SAFE and SMART

Keeping Children Safe Online

Welcome to the May 2024 edition of this half-termly newsletter.

IMPORTANT: within this newsletter we are discussing the online sexual exploitation of children. This is information can be upsetting to adults and children alike. Please prepare yourself before reading and only share information with your child which you feel is appropriate according to their age and cognitive ability.

1

WHAT IS
Child Sexual Exploitation

2

HOW TO
Manage WhatsApp Chat Groups

3

SOCIAL MEDIA
WhatsApp

What is

Child Sexual Exploitation

It's the one area that strikes the greatest fear into many parents, carers and professionals. It's the one that people don't want to hear or talk about, but as adults it's vital we understand the reality of what is going on.

Online child sexual exploitation involves using the internet to harm children such as:

- Coercing them to take/share indecent images/videos.

- Befriending in order to meet up for sexual purposes.

This can happen when offenders contact children over social media, gaming or chat apps, gaining their trust to coerce them into sexual conversations or actions, often leading to further abuse.

Offenders may also threaten to share private images unless the child complies with their demands, this is known as sextortion and commonly boys (14+) are targeted, often for money.

Who is at risk?

Any child of any age can be at risk, this is because many of the online services which children use have a means of contact. However, vulnerable children can be at higher risk. Examples of vulnerability would include:

- Children who are socially or emotionally isolated/lonely as they will seek out friendships.

- Children who don't have much family support.

- Children with low self-esteem, depression or anxiety. Offenders can exploit these vulnerabilities by pretending to offer emotional support.

- Children with additional needs or disabilities.

Are there any statistics?

Yes there are, but bear in mind we only know what we know, meaning we only know statistics

DID YOU KNOW?

Online sexual grooming is a process where an offender builds a relationship with a child through the internet to exploit them sexually. Offenders often use social media, chat apps, and gaming platforms, posing as peers to gain trust and isolate the child from their support network. The process can take hours, days, even months.

in relation to offenders that have been caught or where companies/members of the public have reported illegal imagery.

For example, the National Crime Agency estimate that there are around 70-80,000 individuals in the UK who pose a sexual threat to children. But that's just the UK, the internet is worldwide, so to give you some more detailed statistics we need to consider 2 annual reports that were released in April 2024.

NCMEC

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is a US-based charity where many companies report suspected illegal imagery on their platforms. NCMEC pass these reports onto the country of origin for law enforcement investigations.

In 2023 NCMEC received 36.2 million reports, a 12% increase from 2022. Each report can contain 1, ten or many more images/videos. The 36.2 million reports equates to just under 55 million images and just under 50 million videos.

The reports come from many different platforms (approx. 1600), some examples of which are at the

- Roblox - 13,316

- Movie Star Planet - 7

- Discord - 339,412

- TikTok - 590,376

- Snapchat - 713,055

- Instagram - 11,430,007

- Facebook - 17,838,422

top right of this page, but it's important to note 2 things:

1. Just because a platform isn't mentioned, it doesn't mean to say there is no illegal activity. Remember a key point: offenders are where the children are.

2. Some of the figures may suggest that one platform is 'more dangerous' than others, but this is misleading. Firstly, all these companies have their own reporting methods, we don't

DID YOU KNOW?

The IWF report tells us that 2022 was the first year 'self-generated' child sexual abuse reports were more prevalent than not self-generated. In some cases, children are groomed, deceived or extorted into producing and sharing images or videos by someone who is not physically present in the room with the child.

know how good/bad their software is, but the fact that they are actively scanning and reporting is a good thing. But, only 1600 companies report into NCMEC, how many hundreds of thousands of gaming platforms, image hosts, cloud storage, social media platforms etc. are there around the world? For example, Apple do not currently scan for and report illegal imagery within iCloud.

IWF

The Internet Watch Foundation is based in Cambridge, UK. They are a charitable organisation whose sole purpose is to remove illegal imagery from websites and to pro-actively search for and remove content.

Their most recent annual report (April 2024) identified year-on-year increases of child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

In 2023 they:

- Assessed over 275 thousand reports (containing tens, hundreds or thousands of images/videos) sent via 53 reporting portals around the world.

- 54% of these were children aged 11-13.

- 41% were children aged 7-10

Of the 275 thousand reports, 254 thousand (92%) contained 'self-generated' imagery. This is where a child is coerced into indecent acts on camera (often in their bedroom or bathroom), which is recorded by the offender.

- 98% of all imagery includes girls.

- Imagery of 7-10 year olds has increased by 65% in one year.

- There has been a significant increase of self-generated imagery by 3-6 year olds. As younger and younger children are given access to smart phones and tablets, sometimes unsupervised, this risk is increasing.

These stats are frightening!

Yes they are, but we need to be realistic. Children get a lot of age-appropriate education in school about online risks, but children are children and don't always realise what is going on. As parents we need to be there to help keep them safe, encourage them to talk to us if something isn't quite right, and to support them if things go wrong.

Where can I go for further help?

If you are worried about the way someone has been communicating with your child online you can report to your local police or (in the UK) you can report online to CEOP at www.ceop.police.uk.

In order to protect your child, it's important to have a good knowledge about online grooming, how it happens and how to support your child. There is lots of useful information for parents on the Internet Matters website - www.internetmatters.org/online-grooming

How to:
Manage WhatsApp Chat Groups

A very common concern from children and young people is when they are added to chat groups (such as WhatsApp) where they didn't ask, or didn't want to be added. Their concerns normally relate to receiving notifications through the night, disrupting sleep, and also seeing content shared by others that is inappropriate.
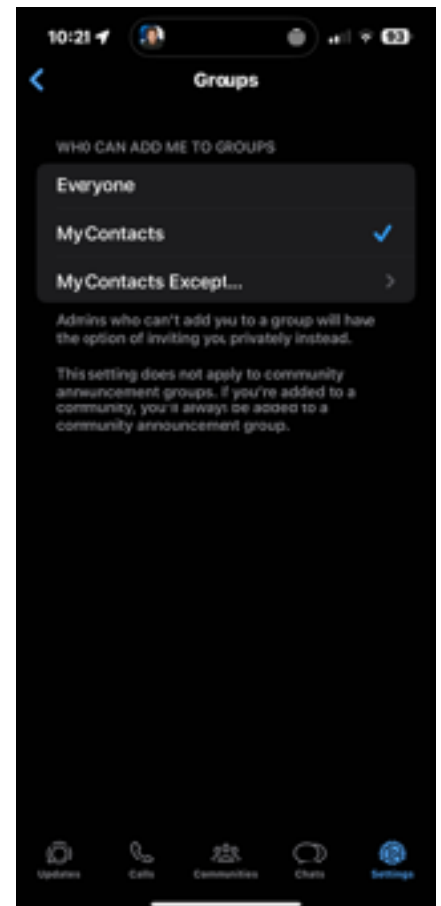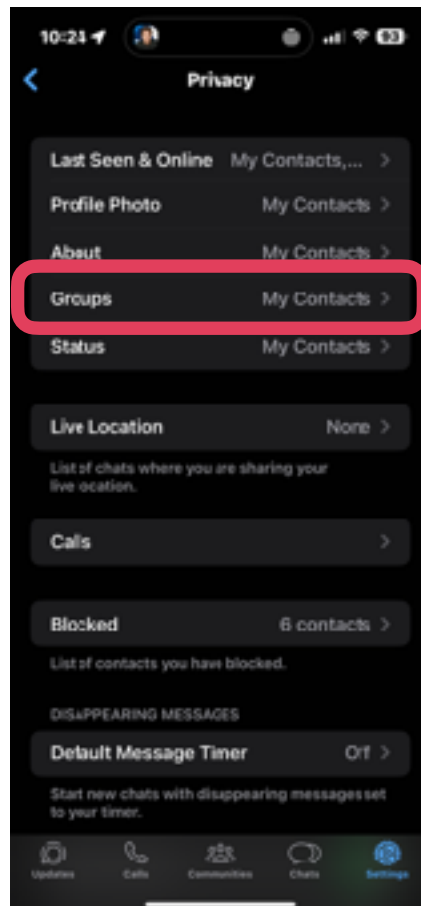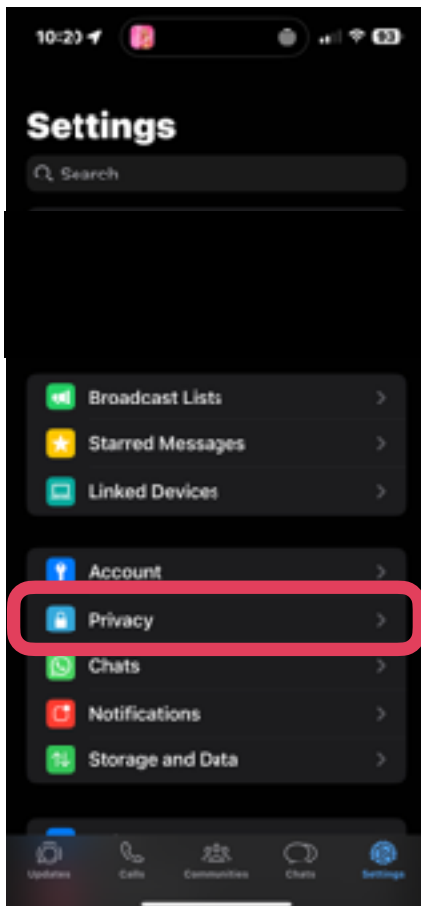
WhatsApp has various features described on the next page, one of these features is deciding who can add you to Groups and you have 3 options: Everyone, My Contacts and My Contacts Except.

