



## Online Safety Newsletter February 2024

### Setting up parental controls on your child's mobile

If you do not have the same mobile phone as your child, and therefore are unable to use Google Family link or Apple Family Sharing, then you can set restrictions on your child's device instead.

#### Apple devices:

To set up restrictions on your child's device directly (rather than using an app) then follow the instructions on the link below:

<https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT201304>

The instructions will show you how to get to the settings on your child's phone and then how to set restrictions such as restrict content, schedule downtime, set time limits for apps. You will need to set a passcode 'use a screentime passcode' to ensure changes cannot be made after you have set them.

#### Android devices:

As with the above link, this link shows you how to set up parental controls on the device itself by creating a PIN:

<https://support.google.com/googleplay/answer/1075738?hl=en-GB#zippy=%2Cfor-family-members-who-manage-their-own-accounts>

### Snapchat: new controls

#### What is Snapchat?

Snapchat is a social media app used for messaging and sharing photos and videos. **You must be 13+ to sign up.** Users can send messages (snaps) to others that are only seen for a set time e.g., 10 seconds and users can also upload snaps to stories, which disappear after 2

hours. You may think that once snaps expire on Snapchat, they get permanently deleted, but that is not the case. Your photos are hidden in your phone's or computer's cache and are not eliminated.

For more Snapchat info follow here:

<https://parents.snapchat.com/?lang=en-gb>



#### Family Center: new features

Snapchat are expanding the features available to you in their Family Center, allowing parents to view:

- story settings: you will be able to see who your child is sharing their story with e.g. all their friends or a smaller group.
- contact settings: see who your child can be contacted by (by people they have added as a friend or their phone contacts).
- if your child is sharing their location with friends on the Snap Map.

In addition, you will be able to restrict the use of Snapchat's 'My AI.' You can find out more here: <https://values.snap.com/en-GB/news/expanding-our-in-app-parental-tools-2024>

#### More information

The NSPCC provide further information about Snapchat, **the risks involved** with using Snapchat and **tips to help keep your child safe** if they are using Snapchat. <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/is-snapchat-safe-for-my-child/>

### At what age can my child start using social networks?

Internet Matters have produced this fantastic resource highlighting the minimum age limits for a variety of social media platforms as well as outlining the risks of being underage on social media. You can find out more here:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/what-age-can-my-child-start-social-networking>



# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

# SNAPCHAT

AGE RESTRICTION  
**13+**

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

Even if your child only connects with people they know, they may still get friend requests from strangers. The Quick Add option lets users befriend people the app recommends – but these 'friends' are merely a username, which could have anyone behind it. Accepting such requests reveals children's personal information through the Story, SnapMap and Spotlight features, potentially putting them at risk from predators.

### EXCESSIVE USE

Snapchat works hard on user engagement, with features like streaks (messaging the same person every day to build up a high score). Spotlight Challenges tempt users into spending time producing content in search of cash prizes and online fame, while it's easy for children to pass hours watching Spotlight's endless scroll of videos.

### INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some videos and posts on Snapchat aren'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 (teens in particular) to share explicit images on impulse – so sexting continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat.

Snapchat is an instant messaging app which allows users to send images, videos and texts to people in their friends list. One of Snapchat's unique features is that pictures and messages 'disappear' 24 hours after they've been viewed; however, this content isn't as temporary as many believe – with some users saving screenshots or using another device to take a photo of their screen. This year, Snapchat added 'My AI': a customisable chatbot with which people can chat and share secrets, as well as asking for advice and suggestions of places to visit.

### 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.

### 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 if a young person compares themselves unfavourably with other 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.

### VISIBLE LOCATION

Snap Map highlights a device's exact position on a virtual map which is visible to other users. There are options to restrict who can see this information: all friends, only you (Ghost Mode) or selected friends. Snapchat also has real-time location sharing, which is intended as a buddy system to ensure friends have reached home safely – but which could also be used to track a young person for more sinister reasons.

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### TURN OFF QUICK ADD

The Quick Add feature helps people find each other on the app. This function works based on mutual friends or whether someone's number is in your child's contacts list. Explain to your child that this could potentially make their profile visible to strangers. We recommend that your child turns off Quick Add, which can be done in the settings (accessed via the cog icon).

### CHOOSE GOOD CONNECTIONS

In 2021, Snapchat rolled out a new safety feature: users can now receive notifications reminding them of the importance of maintaining connections with people they actually know well, as opposed to strangers. This 'Friend Check Up' encourages users to delete connections with users that they rarely communicate with, to maintain their online safety and privacy.

### DISCUSS AI

Although My AI's responses can often give the impression that it's a real person, it's essential that young people remember this certainly isn't the case. Encourage your child to think critically about My AI's replies to their questions: are they accurate and reliable? Remind them that My AI shouldn't replace chatting with their real friends, and that it's always better to talk to an actual person in relation to medical matters.

### CHAT ABOUT CONTENT

It may feel like an awkward conversation (and one that young people can be reluctant to have) but it's important to talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting. Remind your child that once something's online, the creator loses control over where it ends up – and who else sees it. Likewise, it's vital that children understand that some challenges which become popular on the platform may have potentially harmful consequences.

### KEEP ACCOUNTS PRIVATE

Profiles are private by default, but children may make them public to gain more followers. Snap Stories are visible to everyone your child adds, unless they change the settings. On SnapMaps, their location is visible unless Ghost Mode is enabled (again via settings). It's safest not to add people your child doesn't know in real life – especially since the addition of My Places, which allows other Snapchat users to see where your child regularly visits and checks in.

### BE READY TO BLOCK AND REPORT

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

## 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.



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Sources: <https://help.snapchat.com/en-gb/articles/008688036032-What-is-My-AI-on-Snapchat-and-how-does-it-work> | <https://www.snap.com/en-gb/privacy/learnings-from-the-crisis-and-how-safety-will-improve> | <https://help.snapchat.com/en-gb/articles/00200486644>



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