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## Online Safety and Wellbeing

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to you because of some significant worries and issues brought to my attention, with regard to social media use outside of school. These issues centre around the use of WhatsApp groups that some of the children in Year 6 and Year 5 have been using.

The children have raised a number of things that were worrying them about these groups:

- There has been a high volume of messages sent/received by the members of the group
- The children are unable to keep up with the volume of messages
- Seeing such a high number (in the hundreds) of unread messages makes them feel anxious
- Not all children have been included in the group, and this has been discussed on the playground
- Worries about inappropriate content
- Some children have been unkind to each other in the groups or directly, with some of this causing further upset at school

To begin to address these worries, this week the teachers have spoken with all classes by talking about e-safety, with particular focus upon social media and WhatsApp.

We would strongly advise that primary school children **should not be** using WhatsApp, as, due to their age, it is a breach of WhatsApp's terms and conditions. We do however recognise that many of these groups and messaging channels have been the only way for children to communicate with each other through lockdown. However, there are significant safeguarding risks that are posed when children use services such as these, including the risk of being contacted by strangers.

Should you choose to allow your child to use services such as this, they will need to be closely monitored and supported to ensure that they are being kind to each other.

I would urge you to discuss this with your child and carefully consider use of WhatsApp and other social media services, for the good of their mental well-being.

With thanks for your consideration in this matter.

Adam Atkinson

Deputy Headteacher

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 an app of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit [www.nationalonlinesafety.com](http://www.nationalonlinesafety.com) for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

# What Parents & Carers Need to Know About WHATSAPP

**16+**  
in UK & EU;  
12+ rest of world.

WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging service, with around two billion users exchanging texts, photos, videos and documents, and making voice and video calls. The app offers end-to-end encryption, meaning messages can only be read by the sender and the recipient(s). Not even WhatsApp can read them. Updates to its privacy policy in 2021 reportedly caused millions of users to leave the app. But the new policy was widely misinterpreted: it only related to WhatsApp's business features, not to personal messages.

### 'Prize' Scams


WhatsApp users occasionally receive messages from unauthorised third parties or fraudsters pretending to offer prizes – encouraging recipients to click a link to win. A common scam involves a warning that someone's WhatsApp subscription has run out; aiming to dupe them into disclosing payment details. Other scams include instructions to forward a message to earn a gift or reward.

### Enabling Fake News

WhatsApp has unfortunately been linked to accelerating the spread of dangerous rumours. In India, some outbreaks of mob violence were reported to have been sparked by false allegations shared on the app. WhatsApp itself took steps to prevent its users circulating hazardous theories and speculation in the early weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Connections with Strangers

To start a WhatsApp chat, you need the mobile number of the person you want to message (they also need to have the app). WhatsApp can also access the address book on someone's device and recognise which of their contacts use WhatsApp. If your child has given their mobile number to somebody they don't know, that person could then use it to get in touch via WhatsApp.



### Ephemeral Messaging

By enabling the 'disappearing messages' option in a chat, users can send messages that will vanish from WhatsApp after seven days. Parents may want to take note of this new feature, which makes monitoring what children are talking about on the app problematic. Equally, if someone sends your child an inappropriate message, one it has disappeared there is no way to prove any wrongdoing.

### 'Only Admins' and Cyberbullying

Group chats and video calls are great for connecting with multiple people in WhatsApp, but there is always the potential for someone's feelings to be hurt by an unkind comment or joke. The 'only admins' feature gives the admin(s) of a group control over who can send messages. They can, for example, block people from posting in a chat, which could make a child feel excluded and upset.

### Live Location Sharing

The 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, allowing friends to see their movements. WhatsApp describes it as a "simple and secure way to let people know where you are." Indeed, it is a useful method for a child to let loved ones know they are safe. But if your child is in a chat with people they don't know, it means they will be exposing their location to them, too.

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### Report Potential Scams

Advise your child not to engage with any message that looks suspicious or 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 that number as spam. They can also report a contact or a group as spam by tapping on the contact or group name to open their profile and scrolling down to 'report spam'.

### Explain about Blocking

If your child receives spam or offensive messages, calls or files from a contact, they should block them. Communication from a blocked contact won't show up on their device and stays undelivered. Blocking someone does not remove them from your child's contact list – they would also need to be deleted from the device's address book. The option to block someone is on their contact info screen.

### Create a Safe Profile

Even though someone would need your child's phone number to add them as a contact, as an extra precaution it's worth altering your young one's profile settings to restrict who can see their photo and status. The options are 'everyone', 'my contacts' and 'nobody'. Choosing one of the latter two ensures their profile is protected.

### Leave a Group

If your child is part of a group chat that makes them feel uncomfortable, or has been added to a group that they no longer want to be part of, show them how to use the group's settings to leave. If someone exits a group, the admin can add them back in once; if they leave a second time, it is permanent.

### Use Location Features Sparingly

If your child needs to use 'live location' to show you or their friends where they are, advise them to share their location only for as long as they need to. WhatsApp gives 'live location' options of 15 minutes, one hour or eight hours. However, your child can manually choose to stop sharing their position at any time.

### Delete Accidental Messages


If your child has posted a message in the wrong chat or sent a message that they immediately regret, they can delete it. Tap and hold on the message, choose 'delete' and then 'delete for everyone'. WhatsApp allows seven minutes to delete a message after it's sent – but it's important to remember that recipients may have seen (and taken a screenshot of) a message before it was deleted.


### Fact-Check Messages

You can now fact-check messages that have been forwarded at least five times in WhatsApp, by double-tapping the magnifying glass icon to the right of the message. From there, your child can launch a Google search and decide for themselves whether the message was accurate or not. It's a good way to encourage young people to question things they see online.

### Meet Our Expert

Parveen Kaur is a social media expert and digital media consultant who is passionate about improving digital literacy for parents and children. She has extensive experience in the social media arena and is the founder of Kids N Clicks: a web resource that helps parents and children thrive in a digital world.





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 #WakeUpWednesday

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