

ONLINE SAFETY: SNAPCHAT



Dear Parents/Carers,

Online Safety Information – Snapchat

We have received multiple concerns from parents about the popular app Snapchat and in response to these concerns we would like to share some important information with our parents so that we can support you in keeping your child safe online.

We believe that it is important to point out that according to the terms of service, Snapchat users must be 13. You have to enter your birth date to set up an account, but there's no age verification, so it's easy for kids under 13 to sign up. Common Sense Media rates Snapchat OK for teens 16 and up, mainly because of the [exposure to age-inappropriate content and the marketing ploys, such as quizzes, that collect data.](#)

The three main risks:

The myth of disappearing messages. When Snapchat first started, it was labelled "the sexting app" because people sent intimate photos, assuming they'd self-destruct. Any app can be misused, but a lot of kids mistakenly believe that Snapchat has a built-in safety valve. Young people really need to understand that the content they share can be saved and shared and may never go away. It's best to have this conversation before they download Snapchat, but it's never too late. Talk about whether any of their friends have ever pressured them to send an inappropriate, personal or intimate image, and discuss why someone who would do that does not have your best interests at heart. Young people should also ask permission before sharing a picture of someone else.

The time distraction. Snapstreaks and Stories add a time-pressure element that makes kids feel like they have to check in, creating an addictive connection to the app.

Privacy and safety. Since it's so easy to add friends on Snapchat, you can end up with lots of people you don't know well on your friends list. And depending on your settings, the app can collect a ton of data about your habits in—and outside of—the app. Snapchat also works with a lot of third parties that they share your data with.

The app's Family Center gives parents and caregivers some visibility of their child's usage, including who their child has been communicating with. Adults have to install the app and link their accounts by adding their child as a friend. Their child then needs to accept an invitation to opt in to the Family Center functionality. You won't be able to see specific content your child has sent or received—just their friend list and who they've sent messages, photos, or videos to in the last seven days.

Family support and settings:

If you decide to say yes to Snapchat, focus on the privacy settings. Sit down with your child and together go into the app's settings. This is a perfect time to talk with your child about using their Snapchat account safely and responsibly. Discuss when and how often you'll check in on how they're using it, and how they're feeling about it. Explain that you understand that social media is important to them, and that, at the same time, your role is to protect them. Don't

Polwhele House, Truro, Cornwall, TR4 9AE
polwhelehouse.co.uk
01872 273011



forget to ask your child to show you some of their snaps and some of the cool features they like in the app. That'll make it a little less scary for you—and send the message that you're on the same team.

Online safety is a regular topic at Polwhele as part of our Computing Curriculum as well as our Life Skills programme for EYFS to KS3. We encourage the children to talk to someone about any worries or concerns that they might have which is an important part of our safeguarding and child support.

Below you will find some more information about the app and attached you can read some brief guidance for parents. Please contact the school if you have any concerns, we are happy to support you in keeping your child safe online. We also have information for parents on our Home Learning website: [Online Safety Information - Polwhele House School Learning](#)

More information can also be found here on the NSPCC website: [Is Snapchat safe for my child? | NSPCC](#)

We hope all our school family will stay safe online and think carefully about their use of social media.

Yours sincerely,

Lynne Topsey-Eaton
Deputy Head



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Snapchat - an overview:

Snapchat is a popular messaging app that lets users exchange pictures and videos, called snaps, that are meant to disappear after they're viewed. The essential function is to take a picture or video, add filters, lenses, or other effects, and share it with friends. The app is free to download, and also has a premium subscription plan called Snapchat+. There are all sorts of photo-editing tools, as well as filters to decorate your images and videos. Once you customize your "snap," you can send it to anyone on your friends list, add it to your story (which is a record of the day that your friends can view for 24 hours), and add it to Snap Map (which displays your photo on a map of your location that can be viewed by anyone on Snapchat). Snapchat provides several options for sharing and managing snaps. In addition to individual messaging, Snapchat offers group chats that everyone in a group can contribute to.

