

# SAFE and SMART

## Keeping Children Safe Online

January 2024



### Welcome to the second edition of Safe and Smart.

This half-term we're looking at Like-Farming which is a common tactic used by scammers on social media. We will also give some tips and advice about talking to your child about their online lives, as well as delving into Snapchat to highlight the features, benefits and risks.

After that, we'll take a brief look at a report from 2023 highlighting the experiences of some children and their use of Snapchat.

**IMPORTANT:** the information in this newsletter is intended for adults. By its very nature, online safety goes into aspects using terminology and explanations which may not be suitable for younger children. Please use your discretion, only you can decide what is or is not appropriate for your child.

1

#### WHAT IS

Like-Farming

2

#### HOW TO

Talk to your Children

3

#### SOCIAL MEDIA

Snapchat

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## What is LIKE-FARMING

You're browsing through Facebook and come across a post, it's shocking, almost unbelievable, you need to share it with everyone to make them aware.

There's a good chance this is like-farming. It is the process of deceiving users with the aim to get them to like, share or comment on a post in order for that post to go viral, and it isn't limited to Facebook, it's across all social media. The pandemic was a classic example of this with all sorts of disinformation and half-truths which are designed to prey on human emotions to get a reaction.

### Why?

There can be lots of different reasons behind like-farming, such as politically motivated posts, but posts involving children and animals are the ones that can really tug at our heart strings. A sadly common example might be putting up an image of an animal suffering, e.g. a starving donkey, and the text reads, "Animals suffering all over the world, I bet this doesn't get a single like."

Other examples using children might look something like::

- Type 'Amen' if you hate cancer.
- No one wished my daughter a happy birthday, please like and share.

### What are their motivations?

They can be varied, but the two most common are:

- Used as part of a scam; once the Page has enough likes/followers, scammers can then use the Page for criminal activity, such as posting phishing links, scam competitions etc.
- Attention seeking, not related to scams.

### How can you tell if it's like-farming?

Common indicators will be:

- Have a look at the Page, when was it created? If it's only a few days or weeks old that should raise alarm bells as these Pages tend to be short-lived.

## DID YOU KNOW?

With the popularity of artificial intelligence increasing significantly in 2023, many children are using AI such as ChatGPT for a number of different reasons, such as getting answers to questions, helping with homework, coding, developing apps and much more.

Childnet have put together a really useful guide for parents to learn more about ChatGPT, the benefits, the risks and more. You can view the guide [HERE](#) or search 'childnet what do I need to know about ChatGPT'.



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- What other content is on the Page? Is there other genuine, useful information or similar posts?
  - Does the content pull on the heart strings? This is the most effective way to get a person to respond, often using children, animals, poverty etc.

### Have you ever wondered how Facebook seemingly knows everything about you?

If you have a Facebook account, every action within the app is logged and stored. So if you like ties (random example) this is really valuable information to Facebook.

Let's say I owned a tie shop and I want to advertise to everyone about my new range of ties. That is really easy to do, anybody can create an advertising account and find out this information and then target those individuals, and it doesn't cost a lot of money. You can target roughly 100,000 users for approximately £2.00 per day and Facebook will guarantee your ad reaches a percentage of that audience each day. (For clarity, advertisers do not get to see individual accounts, you just pay the money and Facebook does the targeting for you).

But there's also another way, called the Facebook Pixel. This is a very small piece of code that can be inserted onto any website. If you are on your device and are logged into Facebook (even if you're not

using Facebook), when you visit a site that has the FB pixel code, Facebook knows and, based on your activity, will store that information. So to use the above example, if you were to visit my online tie shop, I can then retarget you on Facebook with ads.

What if you don't have a Facebook account? Facebook still collects the information, just in case you set up an account in the future. Once you do set up an account it applies all that knowledge such as who your friends and family are likely to be, shopping habits etc. This is called a ghost account, and whilst Facebook states it deletes this data after 30 days, many are understandably sceptical of this.



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## Talk to your Children

Talking to your children about their online lives isn't always easy, especially if you don't know what they're using and what they're doing. But it's the most vital aspect of keeping our children safe.

You can put as many tech restrictions in place as you feel is necessary, but time and time again research and conversations with children show us that talking with them is the number 1 and only truly effective way of helping them navigate the online world safely.

Those conversations from an early age shows the child that you are interested in what they are doing, and if you get involved with their online activities it does two vital things:

- It gives you a good idea of what they are doing, playing, watching. In turn this allows you to understand any parental or safety features that are (or are not) available and how effective they are. If you take an interest in these activities your children will naturally talk to you about them, but also:
- If something goes wrong, if they see something upsetting or being contacted by someone they don't know, your child is much more likely to talk to you about it.

Sometimes we need to open up a conversation with our child, perhaps you've found out about a risk or something you find concerning. These conversations can be uncomfortable for both you and your child. Here's some tips for you:

1. Space and timing - don't make an appointment, e.g. "When you get home from school we're going to talk about \*\*\*\*\*". Raise your concerns naturally during normal, everyday



conversations. Some people find that talking in the car is really useful, this is because there is no eye contact and therefore you both feel less inhibited or embarrassed.

2. Talk often - to many of us adults, real life and online life are different. But not to children. They have grown up in age where online is real, it's a normal part of 'every day'. In the same way we ask what they've been doing at school, who they've been playing with etc. as part of a normal, every day conversation, their online activities are no different.
3. Be calm - some things can be really concerning. If your child sees you are concerned or angry it can be really difficult to get them to open up. You might be anxious on the inside, but try to be calm on the outside.
4. Don't be judgemental - children often talk about having their devices removed for something that was completely out of their control, e.g. somebody has sent something to them, the device is then removed. There can be very good reasons for this, but to the child they are being punished over something they had no control over. In turn they are less likely to open up in the future.