Go to Settings - Privacy - Groups - and you will see the options.

- **Everyone** - anybody that knows (or guesses) your phone number can add you to a Group. **This is the default setting, worth checking.**

- **My Contacts** - anybody who is in your contacts list on your phone (or device).

- **My Contacts Except** - this is where you can select contacts who can/can't add you to Groups from your Contacts.

  Top Tip - if you don't want anyone to be able to add you to chat groups, select 'My Contacts Except', then select all your Contacts.

Social Media - WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a popular messaging application used worldwide. It enables users to send text messages, make voice and video calls, share multimedia content such as photos and videos, and use group chat features, all through an internet connection.

Key Features

Note: this isn't an exhaustive list of features and settings. All the settings are self-explanatory so it's worth going through your child's account settings to set it up in a way you feel is appropriate.

- **Messaging and Group Chats**: Allows sending messages and creating group chats where users can communicate with multiple people at once.

- **Voice and Video Calls**: Offers the ability to make calls using the internet, which can be more cost-effective than traditional phone calls, especially internationally.

- **Media Sharing**: Users can send photos, videos, documents, and locations directly to each other.

- **End-to-End Encryption**: All communications on WhatsApp are secured with end-to-end encryption, meaning that only the communicating users can read the messages.
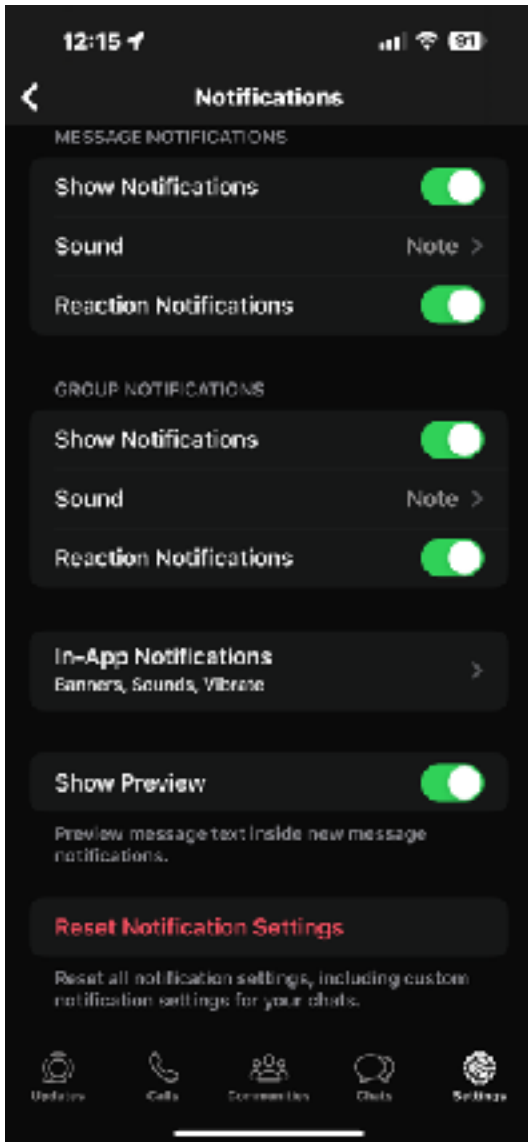
Safety and Privacy Features

