



Aston Fields Middle School

Striving for Excellence: Learning for Life

March 2026

Dear Parents/Carers,

Online Safety - WhatsApp and Social Media

Further to the recent communication about Online Safety and Safer Internet Day for all parents and carers, we are writing to update you about the worries and boundaries around online communication. As part of our continued education about Online Safety we try to keep parents/carers updated of the changing online world and how to protect our children when accessing the internet.

In recent weeks, staff have worked very hard to support pupils who have been receiving and sending messages through WhatsApp and gaming consoles that are unkind and upsetting. While these messages are being sent during the children's social time outside of school and in the holidays, the problems are then affecting relationships within school. We know children like to communicate with each other, but group chats can lend themselves to children falling out and being upset by people, sometimes posting a comment they would not say in a face to face situation. This has caused unnecessary upset and extra work for staff as they teach the children to navigate how they conduct themselves online. Staff have addressed this with individual conversations with children and parents/carers and also in assemblies, reminding them of the rules and how important they follow age restrictions of apps, which are designed to keep them safe and protected from unnecessary advertising and inappropriate content and contact.

Another concern we have been made aware of is that, within some of these large groups, a "chain message" is being sent on to pupils by others in the group. Within this, there are threats that the child receiving the message will die if it is not shared to 20 people they know, going on to be quite graphic in its description. You will be aware of the increase in concern about misinformation and disinformation where people are deceived online with false or manipulated news. This can cause a lot of confusion and worry when received.

It is important we make you aware that your child may be using WhatsApp, with or without your knowledge, and we should be mindful that the **minimum age for WhatsApp is 13+ years**. It is easy for these group chats to become very large with other people who are not known to your child being added, creating a serious safeguarding risk to them. We strongly advise that you check your child's phone and remove them from any group chats they belong to and block any numbers they do not know. Please talk to them about how to report any worries to trusted adults. You will also find a parents' guide to WhatsApp and encourage you to read this for further information as it explains some of the features of WhatsApp we may not be aware of, following recent updates and also additional advice for Parents/Carers of children through Internet Matters about holding conversations about safe and sensible use of phones.

Thank you for your support in this important matter.

Kind regards,

Mrs Mynott

Assistant Headteacher/Designated Safeguarding Lead



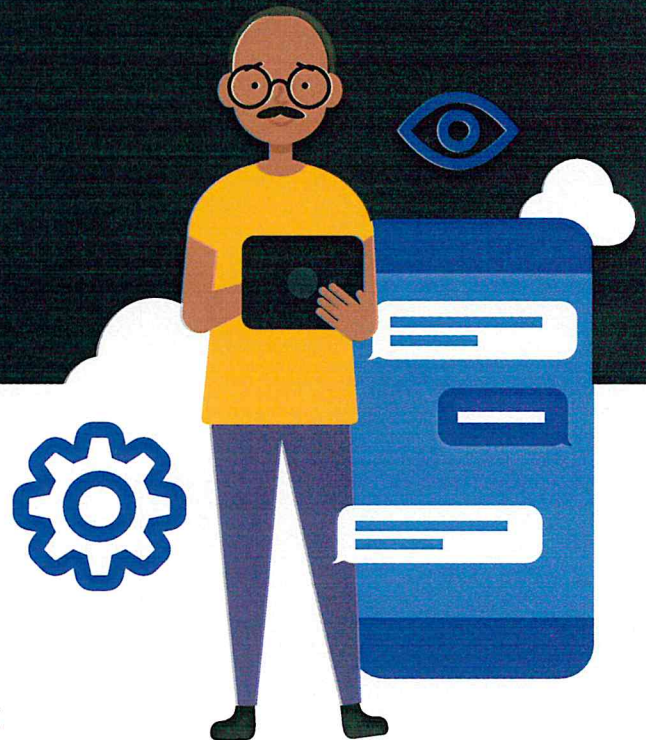
ACE School of
CHARACTER

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Online safety tips for parents of primary school children 6-10 Year Olds

internet matters.org



Checklist:

Agree on boundaries

Be clear about what your child can and can't do online – where and when they can use the internet, how much time they can spend online, the sites they can visit and the type of information they can share. Agree with your child when they can have a mobile phone or tablet.

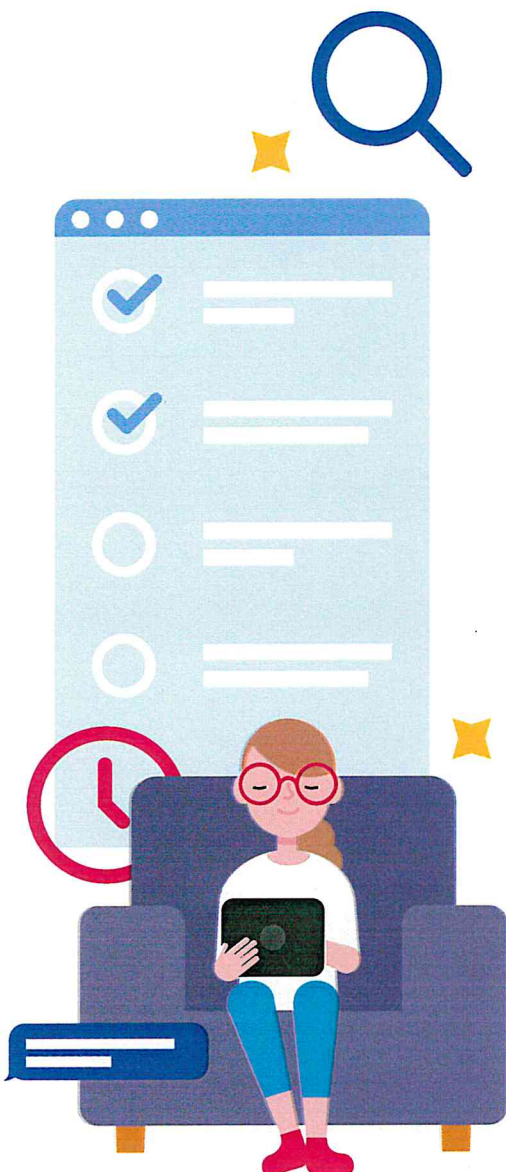
When you do give them their first device make sure that it is set up appropriately for them with the right parental controls in place. It's a good idea to **introduce tech-free meal times** and encourage them to **keep phones out of the bedroom at night** to help them build a healthy screen time balance.

Put yourself in control

Set parental controls on your home broadband and any internet-enabled devices. Set up a user account for your child on the main device they use and make sure other accounts in the household are password-protected so that younger children can't access them by accident.

Explore together

The best way to support your child online is to **talk to them about what they do online** and what sites and apps they like to use. Be inquisitive and ask them to show you their favourites to check they're suitable.



Search safely

If you let your child search independently, **make sure safe search is activated on Google and other search engines**, as well as restricted mode on YouTube. You can set your default search to one designed specifically for children, such as Swiggle, and can save time by adding these to your Favourites.

Check if it's suitable

The age ratings that come with games, apps, films and social networks are a good guide to whether they're suitable for your child. **For example, the minimum age limit is 13 for several social networking sites**, including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok.

Make use of platforms and services designed with children in mind like CBBC, YouTube Kids, Sky Kids, BBC iPlayerKids. Although sites aimed at under-10s like Spotlite (Formerly Kudos) also have social networking elements. See other similar social networking sites built for kids in our ['Social networks made for kids' guide](#).

Stay involved

Encourage them to use their tech devices in a shared space like the lounge or kitchen so you can keep an eye on how they're using the internet and also share in their enjoyment.

