

Snapchat

What is 'Snapchat'?

Remember your grandparents getting every dodgy old photo out, twenty plus years after the event? Wish you could erase those pictures sometimes? Meet Snapchat.

Snapchat is a mobile messaging app that allows you to share photos, videos, text and drawings that expire and delete (or do they?) after a set amount of time, anything up to 10 seconds.

Photos and videos captured and viewed are known as 'Snaps', these become 'Streaks' once they enter a conversation. You can then go on to earn 'Snap Points' which make up your 'Snap Score', for every photo, message, video, text and drawing that you send or receive. This creates excitement and interest but can lead to riskier behaviours as the streak develops. Anything that you post becomes your 'Snapchat Story'

Snapchat is marked suitable **for users 13 years old** and over. It is free to download and send messages. Snapchat is available on the Google mobile operating system, Android or Apple iOS. Remember, that any app, game or website that enables social contact with others presents a risk and is open to abuse.

Is 'Snapchat' Safe?

It sounds fun, right? What harm can these pictures do if they expire and delete???

Like many messaging apps, the truth is people can screen shot your pictures and messages and although you are notified, this could be too late, especially if the 'Snap' was inappropriate. You will have no way of knowing what has happened to your 'Snap' once it has been stored by someone else.

Geo filters can appear at specific locations, giving away your location and that of any given 'Snap' that you share. Snapchat allows you to add contacts from your phone list or through Snap codes, which means that anyone who has Snapchat in your list will automatically be able to follow you on the app.

Snapchat also scans for nearby users and this is not safe. You will have no idea who you are adding or what they might do with your 'Snaps'.

Be aware that this app can assist online bullying and grooming and unless information is captured in a screen shot, it will magically expire so that no trail is left!

Remember this app is designed to be fun, but there are very real dangers in giving your identity, location and other information away, that you might not think of.

Using 'Snapchat' safely

- **Communicate your expectations** – As a parent, it is your responsibility to make clear what is and is not acceptable online behaviour. You need to accept that allowing your child access to online apps like these, require trust and clear boundaries, for their own wellbeing.
- **Model positive and safe online behaviour** – Safe behaviour online starts with us as adults. Following basic safety suggestions and demonstrating these will help your child to follow in your footsteps. You also have a better chance of staying safer online yourself.

- **Username** – Use a creative username that does not identify your child’s real one on screen.
- **Check Privacy Settings**
 - Click on settings in the top right hand corner (signified as a cog),
 - Click on **‘WHO CAN’** section and choose **‘Only Friends’** option. Be aware that even if you choose **‘Only Friends’** anyone in your group will be able to communicate with you in group chat. Please also be aware that these options in **‘See My Story’** will only be active after this time, so previous stories you have saved can still be seen by others if you had no privacy settings set up before this point.
 - Uncheck **‘See Me’** in **‘Quick Add’** – otherwise anyone with a mutual connection can see you, friend or otherwise.
- **Passwords** – Use a strong password, and do NOT save it. It might be extra hassle to log in every time on a single or multiple devices, but this can help protect your account.
 - Use Log In verification, for additional security – after you have verified your mobile number you will need both your password and a code sent to the given mobile to log on to other devices.
- **Choose friends wisely** – Be online friends with those who are real life friends. Ignore, block or delete strange friend requests and check the settings of the app to control who can contact you.
- **Think before you share** – Think about the posts and information you are sharing about yourself and others online. It can be easy to get carried away and share something that you might not have done had you thought about it beforehand.
- **See something you don't like?** – report it under **‘Settings and Support’**, **‘I Need Help’**. You can also **‘Block Snapchatters’**
- **Become your child's friend** – this way you can check what they send, and make sure they are staying safe. **This is not prying, it is parenting.** Consider how you will monitor what is being shared online by your child and what is being shared with them.
- **Read the safety tips and resources** – preferably with your child. This communicates clearly what is and isn't acceptable and what people can do with your pictures and messages. If you can have a clear conversation with your child about this, they are sensible enough to use it.
- **Making a decision** – **You are a parent** and you will know your child enough to make a decision about allowing them to use Snapchat or any other social networking app. Snapchat is designed to be a fun and appealing app and it is not difficult to see why it is so popular. By following the steps outlined above you have a better opportunity to ensure that your child is protected online.

Remember the internet should be a fun and liberating experience for all, but take the right steps to make it a safe one!