Chat apps

Find out about different chat apps like WhatsApp and Kik, and how to help young people use them safely.

NSPCC

WhatsApp

Age rating: 16+

Main features: text, photo & video sharing, one to one and group chats, disappearing messages. End to end encrypted. Live location sharing

Help children stay safe on chat apps

Messaging and chat apps are a great way for a child to stay in touch with their friends and family but it's important both of you are comfortable with who they're talking to.

Talk to your child about who they're chatting to and how they know them. Remind them to be conscious of who they're sharing personal information with and not to share information with people they haven't met before. This includes information like their name, location, email, phone number and school name.

What are chat apps?

Chat apps allow the user to send messages, photos, videos, and documents, as well as creating large group chats.

Some apps allow users to message people they don't know, so your child could receive messages from people they don't know - most apps have settings to allow this to be changed so that they only receive messages from people they know. With your child, make sure these settings are in place and show them how to reject requests from people they don't know.

Even with friends, your child might see something that upsets them. Explore each app to see if there are reporting and blocking features. Show your child how to use these features and talk about situations when they might want to report or block.

Safety settings in chat apps

A risk for children and young people using chat apps is being added to group chats where they don't know the other people in the group, which could increase the chance they come across upsetting or negative messages.

Many of the chat apps have different privacy settings to help restrict who can contact you. If your child is using a chat app, we'd recommend looking at the privacy settings to see what's most appropriate. If there aren't any options to restrict contact, then we'd recommend that your child doesn't use the app

WhatsApp safety settings

To prevent children being added to groups by people they don't know in WhatsApp, we recommend changing the group chat settings from 'Everyone' to 'My Contacts Except…' and using the tick icon to select all contacts.
The 'My Contacts Except…' option means only your child's phone contacts, except those you exclude, can add your child to groups. But by selecting all contacts, it means that nobody should be able to add your child to a group chat without first sending them an invitation.

Worried about a child?

If you're worried about something a child or young person may have experienced online, you can contact the NSPCC helpline for free support and advice. Call us on 0808 800 5000 or contact us online.

Children can contact Childline any time to get support themselves

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For more on Online Safety, please visit
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety