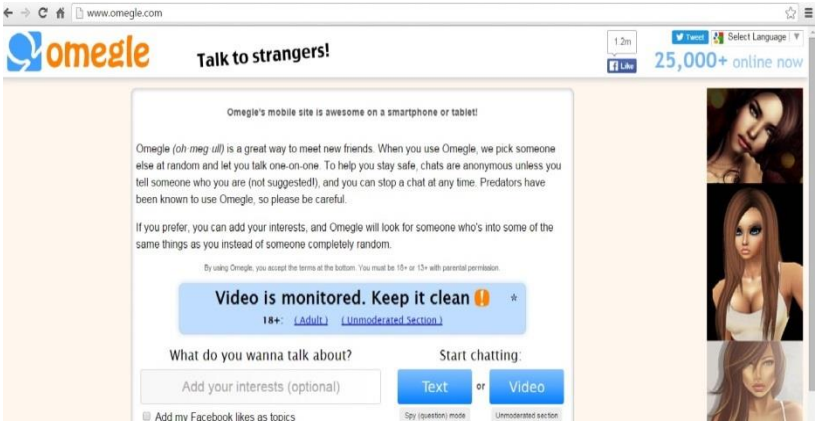
What is Omegle?

Omegle is a free social networking website in which users are connected with other unknown users at random in order to chat via video, text or audio. This is known as a 'virtual chatroom'.

There is an official Omegle website (www.omegle.com) but also many additional sites such as Omegle UK, and various associated apps such as 'Chat for Omegle', 'Free Omegle Chat', 'Omeglers'. All sites and apps appear to share the same features and purpose, but only some claim to be affiliated to Omegle and others state that they are not affiliated. The information below relates to the official Omegle website but may well be applicable to the other Omegle-style platforms.



How much does it cost?

The Omegle website is free to access, and the apps are free to download and use as they connect to a user's existing data plan or Wi-Fi to send and receive messages. There may be charges if the user is not connected to Wi-Fi or they have exceeded the data limit on their device.

Age restrictions

In its written terms and conditions on the site, Omegle has a 13+ age restriction and asks users under 18 to only access the site with parental permission/guidance. However, there is no registration process or age verification and so users simply click a button to chat. This lack of age verification is not restricted to Omegle as many social media sites do not attempt to do this.

Should I be concerned about Omegle as a parent/carer?

The tag line for Omegle is "Talk to strangers". Chatting to different people online can be fun, but as Omegle acknowledges, there is a strong risk of users encountering sexual content on Omegle. This is not limited to viewing adult sexual content but could also be young people performing sexual acts or exposing themselves.

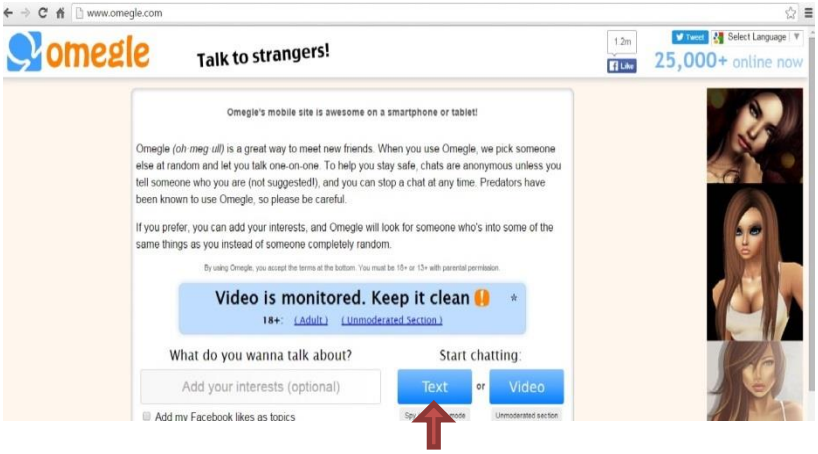
Sharing/viewing inappropriate content

Similar to other chatting websites such as Chat Roulette, Omegle can be used for text and video chat. The concern with video chat is the user's exposure to harmful or sexual content, as well as the young person's ability to share their own sexual behaviour online. As with any webcam based platform, there is always a possibility that footage can be recorded, and possibly distributed, with or without the user's knowledge.

Sexual content is discouraged by Omegle in a written statement on their main site, however in practice the monitoring of the content of the chatroom site is limited.

There are two main ways to chat on Omegle's homepage, text chat and video chat.

