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What is WhatsApp?

WhatsApp is a free messaging app. It allows you to send text and multimedia messages (video, images and voice recordings) to people in the contact list on your phone. It also allows users to set up group chats where the administrators can invite up to 256 people to share messages and images publicly within the group. Although the age limit for WhatsApp was recently raised to 16 it is popular with primary age children and above. So what are the risks?

Safety Tips



As with all Internet activity, talk to your child about how they use WhatsApp and any issues they have encountered.



With your child, look through the groups they are members of and discuss any areas of concern you have. You may agree that it would be best to leave the group.



Go to the settings (by pressing the three dots in the top right of the screen) and ensure your child's profile is set to 'contacts only'.



To leave a group: Open the group in WhatsApp. Press the three dots in the top right of the screen and select 'Group Info'. Scroll down to 'Exit group'.



If an admin adds your child back into a group they have left, your child can ask them not to do this. If they keep adding them then you can prevent it by blocking the admin. To do this, WhatsApp provide the following guidance:

1. Go to the group in WhatsApp, then tap or click the subject of the group.
2. Tap or click the phone number of the admin you wish to block.
3. If prompted, tap or click **Message {phone number}** or **Send Message**.
4. A blank chat with the admin will open up. Tap or click the phone number at the top.
5. Tap or click **Block > Block**.

Reasons for concern



Group administrators can invite people your child does not know into group chats. Some of these people may not have innocent intentions or may be older and post age-inappropriate messages.



Some WhatsApp groups can contain images and messages which can cause distress to children. These might include violent images or videos, abusive messages and sexual content.



Chain messages are often shared through WhatsApp. These pressure children to post them on to their contacts, e.g. by claiming that failure to do so can result in the child or a family member dying. Many children find such messages distressing but also feel they must share them with others due to fear of the threat.

and killed him. A girl named Loran got this message. She laughed and deleted it. I later came to her house and killed her and buried her in a desert. A boy named



WhatsApp does not allow users to decide whether to join a group. Your child will be automatically added to any groups that their contacts add them to. If your child leaves the group the administrator can add them straight back in.



Your child may be in WhatsApp groups in which huge numbers of posts are made. The alerts this generates can be an unnecessary distraction and can disrupt sleep.



WhatsApp's default privacy settings are that anybody can see your child's profile photo and when they were last online.



WhatsApp 'dare games' have become popular with children. These involve the child making a quiz about themselves to share with others and this can lead to oversharing of personal information which can be publicly available.



Children can add and then remove other children from groups as a form of exclusion and bullying.