Talk to siblings

It's a good idea to talk to any older children about what they're doing online and what they show to younger children. **Encourage them to be responsible and help keep their younger siblings safe.**



Know this stuff matters, but don't know where to turn?

Internet Matters is a free online resource for every parent in the UK. We'll show you the best ways to protect your children online – with information, advice and support on all the big online safety issues.

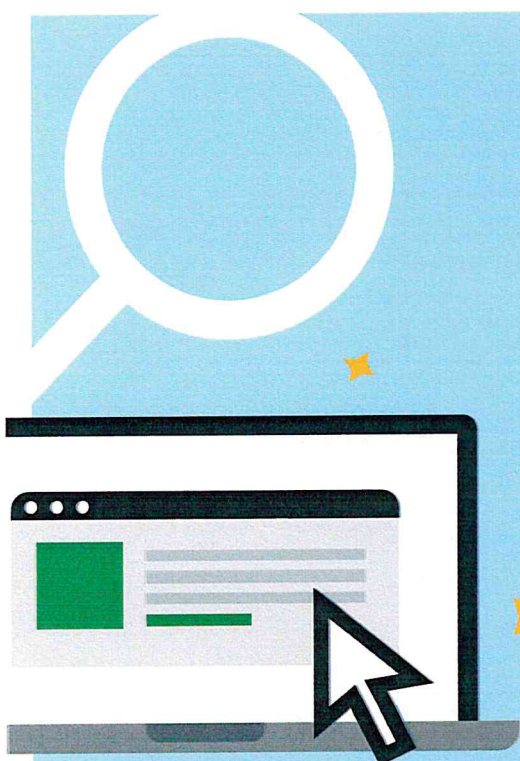
44%

of 5-10 year olds
have their own
mobile phone*

81%

use a tablet
to go online*

*Source: Ofcom Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report 2022



Learn about it:

Teach your child some simple rules

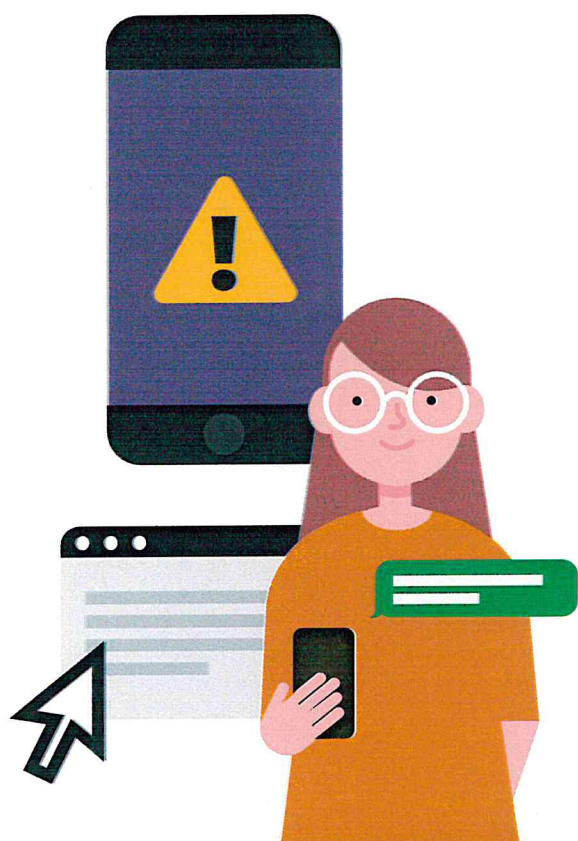
- Make sure your child knows **not to share personal information** like their phone number or email address online.
- Encourage them to **only talk to real-life friends or family** if they are on sites with a social media or chat element like Roblox.
- **Use privacy settings** wherever they exist to keep their information private - help your child to set these up. Remember that the default on many sites is public.
- **Be a good online friend** and don't say nasty things even if it's just a joke.
- Direct them to use **secure and legal sites to download** music and games to avoid experiencing the risks associated with streaming content from unauthorised sites. Visit our ['Dangers of digital piracy' advice hub](#) more advice.
- Advise them to **Check attachments and pop-ups for viruses** before they click or download anything and ask if they aren't sure. You can set up their phone/tablet so you need to grant permission before they are able to download an app or game.
- **Encourage them to use Public Friendly WiFi** when they're out and about to filter inappropriate content but also use the parental control tools on the device just in case they do connect to an unfiltered WiFi - the most likely place for this to happen could be at a friend's house.
- **Help them to better understand the different online platforms they use** and judge the quality and reliability of online resources. Take a look at our [fake news and misinformation advice hub](#) to help children spot, and stop the spread of fake news online.