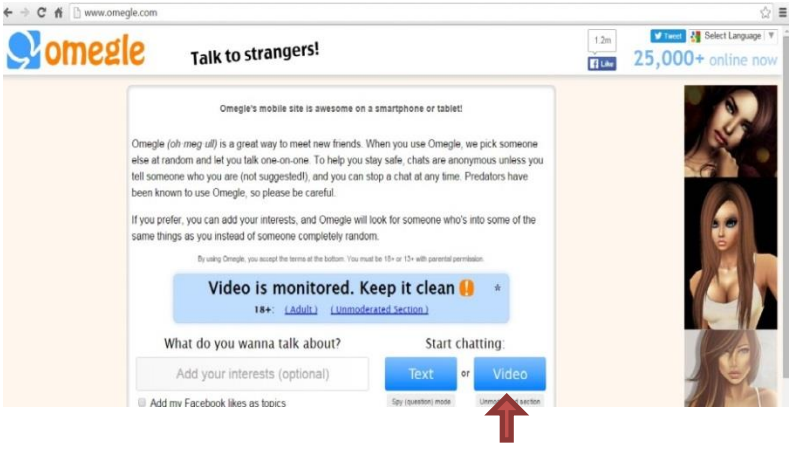
Text chat



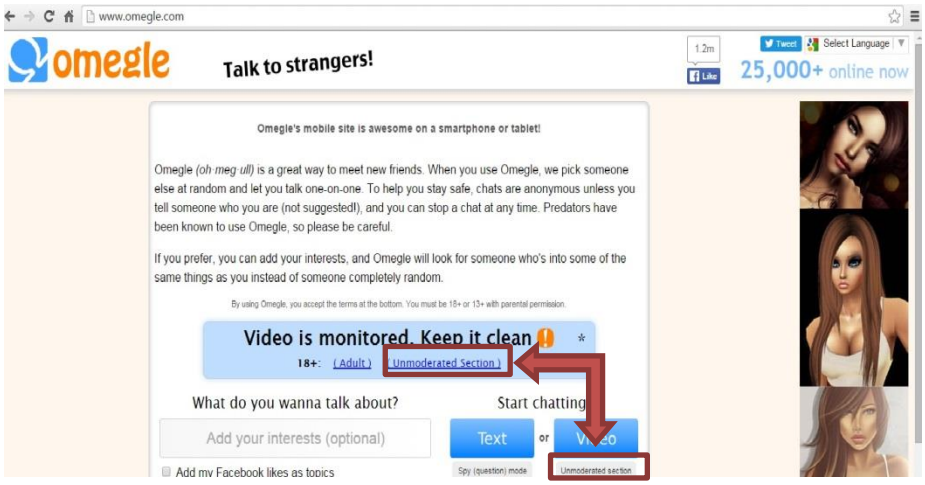
Text chat connects the user "you" and a "stranger" in instant text messaging. It has a 'spy' function. Users can either be the 'spy' and log on as a hidden third party in a text chat between two users. The 'spy' can then ask the other two users to discuss a particular topic or question and view their replies. Alternatively, a user can be the participant rather than the 'spy' and discuss the question with another user. The questions asked, and corresponding conversations, can be explicitly sexual. A 'spy' can exit without ending the chat between the other two users.

Video Chat

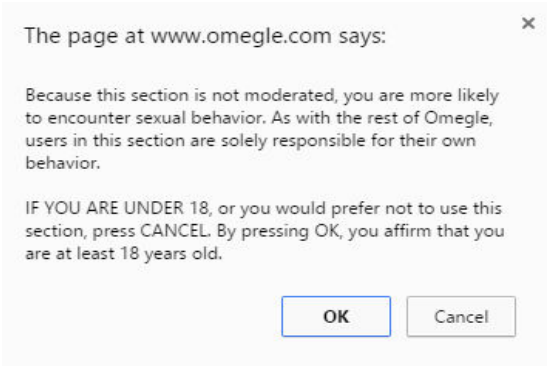
Video chatting in Omegle has three different options- moderated, unmoderated and adult.



Omegle state that the blue video button is the 'moderated' section of the site. By clicking this button the user is taken directly to live video and text chat. No warning message appears to alert the user of sexual content (as it does in the unmoderated and adult sections below). Nevertheless, despite the message stating 'video is monitored, keep it clean', users visiting this section are likely to encounter numerous other users engaging in sexual chat and activity
Omegle also offers unmoderated video chat (see screenshot below).