- **Last Seen and Online Status**: You can control who sees when the account was last active or online. Options include 'Everyone', 'My Contacts', or 'Nobody'.

Age Requirements:
13+ (reduced from 16+ in April 2024)

- **Profile Photo and Info**: You can restrict who can see the profile photo and account information.

- **Calls**: tap on this to silence calls from unknown callers.

- **Block/Report Contacts**: Users can block contacts they no longer wish to communicate with, preventing those contacts from sending messages or calls. To do this, go to the contact by tapping on a recent conversation with them, at the top of the screen tap on their name, at the bottom you can block/report the contact.

- **Group Invites**: Settings can be adjusted to approve joining new groups, preventing unsolicited group additions. This can be set to 'Everyone', 'My Contacts', or 'My Contacts Except...'.

- **Two-Step Verification**: An additional layer of security can be enabled where a passcode is required when registering your phone with WhatsApp again.

- **Read Receipts**: You can disable read receipts, so senders do not know when a message has been viewed. However, in group chats, read receipts are not optional.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp also allows you to manage notifications.

Notifications are split into two groups: Message Notifications and Group Notifications.

For example, if you are in a Group but there are lots of messages and notifications, you can turn these notifications off and/or you can turn the sound off.

Note: you can also use the 'Do Not Disturb' feature on your device to stop all notifications, for example at a certain time in the evening.

iPhone: Swipe down from the top of the screen (iOS 15 and later) or go to Control Center, tap the Do Not Disturb button (a crescent moon should show).

Android: Swipe down from the top of the screen, tap on Do Not Disturb.

DID YOU KNOW?

Snapchat chat groups - whilst WhatsApp has a way to stop people from adding you to chat groups, Snapchat does not, any 'Friend' can add you into groups whether you want to be added or not. However, you can stop random people from adding you into chat groups by turning off 'Quick Add', which also prevents random people from following you.
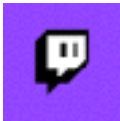
Tap on your profile at the top-left of the screen, tap the Settings button at the top right, scroll down and tap 'See Me in 'Quick Add'. Ensure this is toggled off (no tick in the box).

Common Apps

This is not an exhaustive list, but tends to be the more popular apps used by children and young people.

Age requirements are set within the terms and conditions of the app provider, don't be confused by ratings in the app store which can sometimes be different.

App	Age	Comments
	13 and over	**Discord** - is a voice, video and text chat app that's used by tens of millions of people aged 13+ to tap and hang out with communities or their friends. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13 and over	**Instagram** - is a photo and video sharing app where people can upload photos, videos and messages to share with others. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13 and over	**Snapchat** - is a very popular app that lets users swop pictures and videos (Snaps) with others which are meant to disappear after they are viewed. There is also a messaging feature. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13 and over	**TikTok** - is a social media app that allows users to create, watch and share short videos shot on mobile devices or webcams. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13 and over	**Twitch -** is where people come together to chat and interact live. Think YouTube, but it is live rather then pre-recorded. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13 and over	**WhatsApp -** is a messaging app which uses text, images, video and voice record features to connect with others. Parental settings can be found **HERE**
	18 and over	**Reddit** - is a network of communities (called subreddits) where people can share information, their interests and hobbies. Reddit is an 18+ app, there are no parental controls.