

What Parents & Carers Need to know about SNAPCHAT

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 app of many which we believe and trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.



Snapchat is a photo- and video-sharing app which also allows users to chat with friends via text or audio. Users can share images and videos with specific friends, or through a 'story' (documenting the previous 24 hours) visible to their entire friend list. Snapchat usage rose during the pandemic, with many young people utilising it to connect with their peers. The app continues to develop features to engage an even larger audience and emulate current trends, rivaling platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.

CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

Even if your child only connects on the app with people they know, they are still receiving friend requests from strangers. Snapchat's links with apps such as Wink and Hoop have increased this possibility. Accepting a request means that children are then disclosing personal information through the Story, Snapmap and Spotlight features. This could allow predators to gain their trust for sinister purposes.

EXCESSIVE USE

There are many features that are attractive to users and keep them excited about the app. Snap streaks encourage users to send snaps daily. Spotlight Challenges give users to the chance to obtain money and online fame, and the Spotlight feature's scroll of videos makes it easy for children to spend hours watching content.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some videos and posts on Snapchat are not suitable for children. The hashtags used to group content are determined by the poster, so an age-inappropriate results. The app's Discover function lets users swipe through snippets of news stories and reading articles that often include adult content. There is currently no way to turn off this feature.

CAUTION

Advice for Parents & Carers

TURN OFF QUICK ADD



The Quick Add function helps people find each other on the app. This function works based on mutual friends or whether someone's number is in your child's contacts list. It makes it easier for strangers to find your child's profile visible to strangers. We recommend that your child turns off Quick Add, which can be done in the settings (accessed via the cog icon).

CHAT ABOUT CONTENT



Talk to your child about what is and isn't wise to share on Snapchat (e.g. don't post explicit images or videos, or display identifiable details like their school uniform). Remind them that once something is online, the creator loses control over where it might end up - and who with. Additionally, Snapchat's 'Spotlight' feature has a #challenge like TikTok: it's vital that your child understands the potentially harmful consequences of taking part in these challenges.

KEEP ACCOUNTS PRIVATE



Profiles are private by default, but children may make them public to gain more followers. Your child can send snaps directly to friends, but Stories are visible to everyone they have added, unless they change the settings. If they use Snapmaps, their location is visible unless Ghost Mode is enabled (again via settings). It's prudent to emphasise the importance of not adding people they don't know in real life. This is particularly important with the addition of My Places, which allows other Snapchatters to see the places you and your friends visit and check in. Strangers, bullies and groomers could use this information to engage in conversation and arrange to meet in person.

TALK ABOUT SEXTING



It may feel like an awkward conversation (and one that young people can be reluctant to have) but it is important to talk openly and non-judgmentally about sexting, discussing the legal implications of sending, receiving or sharing explicit images, as well as the possible emotional impact. Emphasise that your child should never feel pressured into sexting - and they should tell a trusted adult straight away.

BE READY TO BLOCK AND REPORT



If a stranger does connect with your child on Snapchat and begins to make them feel uncomfortable through bullying, pressure to send explicit images or by sending explicit images to them, your child can select the three dots on that person's profile and choose report or block. There are options to state why they are reporting that user (annoying or malicious messages, spam, or masquerading as someone else, for example).



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Meet Our Expert
Dr Claire Sutcliffe 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.