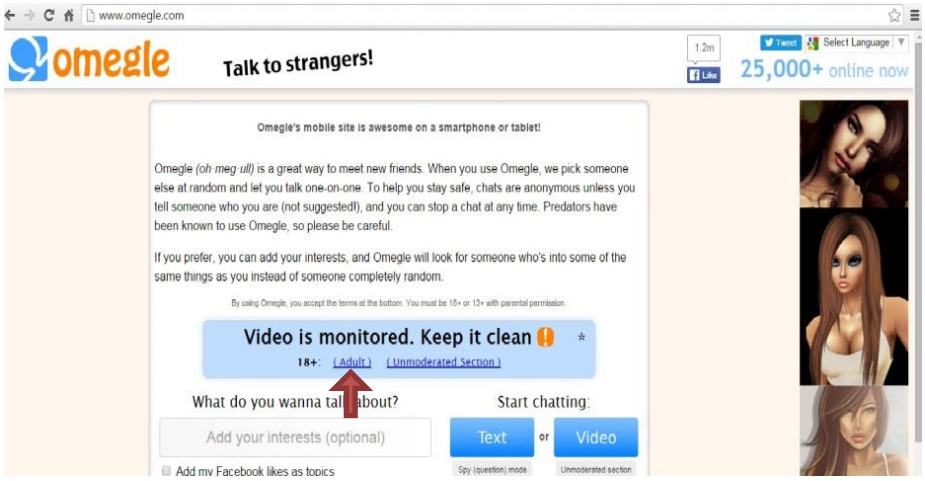
When a user clicks on this unmoderated chat, a warning box is displayed stating users are likely to encounter sexual behaviour and to confirm that they are 18+.



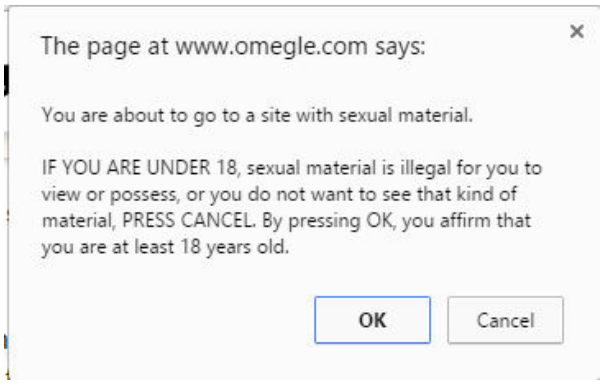
The user is then taken directly to a very similar video and text chat screen as the previous monitored section (see above). This section of the site is rife with sexually explicit videos, including live stream sexual acts.

Within both the moderated and unmoderated sections, it is important to remember that any video can be recorded and faked and so it is easy for users to misrepresent their age and gender. Omegle also offers an option to take a screenshot of the live feed, and users could use their own devices to record the screen. This could then be shared by anyone, anywhere.

Adult chat



The other option for video chat is the 'adult' (18+) section, where users can view adult content by accessing an external adult pornography site. When the user clicks the 'adult' option, a message appears warning the user of sexual material and asks the user to 'confirm' they are over 18. If the user confirms they are over 18 they are automatically redirected to the external site. Omegle does not verify the age of the user so the content can easily be accessed by under 18s at the click of a button.



Personal Information

Omegle states that users can remain anonymous whilst using the site. Participants in the chat are named "you" and "stranger" in order to keep the anonymity of both parties. However, this anonymity can be lost if identifying features are displayed on webcam, or users reveal personal information about themselves in chat conversations. A common question on the site is "ASL?" which means asking for details on the users age, sex and location. Many Omegle chats start instantly with the "stranger" providing their Kik username and asking for "you" to send them a message on Kik. Users should beware that these Kik profiles may host sexualised content (please see our Kik guide for more information). As always, it is important to talk to your child about the risks of sharing personal information online, and sharing their other social media accounts with "strangers" from Omegle.

Reporting

There is no clear way to block other users on Omegle. Omegle's Disclaimer states that users can report other users to a Moderator or Admin of the site but there are no instructions or guidance on how to do this.

Copycat websites

There are a number of 'copycat' websites that link to Omegle or look similar to the site but are in fact pornography sites. It is easy to click the wrong link and access adult content.

How do privacy settings work on Omegle?

Because Omegle is an anonymous site a user can stay fairly private unless they decide to disclose any personal information. There is no registration process so simply closing the website is enough to disconnect the session.

There is no facility to personally moderate/filter the video or text chats with Omegle, other than the limited internal moderation offered by Omegle (and there is no guarantee this will happen). In order to block users from accessing the Omegle website, parental filters would need to be enabled on the computer and the Omegle website included within this.

To delete:

To exit a chat the user can simply disconnect from the session, and either exit the website/app or enter into a chat with another user.

If you have any concerns about grooming, sexual abuse or exploitation on Omegle or on any online app or site, Report to CEOP (the National Crime Agency's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command) at www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre.

Having regular conversations with your child about their online lives is an important part of keeping them safe online. For information about how to best start these conversations and guidance on other popular apps, visit our Thinkuknow parents and carers website www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents.