

Parent/Carer factsheet: WhatsApp

What is it?



Launched in 2009, WhatsApp is a free, multi-platform messaging app that lets users make video and voice calls, send text messages, share their status, and more with just a Wi-Fi connection. Part of what makes this app appealing is that it works on various phone and computer operating systems, so you can continue your conversation anytime, anywhere. It can also take advantage of Wi-Fi and cellular data to make one-on-one or group calls, reducing the need for expensive calling charges.

WhatsApp says the **minimum age** to use it is **16**, but younger children can still use it easily.

What's the problem?

- There's a risk of bullying, particularly in group chats
 - There's a risk of seeing content of a sexual nature, or showing violence and hatred
 - There's a threat to safety if your child shares their live location, particularly with people they don't know in person
 - They may receive spam or hoax messages
 - In group chats, any users who aren't in your child's contacts can see messages they post in the group, and your child will be able to see messages they post
-

5 steps to help your child use WhatsApp safely

1. Keep their personal information and location private

By default, WhatsApp shows profile photos, status and when you last used it to all users.

Encourage your child to only share this information with their contacts, and to only talk to people they know in person on the app, as anyone could pretend to be a child online.

To check and change these settings:

- Tap the 3 dots in the top-right of the home screen, then > Settings > Account > Privacy. Tap the setting you want to change, then choose who it should be visible to

WhatsApp also has a feature that you can use to share your 'live location' with others. Tell your child to keep this turned off, or to only share their location with people they trust.

To check this:

- Tap the 3 dots in the top-right of the home screen, then > Settings > Account > Privacy > Live location

2. Remind your child to be careful about what they share

It's easy to forward messages, photos and videos to others via this app. Even if your child deletes an image from their phone after sharing it, this won't delete the image from other people's phones.

So encourage your child to think carefully about what they share and with who. Before they share anything, tell them to ask themselves: “would I want others to see what I’m about to send?”

3. Remind your child they can leave group chats

If they see something they’re not comfortable with in a group chat, or are in a chat with someone they don’t know and are uncomfortable with, they should leave the group. To do this:

- Go into the group chat, tap the 3 dots in the top-right, then > More > Exit group

4. Make sure your child knows how to report and block people

Whenever they first receive a message from an unknown number, WhatsApp will give them an option to report the message.

If someone in your child’s contacts is upsetting them or making them uncomfortable, they can report or block them at any point. (WhatsApp won’t tell the user they’ve been blocked/reported.)

To do this:

- On an iPhone, open the chat, tap the contact’s name, then > Block contact > Block (or Report and Block)
- In Android, open the chat, tap the 3 dots in the top-right, then > More > Block (or Report)

To report issues like offensive or abusive content or spam:

- In Android, tap the 3 dots in the top-right of the home screen, then > Settings > Help > Contact us
- On iPhone, go to Settings > Help > Contact us

5. Encourage your child to be alert to spam and hoax messages

Explain that these can appear to come from contacts, as well as people they don’t know. Tell your child to watch out for messages that:

- Ask them to tap on a link, or specifically to click on a link to activate a new feature
- Ask them to share personal information like bank account details, date of birth or passwords
- Ask them to forward the message
- Say they have to pay to use WhatsApp
- Have spelling or grammar errors

What can I do about online bullying?

- Encourage your child to talk to you if someone says something upsetting or hurtful to them
- Look for signs they may be being bullied, like being afraid or reluctant to go to school, feeling nervous, losing confidence or becoming distressed and withdrawn, or losing sleep
- Tell our school about **any** bullying your child experiences

Sources used in this factsheet

- [WhatsApp, Net Aware](https://www.net-aware.org.uk/networks/whatsapp/)
https://www.net-aware.org.uk/networks/whatsapp/
- [Bullying and cyberbullying, NSPCC](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/)
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/
- [Frequently asked questions, WhatsApp](https://faq.whatsapp.com/en)
https://faq.whatsapp.com/en

This factsheet was produced by [Safeguarding Training Centre from The Key:](https://thekeysupport.com/safeguarding)
thekeysupport.com/safeguarding