

## **Parents' guide to the latest social media and instant messaging trends**

- It seems that almost every week there is a new app or website that kids are using to IM (instant message) each other and it can be hard to keep up.
- It's important for parents to know how these work, and how old your child should be to use them, usually 13 or over.
- In school E-Safety is a priority and we talk to the children regularly and display posters and information around school.
- It's important to talk to your child about what is and is not appropriate to share online especially as with most of these apps they can send images or videos free of charge.
- Ultimately, the decision as to whether or not a child under 13 is using these sites lies with the child's parent or carer.

### **Social media apps**

#### **ooVoo**

ooVoo is a video chat app. It lets you make video calls, voice calls and send texts to friends and family. You can also start a group video chat with up to 12 people. The default privacy settings are set to 'public', so you can talk to people you don't know, but they can be changed so that you can just talk to your friends.

Like many other sites and apps, ooVoo is used by both adults and children. This means that children can be directly contacted by an adult they don't know.

NSPCC recommends that sites such as ooVoo should only be used by young people aged over 13 who have set their privacy settings to allow contact only with people they know and trust in the real world.

#### **Whisper**

[Whisper](#) is a new social media app which allows users to post snippets of information anonymously to another user or group of users using images from the app and creative fonts. It allows users to respond anonymously to other anonymous 'whispers'. While Whisper is 100% anonymous, users are still able to comment on or like other Whispers, as well as receive private messages from other users. Users can also share their location with others. It is a free app. The app is rated 17+ so children under that age should not be using it. It has been described as being like Facebook, but anonymous.

#### **Yik Yak**

[Yik Yak](#) is another new social media app which is gaining popularity starting in the US and now in the UK. It describes itself as a 'local bulletin board' for sharing information and connecting with others in your area (within a 1.5 mile radius), without having to know them. The app is rated 17+ so children under that age should not be using it. The app is free to download but has in-app purchases.

#### **Secret**

[Secret](#) is another anonymous social media app allowing users to share 'secrets' such as what you are thinking or feeling using words and images with your friends. When you post a 'secret' it is delivered anonymously to the people in your contacts list who are also on Secret - the app uses their email address and/or phone number to find your connections. These people can view, like, and comment on your post. If a friend likes your secret, it will be shared among their friends so secrets can spread. The app accesses your contacts list to find out who your friends are but there are no names or profiles displayed on the posts. You can see how many friends you have also on Secret but you won't be able to see their identity. Once you sign up, you have to have at least three friends also on Secret

before the app will publish your post, this is to ensure your anonymity. All posts are encrypted so that not even the team behind this app know who is posting.

### **ask.fm**

Children should be over 13 to have an account on ask.fm. People join this site and then others can ask them questions (this can be anonymously). All too often people use the site to ask inappropriate questions or post sexual comments. Anything posted is visible publicly and you don't really have any control over where else this information can appear. You can change whether you allow people to ask you questions anonymously in your privacy settings. If someone asks a question you don't like or think is inappropriate or they are bullying, you can block that user so they can't contact you again. It is important to talk to your child so that they know how to do this and let them know to tell you about any abuse or inappropriate comments. There is also a 'report abuse' button. Essentially if your child is on this website there are no restrictions about the type of content they are seeing so we would recommend you maintain a close eye on what your child is doing online and talk to them about the dangers of posting information about themselves.

### **Snapchat**

Snapchat is a free app where you can take a picture or video and send it to your friends. Kids like it because the image isn't permanent and because it feels spontaneous. You get to decide how long a photo will "live," from 1 to 10 seconds, after it's viewed. It's important that users realise that this doesn't mean the image can't be captured by the receiver by taking a screenshot or other method. Unlike social network sites and other photo-sharing apps, you can't post publicly. You can only share with friends and you get to decide who to share with each time you send a photo. You have to be age 13 or over to use Snapchat Once you have set up an account, by default, anyone who knows your username or phone number can send you a message.

### **Whatsapp**

WhatsApp Messenger lets teens send text messages, videos, photos, and short audio messages to one or many people with no message limits or fees (after paying for the app). Messages can only be sent to other smartphone users who also have WhatsApp. Once you install the app, it checks your address book to see if anyone else you know is already using WhatsApp, and connects you automatically. You have to be over 16 to use Whatsapp legally. There are ways to send messages anonymously so it is always essential to make sure you talk to your child about what is and isn't appropriate to send and receive.

### **Instagram**

Instagram is a photo editing and sharing 'app' that allows users to edit photos taken on their phone and post them to Instagram, Facebook and Twitter with the click of a button. Instagram photos are open to the public by default and Instagram lets users browse public photos posted by others and by people whom they follow. You have to be over 13 to use Instagram. Once an Instagram profile has been created, anyone can browse them and follow other Instagram users. There is an option to make an Instagram profile private users have to send a request to connect to that person.

### **Meow Chat**

[Meow Chat](#) is an app that is increasingly getting popular amongst young people and it is a messaging service. It will ask to connect to your Facebook account so it can access your friends lists, amongst other things and will then send mass invites to your [Facebook](#) friends. If you click on 'Random Chat' it allows you to go into a random chat room where you can talk openly with the purpose of moving conversations to private messaging. With any type of open chat platforms, you never know who you are really speaking too which can leave a teen vulnerable and exposed to content that is adult. You have to be over the age of 13 to use this app.