

Online Safety Monthly Bulletin

For Parents and Carers

Edition 6

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Miss Hyland – Computing Coordinator



Social media

For many children, being able to socialise with their friends online is a priority for them. As parents, there are things to consider in order to allow them opportunities in an age appropriate way.

All of our pupils are under the 13+ age of social media applications, such as Snapchat. It has come to our attention that several children across our school have Snapchat and are part of larger groups where anyone can be added. Safeguarding concerns have arisen because of this.

Please see the attached poster for further information on just some of the risks attached with Snapchat and how to manage teen accounts if you permit your older children to access it.

Smartphone vs 'Dumb' phone

With screen addiction on the rise, parents across the world are faced with tough decisions about when to introduce technology to their children and how to manage it. Some families are opting to introduce simpler phones (the phones many of us grew up with before the internet was a common feature). Though, these don't have access to apps with safety features you may wish for.

You can find an article [HERE](#) that explains the pros, cons and risks of all options. It also tells you many ways that you can set up a smartphone to manage access and mimic a 'dumb' phone.

Phone calls

The art of conversation is a skill that can be practiced. Allowing your child time to phone relatives and friends gives them an opportunity to refine their speech and language skills.

Contact Us

If you have any concerns or questions regarding online safety or your own child's well-being, please email the Whitehall Junior School office on: office@whitehalljunior.org

Visit our parent [Online Safety](#) webpage for previous Online Safety Bulletins and further information.

This issue...

- Snapchat
- Smart vs Dumb phones
- Benefits of phone calls

Top Tips

- Set up phones, consoles, tablets and computers with parental control settings.
- Have open and honest conversations with your child about what they are accessing and what is acceptable.
- Guide children to appropriate games and activities.
- Follow age rating guidance.
[Common Sense Media](#)
- Keep up to date with trends through [our newsletter and online safety website page](#).

Helpful Links

CEOP – Child Exploitation and Online Protection



Internet Matters



What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

SNAP STREAK

97
DAYS

SNAPCHAT

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

Snapchat is a messaging app which allows users to send images, videos and texts to others. Its best-known feature is that anything sent 'disappears' 24 hours after it's been viewed; however, users are known to take screenshots or use another device to obtain a photo of their screen. In 2023, Snapchat added a chatbot function called 'My AI'.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

My AI is Snapchat's new chatbot, which replies to questions in a human-like manner. However, the software is still in its infancy and has significant drawbacks, such as biased, incorrect or misleading responses. There have already been numerous reports of young users turning to AI for medical help and diagnoses, which could be inaccurate and therefore potentially dangerous.

PREDATORS AND SCAMS

Predators can exploit Snapchat's disappearing messages by, for example, telling a user they have naked photos of them and will post them unless they're paid. Snapchat's own research found that 65% of teenagers had experienced this – on this app or others. This likely isn't helped by 'SnapMaps' – a feature which highlights your exact position in real-time. This is meant to help friends keep track of each other, but could be used for more sinister reasons.

MY EYES ONLY

Snapchat has a hidden photo vault called 'My Eyes Only'. Teens can conceal sensitive photos and videos from parents and carers in this folder, which is protected by a PIN. You can check for this by clicking on the icon which looks like two playing cards. This takes you to the 'Memories' folder which stores photos, stories and the My Eyes Only folder.

SCREEN TIME ADDICTION

Snapchat prioritises user engagement, with features like streaks (messaging the same person every day to build up a high score). The app also has sections called 'Discover' and 'Spotlight', which show tailored content to each user. However, this could also be seen as an attempt to hook users into watching videos endlessly. Furthermore, constant notifications can lure people into using the app.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some content on Snapchat simply isn't suitable for children. The hashtags used to group content are determined by the poster, so even an innocent search term could still yield age-inappropriate results. The app's 'disappearing messages' feature also makes it easy for young people to share explicit images on impulse – so sexting continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat.

ONLINE PRESSURES

Although many of Snapchat's filters are designed to entertain or amuse, the 'beautify' effects on photos can set unrealistic body image expectations – creating feelings of inadequacy in younger users. Snapchat now also has 'priority' notifications (which still get displayed even if a device is in 'do not disturb' mode), increasing the pressure on users to log back in and interact.

Advice for Parents & Educators

UTILISE PARENTAL CONTROLS

Snapchat's 'Family Centre' lets you view the details of the child's account – their friends list and who they've spoken to in the last week – and report any concerns. You must invite a child to the Family Centre for them to join. To keep the child's location hidden on the app, go into settings and turn on 'Ghost Mode' and 'Hide Live Location', and ensure they know not to share their location with anyone.

BLOCK AND REPORT

If a stranger does connect with a child on Snapchat and begins to make them feel uncomfortable through bullying, pressure to send explicit images or by sending sexual images to them, the child can tap the three dots on that person's profile and report or block them. There are options to state why they're reporting that user – such as annoying or malicious messages, spam or masquerading as someone else.

FAMILIARISE YOURSELF

Before you allow a child to download Snapchat, download it yourself and familiarise yourself with the app. Snapchat has produced a parents' guide to the app to help you understand how it works and any protections they have in place. A link for this can be found in the sources below.

ENCOURAGE OPEN DISCUSSIONS

Snapchat's risks can be easier to handle if you nurture an open dialogue. For example, discuss My AI's responses to questions and how reliable they are. Talk about scams and blackmail before letting children sign up. If they're lured into a scam, encourage them to tell you immediately. Talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting, emphasising its inherent risks. Furthermore, explain how popular 'challenges' on the platform can have harmful consequences.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



#WakeUpWednesday

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