WhatsApp

What is '*WhatsApp*?

WhatsApp is a free messaging app available for smartphones. WhatsApp is part of the Facebook 'family' and shares some information with them. It uses the internet to send messages, videos, pictures and audio. You can also make phone calls via WhatsApp. Many people favour WhatsApp because it is free to send media and texts all the time you have internet access either via Wi-Fi or 3G services.

WhatsApp is designed for 13 years old and over, and is free to download. It is available on iOS, Android and Windows phones.

Is '*WhatsApp*' Safe?

Any app, programme or website that enables the user to interact with other people online poses a risk. Messages can be inappropriate, saved and shared.

WhatsApp allows you to send and receive messages, pictures, videos and voice messages to contacts that you have added to your WhatsApp account. Messages are encrypted (meaning they are coded so no one else can see them). WhatsApp also has a location feature that allows you to share your location via a message, video or picture.

Like other apps, the recipient can screen shot, save and share messages. Unlike 'Snapchat', you will not know anything about it. Messages can be sent individually or to a group.

Ever noticed that you can see when your friends were last seen, and if they are online? This means they can see this about you to. When you share a message, picture, video or voice message with someone else on WhatsApp, they will have a copy of these messages. They can then re-share these with others on WhatsApp and other social media.

Be aware, that you can export a whole conversation with or without media, to anyone via pictures, messages or email.

Using '*WhatsApp*' safely

- **Communicate your expectations** – As a parent, it is your responsibility to make clear what is and is not acceptable online behaviour. You need to accept that allowing your child access to online apps like these, require trust and clear boundaries, for their own wellbeing.

- **Passwords –** WhatsApp does not have a facility to password protect your account, so ensure your child's phone is password protected, so that no one can access their account.

- **Encryption –** Think that no one else can read your messages, think again. This offers very little protection as messages can still be saved and shared.

- **Having the difficult conversation** – Educate your child in the correct way to communicate online. Avoid writing anything inappropriate or entering any 'wrong' conversations. Explain why your child should not send rude pictures. Talk this through with them and explain the possible consequences and how much trouble they can get into both legally and personally.

- **Privacy Settings –** By default WhatsApp will set privacy settings to allow any WhatsApp user to view content, status, profile photo and location.

  - Open the WhatsApp settings and change what the app can access
  - Enable 'My Contacts' so that only friends can see certain information

  Please note there is no way to stop all users of WhatsApp seeing an online status

- **Location Tagging –** Turn off location services for the app, if this is switched on, any images and videos will contain information of where they were taken.

- **Profile Picture** – Make sure you are comfortable with the picture they use, if you wouldn't put it on your social media, it shouldn't be on theirs!

- **Status Button on bottom of app screen –** It is possible to take a photo and set this as a 'status picture'. Be aware that this picture can be seen and shared by others. It works like Snapchat, where by the photo or picture 'disappears' after a period of 24 hours.
  People online can freely respond to this status/photo or picture.
  Leaving your child exposed to bullying and grooming if privacy settings are not tight. After 24 hours, the trail will simply 'vanish' but the damage may have already been done.

- **See something you don't like** – Report it and block the user or better still encourage them to delete the user. Be aware, although WhatsApp try hard to ensure you are not spammed, you can be. Always report this and block this type of content.

- **Read the terms and conditions** - According to WhatsApp a parent or guardian must agree to them. Making you as the parent or carer liable if something should go wrong.

- **Add your child –** You will not be able to see every message they send or receive, but you can see their status pictures and when they are online. If you don't like what you see, you can then discuss this and advise them accordingly.

- **Making a decision** – You are a parent and you will know your child well enough to decide about allowing access to WhatsApp or any other social networking app. WhatsApp is designed to be a quick and free messaging app and it is not difficult to see why it is so popular. By following the steps outlined above you have a better opportunity to ensure that your child is protected online.

Remember the internet should be a fun and liberating experience for all, but take the right steps to make it a safe one!