If you set a time limit on a snap, it will disappear after it's viewed. However, recipients can take a screenshot of an image using their phones or a third-party screen-capture app. If someone uses their phone to take a screenshot of what you sent, you will be notified. But screen captures from third-party apps don't trigger a notification. For these reasons, it's best for children and young people to understand that [nothing done online is really temporary](#). Before sending a snap of themselves or someone else, it's important to remember that it's out of their control after it's shared.

Snapstreaks:

As well as the safety implications of this app, we are also concerned about the [addictiveness of the apps systems](#) which includes the concept of 'snapstreaks'. A Snapstreak represents the number of days users snap each other. To achieve a Snapstreak, two users must have snapped back and forth with one another in a 24-hour period for three days in a row or more. Once you've established a streak, special emojis and statistics display next to your names to show how long you've maintained a streak. Why do they matter? For one thing, they most likely add to your overall Snapchat score (basically a number that reflects how much you use the app).

Because of the intense bonds that children can form over social media, they can feel that a Snapstreak is a measure of their friendship...and that if they don't keep it up, they'll let the other person down. Young people have even been known to give friends access to their Snapchat accounts to keep a streak going if they can't do it themselves (for example, if their phone gets taken away for being online too much). This can lead to [feelings of pressure, anxiety, and compulsion](#), so it's a good idea to talk with your children about how they use the app. There are also significant safety concerns regarding the [sharing of passwords and personal data](#) which can open the opportunities for someone else to share content as your child.

Snap Map:

Snap Map displays your location on a map in real time. Only your Snapchat friends can see where you are. If your friends have opted into Snap Map, you can see their locations, too. You can turn this off or use it in Ghost Mode, which allows you to see the map but not be seen by others. Snap Map also features news and events from around the world. Young people can submit snaps to the Snap Map, and their name and location could appear on a public map. But the bigger risk with Snap Map is a young person having their location seen by all their

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friends -- [since some of their Snapchat contacts may not be real friends](#). Unless there's a specific event where it's easier for friends to know each other's location, it's best to leave Snap Maps off or use it in Ghost Mode.

Snapchat story:

A story is a collection of moments in the form of pictures and videos. On Snapchat, stories appear as circles, and when you tap them, they autoplay the pictures or videos the user collected. You can create personal stories that your friends can view for a 24-hour period. Snapchat+ subscribers can set them to expire after anywhere from an hour to a week. Or, if you think your snap is particularly interesting or newsworthy, you can submit it to be featured in the Spotlight section, which features a mix of snaps that have been identified as entertaining viewing. Snaps are curated and compiled by the company. While it's cool to have your story added to the Spotlight roundup, it's also [very public](#), so young people should think carefully before submitting one.

Snapcode:

When you sign up, Snapchat gives you your own unique QR code. When you meet a fellow Snapchat user and want to become friends on the app, you can just take a snap of the other person's code and they're automatically added to your friends list. Because it's so easy to find friends on Snapchat (depending on your settings) or exchange codes, young people may end up with [virtual strangers on their friends list](#). For a variety of reasons, that can be risky, so it's best to talk to your teen about when it's safe to add people.

Discover:

The Discover area of the app offers content created by celebrities, news and entertainment outlets, and other users. You can subscribe to specific Discover sources to receive their feeds. While Discover offers some legitimate news from publishers including the New York Times and Vice Media, the offerings can be promotional and are frequently mature or outlandish (such as people with extreme plastic surgery or rare medical conditions). But if your child has signed up with their correct birth date, they'll miss the alcohol ads and other adult content that Snapchat filters out for underage users. Discover stories often feature promos that prompt young people to "swipe up" to learn more (which usually leads to ads) or take a quiz (which is usually a marketing tool). This section runs the gamut from harmless to shocking, so it's good to look around and get a sense of what your children are seeing.

