwarded from groups, too, which potentially opens up images and text being sent to people they weren't intended for.

UNMODERATED CONTENT

Because Telegram relies on users' self-moderation, it can occasionally become a hub for illegal or inappropriate content. In the past, the circulation of this material has led to its temporary removal from the App Store. In fact, the same can be said of several messaging platforms, but Telegram's 'Secret Chats' (for instance) certainly present more issues than the likes of WhatsApp.

PREMIUM COSTS

Telegram is free to use, but it also offers a premium membership (£4.99 per month or £35.99 a year) which increases download speeds, adds translation features, and increases channel and account limits. If your child has access to your Apple ID or Google Play details, they may be able to sign up for the premium package without your knowledge.

UNAUTHORISED ACCESS

One of Telegram's major selling points is that it's accessible across multiple platforms. Once the app's been downloaded, users can log in from a phone, tablet or computer. This multi-device availability means increased opportunities for someone else to gain unauthorised access (if your child leaves a computer or tablet at school logged into their Telegram account, for instance).

SECRET CHATS

Telegram offers a feature called 'Secret Chats' which allows for messages which self-delete after a specified period of time. There are instances where this can be useful (journalists often use Telegram to protect their sources, for example), but for young people it can make it extremely difficult to prove that someone has been abusive or inappropriate towards them on the app.

Advice for Parents & Carers

PRIVACY CONTROLS

If your child wants to use Telegram, we'd strongly suggest using the app's built-in privacy settings to restrict who can see when they were last online, their profile photo, and their phone number. This can be set to 'everybody', 'my contacts' or 'nobody'. We'd recommend either the second or third option, depending on how locked down you want the platform to be.

DISCUSS SECURITY

It's important that your child understands the merits of strong passwords and logging out of devices when they're finished – and the benefits of protecting their personal data in general. This could range from relaxed chats and simple tips like "don't send your bank details" to how to set up passcodes for Telegram so your child's chats stay secure when they step away from their screen.

REPORT UNSAFE CONTENT

If your child receives private messages which include content that could be considered illegal, unsafe or upsetting, they can of course block the account responsible within the app itself. Be aware, however, that Telegram won't necessarily take any further action unless this offensive content involved a user-created channel, bot or sticker.

USE THE BLOCK FUNCTION

Users can block spam, abusive, or imposter accounts within the app. Blocking stops that account from messaging your child, or viewing their profile and status. If the user in question is one of your child's peers or friendship circle, it may be worth bringing it to the attention of their school. Also bear in mind that your child can also voluntarily leave a Telegram group at any point if they wish.

PROTECT PAYMENT METHODS

Apple and Google's storefronts offer family sharing options, but it's also worth double-checking your settings to ensure that a password or two-factor authentication option is set up to prevent any unexpected purchases. If your child does pay for a premium Telegram subscription without your consent, Apple and Google have been known to issue refunds in some cases.

Meet Our Expert

Lynal Coombes is Editor in Chief of gaming and esports site *ESportsland* and has worked in the gaming sector for almost four years. A regular visitor to the app store to try out new tools, he's a parent who understands the value of online safety, writing mainly about tech and games. His articles have been published on influential sites including *IGN* and *Technet*.

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Controversial changes to WhatsApp's privacy policy back in 2021 was a major shot in the arm for Telegram, as millions of users began searching for a more secure messaging platform. Indeed, Telegram is so confident in its resistance to hacks that it's previously set challenges (with a prize of up to \$300,000) to any user who's able to crack its encryption.

With protected 'secret chats' and self-deleting messages, however, Telegram's security advantage has also been subverted by criminals using the app to trade stolen data, share child sexual exploitation material and arrange drug deals. As Telegram's popularity continues to grow, our #WakeUpWednesday guide tells trusted adults what they need to be aware of.

In the words of influential tech publication *Wired*, Telegram "exercises virtually no content moderation". It's a particularly troubling assessment in this sensitive era when messaging and social media platforms are increasingly (and rightly) being held to account for their policies on tackling online hate speech and misinformation.

Regrettably for Telegram, it's occasionally been cited in the media as the communications app of choice for several groups with extreme political views – including white supremacist and far-right organisations in the US and UK, and the terrorist cell which carried out attacks in Paris in 2015. Our #WakeUpWednesday guide profiles this powerful, popular and often divisive app.

[Click here](#) to download the guide