

# WhatsApp & your child

**It looks like simple texting. It's more than that.**

For many children WhatsApp is their first social network: group chats, viral videos and constant peer pressure that follows them home from school.

## ● THE RISK MOST PARENTS MISS

### It usually isn't strangers. It's other children.

In the everyday group chats your child is allowed to join, like the class chat, **any member can send images and videos** straight into the conversation: pornography, violence, racism, cruelty. Privacy settings don't stop this, because your child is a welcome member of the group.



**13+**

Officially **13+** (lowered from 16 in 2024). The proposed UK under-16 social media ban would exempt WhatsApp as a "messaging service", but that doesn't mean it's low-risk.

**56%**



**Messaging apps are the most common place children are bullied online**, ahead of social media. **Ofcom**

## ● What parents underestimate

### Eight things behind that little green icon.



1

#### It becomes their whole social world

Class and friendship group chats run all day: FOMO, exclusion and bullying that no longer stop at the school gate. **Ofcom**: among children who are bullied, it's now more likely to happen on a **device (84%)** than face-to-face (61%), and it usually comes from someone they already know.



2

#### The danger is inside groups they're allowed to join

Not strangers: classmates. In ordinary class and friendship chats, any member can drop in porn, violent clips, racism or cruelty. Locking down privacy settings doesn't help, because your child is a welcome member. Police have warned of children as young as nine exposed this way.



3

#### It arrives as images and video, not text

Photos and clips hit harder than words, and Ofcom found that repeated exposure to disturbing content can desensitise children over time.



4

#### Messages disappear

Disappearing and "view once" messages mean content may be gone before a parent ever has the chance to see it.



5

#### Encryption cuts both ways

Strong privacy and security, but harmful content and grooming are also harder for parents and platforms to spot.



6

#### Grooming hides in encrypted chats

Predators rarely start on WhatsApp; they make first contact on open, mainstream apps, then steer children onto private, encrypted messaging, where abuse can carry on out of sight. The **NSPCC** warns much of this abuse is moving into private messaging precisely because it's so hard to detect.



7

#### It's not just messaging now

WhatsApp "Channels" let children follow influencers, celebrities and organisations: content to consume, not just chat.



8

#### It's a gateway to other apps

Once friends are chatting here, pressure builds to join Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram. One campaigner called WhatsApp a "gateway drug" for other social media.

## ● Before you say yes, ask yourself

### It's best not to leave it to chance.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is my child ready for group-chat dynamics: exclusion, gossip, conflict? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do they know not to share photos impulsively?  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can they recognise and handle inappropriate content?                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do they know how to mute, leave, block and report?   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Am I comfortable with content I may never see?                          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I want the group chat - pressure, fallouts and all - following them into evenings and bedrooms? |

Tick the ones you can answer with a confident "yes"; the blanks are simply where to start the conversation.

## ● The bottom line

### Safer than the feed, but it's not just texting.

WhatsApp avoids the endless algorithmic feed, and it's genuinely useful for family, so in some ways it's **safer than feed-driven apps**. But it isn't just digital SMS. The everyday risk most parents underestimate is simple: in the groups children are allowed to join, **classmates can send anything**, including pornography, violence and cruelty, as images and videos that land straight in the chat, and no privacy setting prevents it.

// **The real question isn't "can my child send messages?" It's "are they ready to receive whatever their classmates choose to send, and to cope when something disturbing arrives?"**

## ● Key sources & where to find out more

**Ofcom 2025** 37% of 8–17-year-olds say people are mean or unkind to each other on these apps most or all of the time. Ofcom also reports that exposure to violent content often begins at primary-school age. [ofcom.org.uk](https://www.ofcom.gov.uk)

**GOV.UK Jun 2026** The new under-16 social media rules **exempt messaging services** like WhatsApp, so an age-restricted feed isn't the same as a safe one. [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) · search "rules to protect children online".

**Ofcom** Online bullying is now **more common than offline**, and messaging apps are the top channel for it. [ofcom.org.uk](https://www.ofcom.gov.uk) · "threat of online bullying greater than offline".

**NSPCC 2025** Much of the abuse and grooming of children is **moving into private, encrypted messaging**, where it is far harder to detect. [nspcc.org.uk](https://www.nspcc.org.uk)

**Find out more:** Internet Matters: WhatsApp safety & group-add settings ([internetmatters.org](https://www.internetmatters.org)) · Smartphone Free Childhood: guides & local parent groups ([smartphonefreechildhood.org](https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org)).

— FROM THE TEAM BEHIND THIS GUIDE

The Sayph phone has **no WhatsApp and no group chats**, by design.

A phone built for staying in touch, not for growing up online.

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