## What is WhatsApp?

WhatsApp is one of the most popular messaging apps in the world, with more than one billion people in more than 180 countries using it to send and receive text, photos, videos and documents, as well as make voice and video calls. The free app offers end-to-end encryption, which means that all messages can only be read by the sender and the recipient in one to one chats, or all members if it is a group chat.

## What does it look like?

## Main Concerns for Parents

**WhatsApp**

### Receiving unwanted messages
WhatsApp works by accessing a device's address book and recognising which contacts are using WhatsApp. Without a mobile number, people should not be able to contact your child via WhatsApp. Of course, in theory, anyone could add any series of numbers to make a mobile number that by chance matches your child's phone number. Or your child may have shared their mobile number with people in a different context and someone can then use it to get in touch via WhatsApp.

### Connecting with strangers
Your child may either receive a message from an unknown number or someone in their contacts list who they don't really know that well but feel like they need to respond. Online predators will use an approach, known as grooming, to befriend children in order to take advantage of them for sexual purposes. For example, they may start sending sexually explicit messages or offer gifts, such as new phones, in return for sexual favours. With WhatsApp, messages and calls are encrypted end-to-end, so only your child and the person they are communicating with can read or listen to them.

### Location sharing
WhatsApp has a feature that lets contacts track one another in real time. The idea is that Live Location is a 'simple and secure way to let people know where you are' - location-sharing is already a common feature on other social apps, including Snapchat's Snap Map and Facebook Messenger. Children sharing their location with strangers can put them in grave danger.

### Cyberbullying
Cyberbullying is the act of sending threatening or taunting text messages, voice messages, pictures and videos, with the aim to hurt and humiliate the receiver. They can also include messages that threaten physical harm, blackmailing or excluding people from something. The group chat option is great for keeping up with gossip and inviting multiple people to an event at once but there is the potential for people to be hurt by others with their comments or jokes.

### Scam messages
Occasionally on WhatsApp, people receive spam from unauthorised third parties or from fraudsters pretending to offer prizes to 'lucky people'. A popular scam involves text messages warning recipients that their Whatsapp subscription has run out with the hope that people are duped into providing their payment details. Other hoax messages include instructions to forward the message in return for a reward or gift from WhatsApp or another person.

## Signing up safely to WhatsApp

To use the app, your child must be at least 13 years-old or given parental permission. Setting up a WhatsApp account requires a smartphone and a mobile number - the app will verify a number and you will need someone's mobile. Settings can be used to manage contacts and how their profile is accessed.

## Control how a profile is accessed

Your child can set their 'last seen', profile photo and/or status to the following options:
- Everyone: available to all WhatsApp users
- My Contacts: available to contacts from address book only
- Nobody: not available to anyone

## Explain how to block people

Show your child that it's possible to stop receiving messages, calls and status updates from certain contacts by blocking them. Messages and status updates sent by a blocked contact will not show up on the phone and stay undelivered. Blocking someone will not remove this contact from the contact list – they will need to be removed from the phone's address book.

## Deleting messages sent by mistake

You can delete messages sent by mistake - whether to one person or an entire group. This is useful if your child sent a message to the wrong chat or if the message they sent contained a mistake. Tap and hold on the message, choose 'Delete' and then 'Delete for everyone'. You have seven minutes to delete the message after it's sent. It's worth remembering that recipients may see and screenshot a message before it's deleted or if deletion was not successful.

## Ignore and report scam messages

Advise your child that if they receive an unwanted or unsolicited message to block the sender, disregard the message and delete it. Remind them that if a message looks suspicious or sounds too good to be true, don't tap on it, share it or forward it. When your child receives a message from an unknown number for the first time, they will be given the option to report the number as spam directly inside the chat. They can also report a contact or a group as spam using the following steps:
- Open the chat
- Tap on the contact or group name to open their profile information
- Scroll to the bottom and tap Report Spam



Contact Details

Share Contact

Export Chat

Clear Chat

Block Contact

Report Spam
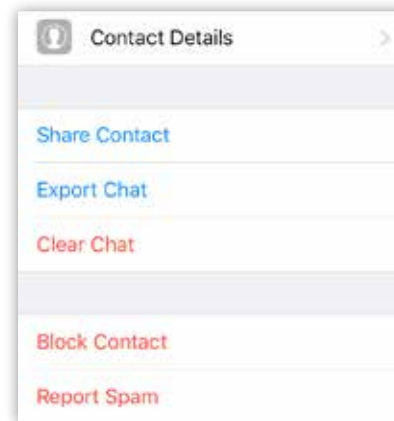
## Connecting with WhatsApp on the web

WhatsApp Web is an extension of your phone: the web browser mirrors conversations and messages from the mobile device. To pair WhatsApp on your child's phone with the WhatsApp web client, open web.whatsapp.com in the browser and use the QR code to scan the code inside of WhatsApp.

## Controlling 'last seen'

'Online' and 'last seen' are tools for checking if contacts are online, or the last time they were using WhatsApp. Online means that a contact has WhatsApp open in the foreground on their device and is connected to the internet. Last seen refers to the last time the contact used WhatsApp. Through privacy settings, there is the option to control who can see your last seen but people cannot hide their online status.

## Think about content

Encourage your child to think carefully before they decide to share something. Ask them to consider: would you want others to see what you've sent? Explain that when they share a text, photo, video, file or voice message with someone else on WhatsApp, they will have a copy of these messages and they can re-share these messages with others on and off WhatsApp and post them anywhere online.

## Chat to your child

Research has shown that sexting, cyberbullying and inappropriate online content has caused a direct increase in mental health problems in children, including stress and anxiety. Children may feel increasingly desperate and isolated. Take steps to protect your child when they are using WhatsApp and chat to them regularly about how they are using the service. Read through privacy and safety settings with your child and make sure they know they can talk to you if they encounter any problems, such as bullying and abuse.

## Watch out for addiction

By the age of 14 the average child will have sent more than 35,000 texts, 30,000 WhatsApp messages and racked up more than three solid weeks of video chat, a 2017 study found. While it is inevitable that your child will use technology, you can still set boundaries. Not easy, especially since teens use their devices for both schoolwork and free time, often simultaneously. Take the time to discuss appropriate use, establish guidelines and explain clearly how phones may be used and when.

## Find an alternative service

Talking to random strangers is always going to be potentially dangerous. There are other online chat services available where it is clear who you are talking to and they are who they say they are.