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Dear parents and carers,

It has come to our attention that more and more of our children are using the messaging app, Whats App. Since May 2018, the minimum age for using Whats App is 16 years old. Prior to this it used to be 13, however in the UK and European Union, the age limit has been raised. Despite this age limit change, it does seem relatively easy for younger children to access Whats App and to freely use it.

Whilst Whats App is a very popular way of communicating, using it to send and receive messages, photos, videos and documents as well as making voice and video calls through and internet or Wi-Fi connection. There are also some aspects to be aware of that are not so positive. Fake news and hoaxes, live location sharing, connecting with strangers, cyber bullying and receiving scam messages are all issues that have befallen due to use of Whats App.

In our bid to keep children safe online and to prevent their experience of any such negative issues we regularly teach children about the dangers of using apps and games online, both in their PSHCE lessons and in their computing curriculum. However, it is vitally important in this ever-changing world of technology, that parents are also kept abreast of these dangers and monitor their child's online activities carefully, to ensure that they stay safe. Whilst Whats App may seem a relatively harmless app to adults, there are instances where it can cause more serious issues for children, if not monitored appropriately.

Attached to this letter is a fact sheet for parents which also offers some helpful tips on how to make sure that you can keep your child safe. We will be running a parent workshop for E- Safety during next term and we will write to you with further details about this, in due course.

Yours sincerely

Mrs J Callaway
Headteacher

Child safety on WhatsApp

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
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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?

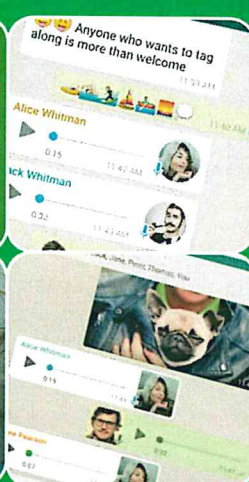
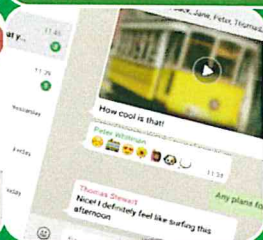
- Encourage your child to talk to you if someone says something upsetting or hurtful to them
- Look for signs they may be being bullied, like being afraid or reluctant to go to school, feeling nervous, losing confidence or becoming distressed and withdrawn, or losing sleep
- Tell our school about **any**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

Other sources of help

- [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>



WhatsApp is one of the most popular messaging apps in the world, with more than 1.5 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 through an Internet or Wi-Fi connection. The free app offers end-to-end encryption, which means that 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. Not even WhatsApp can read them.



AGE RESTRICTION
16+



What parents need to know about WhatsApp



AGE LIMIT CHANGE

Since May 2018, the minimum age for using WhatsApp is 16 years old if you live in the European Union, including the UK. Prior to this, the minimum age was 13, which still applies for the rest of the world. WhatsApp has not yet stated whether it will take action against anyone aged between 13 and 16 who already hold accounts under the old terms and conditions, such as closing their account or seeking parental permission.

SCAM MESSAGES

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

FAKE NEWS AND HOAXES

WhatsApp has been linked to enabling the spread of dangerous viral rumours. In India, for example, a number of attacks appear to have been sparked by false rumours shared on WhatsApp.

THE 'ONLY ADMIN' FEATURE AND 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. The group chat and group video call features are great for multiple people to chat simultaneously, but there is the potential for people to hurt others with their comments or jokes. The 'only admin' feature gives the admin of a group chat greater control over who can send messages. Whilst this can be good for one-way announcements, the group admin has the power to block somebody from responding to an offensive message in a chat, which could result in a child being upset and unable to reply.

CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

To start a chat in WhatsApp, you need to know the mobile number of the contact you want to speak to and they also need to have the app downloaded. WhatsApp can find contacts by accessing the address book of a device and recognising which of those contacts are using WhatsApp. If your child has shared their mobile number with somebody they don't know, they can use it to get in touch via WhatsApp.

LIVE LOCATION SHARING

WhatsApp's 'Live Location' feature enables users to share their current location in real time to their contacts in a chat, allowing friends to show their movements. The feature, which can be found by pressing the 'attach' button, is described by WhatsApp as 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 and can be a useful way for a child to let loved ones know they are safe. However, if your child is in a group chat with people they do not know, they will be exposing their location.



**National
Online
Safety**

Top Tips for Parents



CREATE A SAFE PROFILE

Even though somebody would need your child's phone number to add them as a contact, as an extra security measure we suggest altering their profile settings to control who can see their profile photo and status. The options to choose from are 'Everyone', 'My Contacts' and 'Nobody'. We suggest selecting 'My Contacts' or 'Nobody' to ensure their profile is protected.

EXPLAIN HOW TO BLOCK PEOPLE

If your child has received spam or offensive messages, calls or attachments from a contact, they should block them. Messages and status updates sent by a blocked contact will not show up on the phone and will 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. To block a contact, your child needs to open the person's chat stream and tap on the settings.

REPORT SCAM MESSAGES

Advise your child not to tap, share or forward any message that looks suspicious or sounds too good to be true. 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: 1) Open the chat. 2) Tap on the contact or group name to open their profile information. 3) Scroll to the bottom and tap 'Report Spam'.

LEAVE A GROUP

If your child is part of a group chat that makes them feel uncomfortable or has been added to a group they don't want to be part of, use the group's settings to show them how to leave. If someone exits a group, the admin can add them back in once, if they leave again, they cannot be added again.

USING LIVE LOCATION SAFELY

If your child needs to use the 'Live Location' feature to share with you or a friend, advise them to only share it for the amount of time they need to. WhatsApp gives the options of either 15 minutes, one hour or eight hours. However, your child can choose to stop sharing at any time.

DELETE ACCIDENTAL MESSAGES

If your child has sent a message to the wrong chat or if a message they sent has contained a mistake, they can delete it. To do this, simply tap and hold on the message, choose 'Delete' and then 'Delete for everyone'. The app allows seven minutes to delete the message after it has been sent, but it is important to remember that recipients may have seen and screenshot a message before it was deleted.

SET TIME LIMITS

A 2017 study found that 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. Although it is inevitable that your child will use technology, you can still set boundaries. This is not easy, especially since teens use their devices for both schoolwork and free time, often simultaneously.

SOURCES: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/26/whatsapp-privacy-ban-under-16-the-mystery-is-how>, <https://whatsapp.brand.com>, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/whatsapp-update-kills-india-hoaxes-forward-messages-app-downloaded-8456011.html>