Talk about it:

Tips for a meaningful conversation

- Start conversations when your children won't be embarrassed, for example in the car going home from school. **Try to de-personalise it by asking their opinion on a current news story** that relates to an online issue.
- **Be proactive - don't wait until something has already gone wrong** - discuss issues ahead of time - knowing what children of a similar age are doing will help you know more about the environment that your child is living in.
- **Ask them for advice on how to do something online** and use this as a conversation starter.
- Make sure they know they can come to you if they're upset by something they've seen online - **listen to them when they do and try not to overreact** - the important thing is that they have come and told you!
- **Be sensitive and praise them** when they share their online experiences with you.
- If your child comes to you with an issue, **stay calm and listen without judging them.**
- **Talk about online grooming as you would stranger danger** and explain that people they meet online might not be who they say they are.
- Ask them about things online which **might make them (or others) uncomfortable.**



Deal with it

You can find out where to get help and advice on the [Report issue](#) resource page of [internetmatters.org](#), where we include information on how to report problems – and which relevant organisations and agencies to turn to.

On this page, we also provide information on how to deal with any specific issues you may encounter with your child; such as finding inappropriate content and cyberbullying.

Stay safe at secondary school

Exposure to some of these issues increases when children move up to secondary school so make sure your child is prepared – find out more with our pre-teens age guide at [internetmatters.org/advice/11-13](#)


Scan below or visit [internetmatters.org](#) for more advice




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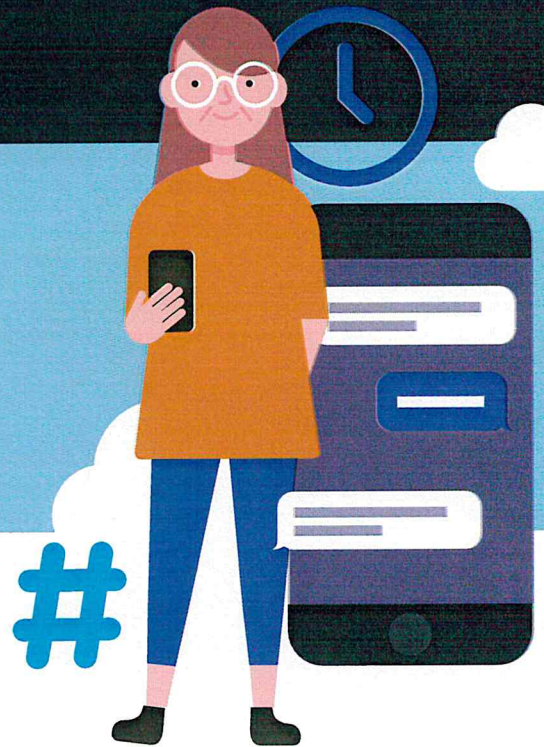
**internet
matters.org**

Online safety tips for parents of 11-13 Year Olds

internet matters.org

60% of children age 8-11 have their own social media profile

**Source: Ofcom Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2022*



Checklist:

