WhatsApp – Guide for Parents and Carers

What is it?

WhatsApp is a mobile messaging app which allows users to exchange messages using existing phone contacts without having to pay text message fees. WhatsApp Messenger is available on most mobile devices including iPhone, BlackBerry, Android, Windows Phone and Nokia. WhatsApp users can create groups and send each other unlimited images, video and audio messages.

How much does it cost?

For all phone types, WhatsApp is free to download and try for the first year. Afterwards, you have the option of extending your subscription for **£0.69** per year.

WhatsApp uses an Internet connection using 4G or Wi-Fi to send and receive messages to your contacts. As long as the user hasn't exceeded the data limit or is connected to a free Wi-Fi network, messaging over WhatsApp should not cost extra.

Does WhatsApp have any age restrictions?

As part of its Terms of Service, WhatsApp's **minimum age of use is 16 years old**. By using WhatsApp, a user agrees to provide certain personal information such as their mobile phone number, billing and mobile device information.

If WhatsApp learns that identifiable information of a child under 16 has been collected on the WhatsApp Site or WhatsApp Service, then WhatsApp may deactivate the account.

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

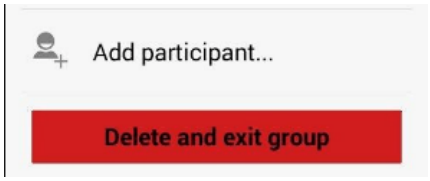
WhatsApp is a great way for young people to socialise with their friends.

Children can only talk to existing contacts on their phone, although this may feel safer, it's still important to remember that some content shared may not be appropriate for children, or they have contacts (strangers) in their phone who they have never met face to face.

Likewise, as with all social media, caution is advised over your child's digital footprint, particularly the content (photos, videos and messages) they choose to share via WhatsApp. Once shared, it can be copied, re shared and posted anywhere online.

Group chats on WhatsApp

WhatsApp also contains a group chat function. The feature lets users chat with up to 100 people in one conversation stream. Each group is set up by one contact who becomes the group admin – they're the only user who can add or remove participants and change/add new group admins.



Group conversations usually take place between friends. But sometimes, users can be added to a group where they don't know everyone else. Even if fellow users in the group aren't contacts, they will still be able to see messages your child posts in the group, and your child will be able to see theirs. Likewise, if they're added to a group with someone they've blocked, the blocked person will be able to contact them there.

Therefore, it's possible they could see or be contacted by someone they don't know and could be vulnerable to content posted by this person.

Group chats - advice

Although a user cannot control who adds them to a group chat, **they can always control their own participation within it** – they can leave whenever they want to.

It's a good idea to advise your child that if they are in a group chat with someone they don't know and are uncomfortable with, they should exit the group and speak to you about it.

How do privacy settings work on WhatsApp?

WhatsApp's default privacy setting allows any other WhatsApp user to view your profile photo, status and when you were last using the app.

You can specify that your child's Whatsapp account (when they were last online, profile photo, status) can be seen by:

Everyone - all WhatsApp users.

My Contacts - the contacts from their address book only. This is the recommended option for most users.

Nobody

Talk to your child about their privacy settings and ask them to adjust to '*my* contacts' if they have them set to '*everyone'* by following the steps below:

Privacy settings are accessed here:

WhatsApp > **Settings** > **Account** > **Privacy**

How do I report a user to WhatsApp?

There is no direct way to report a user, or specific abuse, other than to block them from sending you further messages. To do this, tap:

Settings > **Account** > **Privacy** > **Blocked Contacts**

WhatsApp messages sent by a blocked contact will not show up on your child's phone and will never be delivered to them. The 'last seen' status information and profile picture will no longer be visible to blocked contacts.

To permanently delete a contact in WhatsApp, you will need to delete them from your phone's list of contacts.

If you have any concerns about grooming, sexual abuse or exploitation on Whatsapp 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.

How do I disable a WhatsApp account?

Go to:

Settings > Account > Delete My Account

This will remove all account information from the service including deleting all message history, and removing the user from all WhatsApp group.