

# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about WhatsApp

All 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 wish 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 WHATSAPP

With more than two billion active users exchanging texts, photos, videos and documents, as well as making voice and video calls, WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging service. Its end-to-end encryption only allows messages to be viewed by the sender and any recipients, not even WhatsApp itself can read them. This privacy issue has been in the spotlight recently as the UK's Online Safety Bill proposes to end such encryption on private messaging. WhatsApp is unwilling to do so and has reportedly considered withdrawing its service in the UK should this legislation go ahead.

**AGE RESTRICTION 16+**  
In UK and Europe, rest of the world 13+

### WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

#### EVOLVING SCAMS

WhatsApp's popularity makes it a lucrative hunting ground for scammers. Recent examples include posing as the father of a child, requesting a money transfer because of a spurious 'emergency'. Plus a scam where fraudsters trigger a verification message by attempting to log in to your account, then (posing as WhatsApp) call or text to ask you to repeat the code back to them, giving them access.

#### CONTACT FROM STRANGERS

To start a chat, someone only needs the mobile number of the WhatsApp user that they want to message. If your child has ever given their number out to someone they don't know, that person could then contact them via WhatsApp. It's also possible that your child might be added to a group chat (by one of their friends, for example) containing other people that they don't know.

#### FAKE NEWS

WhatsApp's connectivity and ease of use allows news to be shared rapidly - whether it's true or not. To combat the spread of misinformation, messages forwarded more than five times on the app now display a 'forwarded many times' label and a double arrow icon. This makes users aware that the message they've just received is far from original... and might not be entirely factual, either.

#### ONLINE

#### 'VIEW ONCE' CONTENT

The facility to send images or messages that can only be viewed once has led to some WhatsApp users sharing inappropriate images or abusive texts. Knowing that the recipient can't re-open them later to use as evidence of misconduct, people used to be able to screenshot this 'disappearing' content - but a recently added WhatsApp feature now blocks that, using increased privacy.

#### CHAT LOCK

Another new option allows users to share certain messages or chats in a separate 'locked chats' folder, saved behind a passcode, password or face ID authentication. The risk here is that this function creates the potential for young people to hide conversations (and content that they suspect their parents wouldn't approve of (such as age-inappropriate material)).

#### VISIBLE LOCATION

WhatsApp's 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, which can be helpful for friends meeting up or parents checking that their child's safely on the way home, for example. However, anyone in your child's contacts list or in a mutual group chat can also track their location - potentially letting strangers identify a child's home address or journeys that they make regularly.

## Advice for Parents & Carers ...TYPING...

### EMPHASISE CAUTION

Encourage your child to treat unexpected messages with caution: get them to consider, for example, whether the message sounds like something a friend or relative would really send them. Make sure they know never to share personal details over WhatsApp, and to be wary of clicking on any links in messages. Setting up two-step verification adds a further layer of protection to their WhatsApp account.

### THINKING BEFORE SHARING

Help your child to understand why it's important to stop and think before posting or forwarding something on WhatsApp. It's easy - and all too common - for content to then be shared more widely (even publicly on social media). Encourage your child to consider how an ill-judged message might damage their reputation or upset a friend who sent something to them in confidence.

### ADJUST THE SETTINGS

It's wise to change your child's WhatsApp settings (go to 'Privacy', then 'Groups') to specify which of their contacts can add them to group chats without needing approval; you can give permission to 'My Contacts' or 'My Contacts Except...'. Additionally, if your child needs to use 'live location', emphasise that they should enable this function for only as long as they need - and then turn it off.

### CHAT ABOUT PRNACY

Some parents like to check in with their child about how they're using WhatsApp, explaining that it will help to keep them safe. If you spot a 'locked chats' folder, you might want to talk about the sort of chats that are in there, who they're with and why your child wants to keep them hidden. Also, if your child has sent any 'view once' content, you could discuss their reasons for using this feature.

### Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Kilmer is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and delivered practical 'privacy' and safety guides for schools, the Home Office, and various national and international government computing internet use and reading behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

**...HEY OSCAR...**

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It's a description of encryption proscription!  
🔒📱 The world's most popular instant messaging service, WhatsApp has been appearing in the headlines even more often than usual recently over its opposition to aspects of the UK government's Online Safety Bill 🇬🇧

Encrypting messages to protect users' privacy has undeniable merit, but it also poses obvious risks - especially to young people. Updated to reflect the newest version of WhatsApp, today's #WakeUpWednesday guide brings trusted adults the latest essential info.

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