Have a conversation

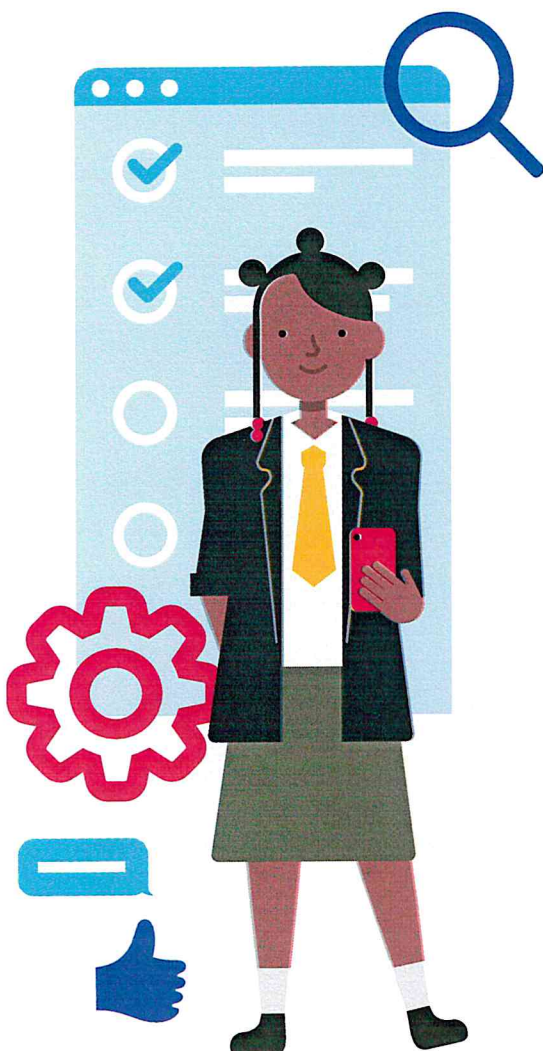
The best way to find out what your child is doing online is to **ask them to tell you about what they do and what sites they like to visit**. Discuss with them what they might come across. There are always stories in the press which will help to start a conversation. [See our conversation starter guide](#) for advice to help children open up about their digital lives.

Agree on boundaries

Have a [family agreement](#) about where and when they can use the internet, how much time they can spend online, the sites they can visit and the type of information they can share. **It's a good idea to introduce tech-free meals times and encourage them to keep phones out of the bedroom at night** to help them build a healthy balance with screen time.

Put yourself in control:

Make use of parental controls on your home broadband and any internet-enabled devices that your child uses. You can [visit our parental control how-to guides](#) to learn how to set these up or visit your broadband or mobile network's provider's website. You can also set up safe search in Google by going to the Google Safety Centre.



If you are giving a child their first device, you can set all this up together before they start using it so they can see how they'll be protected. It can also be an opportunity to have a conversation about online safety.

Remember, although these tools can create a safety net to protect children online, they are not 100% foolproof so **it's important to continue having regular conversations with children** about their online use to equip them with coping strategies to deal with online risks.

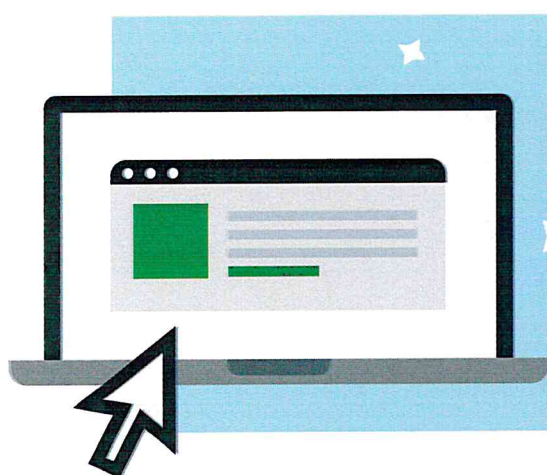
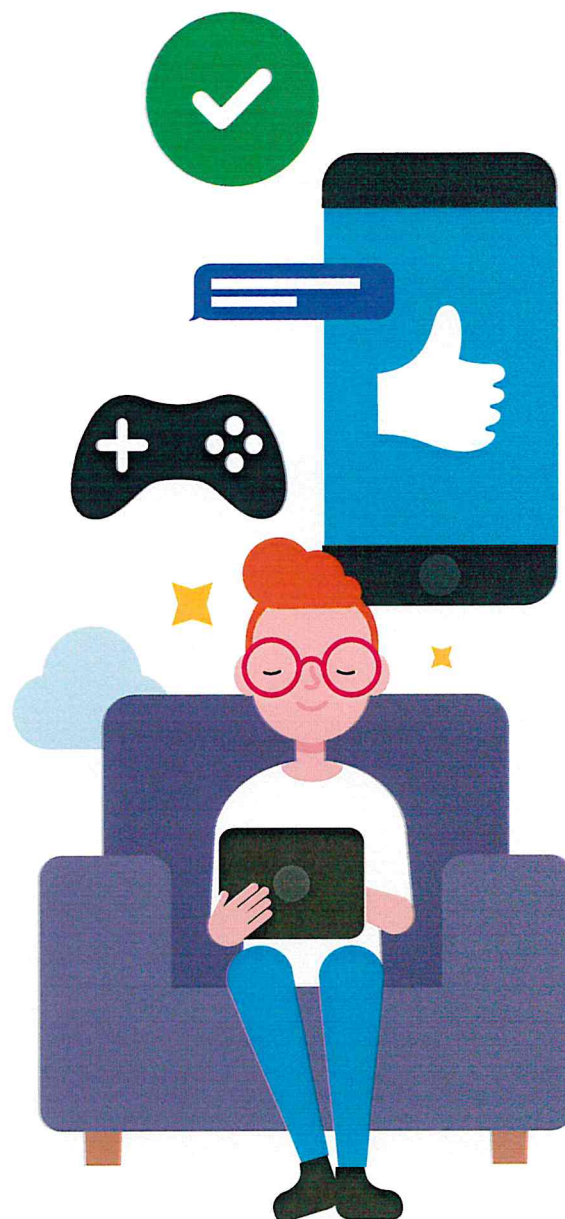
Check if it's suitable

The age ratings that come with games, apps, films and social networks **are a good guide to whether they're suitable for your child**. The minimum age limit is 13 for several social networking sites, including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. [Visit our guide to check the minimum age of popular apps.](#)

Get them clued up about social networking

Talk to children about the benefits and risks of social networking before they join any sites. Let them know that anything they upload, email, or message could stay around forever online. Help them to set their profile up so that they are in control of who can comment, message them etc. Get tips and insight from [our social media guide](#). If you have a child with SEND, [please visit our Connecting Safely Online hub for tailored advice.](#)

Help them to be critical of things they see online and judge the quality and reliability of online sources.



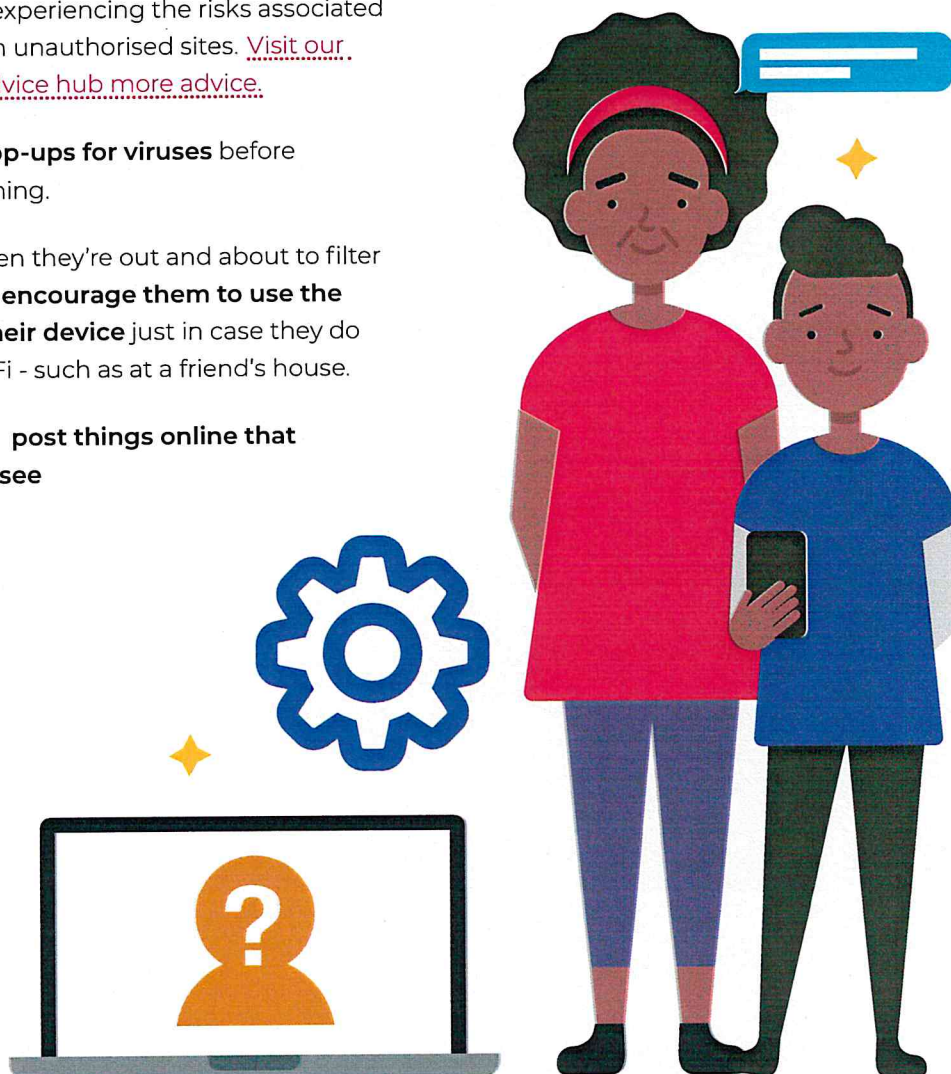
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Learn about it:

Teach your child some simple rules

- Make sure your child knows **not to share personal information like their phone number or email address online** and if they need to provide this or similar information to sign up for a service tell them to check with you first.
- Encourage them to only talk to **real-life friends or family** on social media sites and in chatrooms.
- **Show them how to use privacy settings** wherever they exist to keep their information private - remember that the default on many sites is set to public. [Visit our social media privacy guides for support.](#)
- As children may go online to widen their group of friends, **set some boundaries when it comes to new friends online.**
- **Advise them not to arrange to meet with people in real life** that they've only talked with online without talking to you about it and getting your support.
- **Advise them to use secure and legal sites to download music and games** to avoid experiencing the risks associated with streaming content from unauthorised sites. [Visit our 'Dangers of digital piracy' advice hub more advice.](#)
- **Check attachments and pop-ups for viruses** before they click or download anything.
- Use Public Friendly WiFi when they're out and about to filter inappropriate content. **Also, encourage them to use the parental control tools on their device** just in case they do connect to an unfiltered WiFi - such as at a friend's house.
- Make sure they know **not to post things online that they wouldn't want you to see**



Talk about it:

Tips for a meaningful conversation

- Ask them for advice on how to do something online and use this as a conversation starter.
- Make sure they know they can come to you if they're upset by something they've seen online and remember to listen and not overreact.
- Be sensitive and praise them when they share their online experiences with you
- Make sure they know how to block abusive comments and report content that worries them.
- If your child comes to you with an issue, stay calm and listen without judging them
- Tackle peer pressure by explaining that if they are talked into bullying someone online or sending inappropriate images it may get reported to their school or even the police. Read this guide – So you got naked online– aimed at kids to get insight on [how to deal with sexting incidence](#).
- Teach them to treat others as they'd like to be treated online and set a good example with your own internet use. [Use the Stop, Speak, Support code](#) to encourage them to call out cyberbullying when they see it.

Deal with it

You can find out where to get help and advice on the [Report issue page of internetmatters.org](#), where we include information on how to report problems - and which relevant organisations and agencies to turn to.

On this page, we also provide information on how to deal with any specific issues you may encounter with your child; such as [cyberbullying](#), finding [inappropriate content](#), your child's [online reputation](#), [online pornography](#) and [child grooming](#).

Learn more about apps

It can be difficult to stay on top of what apps your child is using and who they are talking to online – [find out more about the latest apps at internetmatters.org/apps](#).



Scan below or visit [internetmatters.org](#) for more advice





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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about WHATSAPP

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

WhatsApp is a free messaging app owned by Meta, allowing users to send text and voice messages, share multimedia, make video calls, and chat in groups. With end-to-end encryption, only the sender and receiver can view messages. This may offer privacy, but it also comes with risks that parents and educators need to be aware of.

GROUP CHAT PRESSURES

Group chats enable multiple users to message in the same space, but this can also make it easier for young people to feel excluded or overwhelmed. Negative comments can escalate quickly, and young people may feel pressure to respond or stay engaged even when the conversation is uncomfortable or upsetting.

SCAMS TARGETING YOUNG USERS

Scammers are increasingly using WhatsApp to trick users into sharing personal information. Common scams include fraudsters posing as family members in an emergency or tricking users into revealing security codes. These can lead to identity theft or access to private conversations.

DISAPPEARING AND HIDDEN MESSAGES

WhatsApp offers features like disappearing messages and 'Chat Lock', which can give users a false sense of security. While intended to protect privacy, they can be used by young users to hide inappropriate conversations or content, making it harder for adults to spot potential issues.

EXPOSURE THROUGH CHANNELS

'Channels' are an optional feature that allows users to follow updates from public figures or organisations; however, there is no way to block this feature or filter its content by age. Young users may encounter adult or distressing content, including misinformation and harmful ideologies.

UNWANTED CONTACT AND LOCATION SHARING

WhatsApp users can share their live location, and if not managed carefully, this can allow others – even those in mutual groups – to track someone's whereabouts. Also, without the right privacy settings, young users may be contacted by strangers.

COMMERCIAL AND AI CONTENT

WhatsApp now includes ads in the 'Updates' feed and has introduced an AI assistant – Meta AI – across the app, which cannot be removed. These additions raise concerns about targeting, privacy, AI use, and the type of content children and young people might interact with.

...ONLINE...

Advice for Parents & Educators

REVIEW PRIVACY SETTINGS TOGETHER

Help young users check who can see their profile photo, status, and location. Activate the 'Silence Unknown Callers' setting and set group chat invitations to 'My Contacts' or 'My Contacts Except...' for added safety.

BE OPEN ABOUT HIDDEN CHATS

Discuss why children and young people might use features like disappearing messages or 'Chat Lock'. Encourage them to share if something made them uncomfortable, even if the messages are gone. Let them know that privacy should not mean secrecy.

TEACH HOW TO SPOT SCAMS

Encourage caution around unusual and unexpected messages, especially if they involve money or codes. Help young users understand the signs of scams and what to do if they receive a suspicious message. Enable two-step verification to add an extra layer of protection.

TALK ABOUT ADVERTISING AND AI

Explain that WhatsApp now includes ads and AI tools. Discuss the difference between genuine and sponsored content, and the potential for AI to share inaccurate or age-inappropriate responses. Encourage young users to think critically before trusting or interacting with these features.

Meet Our Expert

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



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