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## Social Media - Snapchat

Age: 13+

Snapchat was released late 2011 and according to Snap, it gives users the ability to chat, Snap and video call friends from wherever they are. The focus is on helping Snapchatters communicate with their close friends in an environment that prioritises their safety, privacy and wellbeing. It's available as an app and some features can be used via a web browser.

### Key Features (these are the main ones)

- **Snaps:** pictures, texts or videos that can only be seen for a few seconds before they disappear.
- **Stories:** a collection of Snaps in the order they were taken, they disappear after 24 hours.
- **Snap Streaks:** trading Snaps with someone else within 24 hours. Keep doing this so that the counter increases. Forget to share? Counter goes back to zero!
- **Video chat:** users can chat with up to 15 people on video.
- **Snap Maps:** allows users to see their friends' location if they have it turned on.
- **Ghost Mode:** prevents or allows you to share your location with others, but does NOT prevent you sharing your location with



Snapchat. You can also set a timer to share your location temporarily.

- **My AI:** a chatbot in Snapchat messaging. Users can talk, ask questions and get advice from the chatbot.

### Benefits

- **Community and Socialising:** connecting and keeping in touch with friends in a creative way, e.g. using filters.
- **Local news and events:** given the geotag features, users can keep up with what is happening locally.
- **Default privacy:** if you have stated you are 17 or younger your account is set to private by default and they can't be contacted by adult users.

### Concerns

Whilst there are many benefits to Snapchat and most children report their experience as being very positive, there are equally many concerns such as:

### DID YOU KNOW?

Over 70% of 6-18 year olds say that earning their own money is important to them with many doing this online, e.g.:

- Video games, such as Roblox, where users can create and sell their own content such as skins (designs), avatars, mini games etc.
- Selling used clothing via online marketplaces.

Source: Internet Matters [HERE](#).





- **Exposure to Inappropriate Content:** including sexual content, violence, inappropriate language and more.
- **Exposure to Inappropriate Contact:** the ease in which friends can be added poses a risk of inappropriate contact.
- **Online disinhibition:** being behind a screen, coupled with the temporary nature of Snaps and Stories, users may do/share things they wouldn't face to face.
- **Persuasive design:** the constant sharing and notifications from friends compels users to open the app continuously. Snap streaks compels users to share at least once every 24 hours. Many children say that Snapchat is 'addictive'.
- **Excessive use of filters:** can push unrealistic beauty/body standards to impressionable children.

## Tips for Parents

- Make sure your child sets up their account with the correct age. This means that users

17 and under will have the correct security features applied automatically.

- Talk to your children about what they are posting and what they are seeing.
- Ensure privacy settings are applied correctly, including Snap Maps/Ghost Mode.
- Explore the safety features with your child so that you both know what is available and how to use the features.
- Consider pairing your account with your child's account so that you can see who they are talking to (see useful links).

## Conclusion

There are lots of benefits to Snapchat but equally there are many concerns (see also the next page). Most children who are using Snapchat report a positive experience, simply using Snapchat as a more creative way of messaging their real-life friends and family. Only you can decide what is or is not appropriate for your child, taking into account their age, maturity and emotional resilience.

## Useful Links

Snapchat has rolled out a number of new features for parents and children. You can learn all about these at <https://parents.snapchat.com/en-GB> There is also a small YouTube series (2 short videos) which you can view [HERE](#).

## DID YOU KNOW?

There is a lot happening around the world from conflict to famine, climate change and much more which may upset or even scare children. We get our news from a variety of sources, as do our children: the TV, social media, radio and more, the news is all around us, so it's important we are able to talk to our children about these events through open and honest conversation.

To help you with this the Mental Health Foundation have put together a useful guide which you can find [HERE](#) or search 'Mental Health Foundation talking to children about scary world events'.



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## Anti-Social Media

In June 2023 an organization called **Revealing Reality** released a new report about disturbing content children are viewing on one of the most popular apps - Snapchat.

It should be noted that the number of children who took part was very low - 13. Also, the researchers were exploring children who were deprived or vulnerable. Nevertheless, the report gives us an indication of what any child using Snapchat may see.

Importantly, although the report looks at children 14+, remember that younger children on Snapchat will be at least a teenager (to Snapchat) because you have to be 13+ to have an account.

On this page I just want to share a few findings of the study with you, if you are interested you can look at the full study using the link at the end.

### Findings

1. Most children use Snapchat as an extension of their social circles, meaning that information is localised to a geographical area. This means that any disturbing, inappropriate or illegal content is also localised, in other words it is happening in your area.
2. Snapchat serves as the 'local news', being used by some to arrange fights, build and destroy reputations, sell illegal goods, spreading gossip, leaked nudes (adults and children) and much more.
3. None of those who took part in the study would report this content to anyone due to the potential for repercussions.



4. Most of those in the study had thousands of 'friends'. This is because it is so easy to add people you do/don't know through the 'Quick Add' feature and the amount of Friends can often be a status symbol.
5. The very nature of Snapchat's design makes it very difficult for parents to monitor what is going on as content disappears quickly: Snaps disappear once viewed and Stories are available for up to 24 hours, but often Snaps and Stories are screenshot or recorded on another device so that the sharing continues.





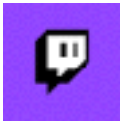


The report makes for a very interesting (and very concerning) read, including plenty of real-life stories from those young people who took part. To see the full report click [HERE](#) or search for 'Revealing Reality Anti-Social Media'.



# 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 very different.

App	Age	Comments
	13 and over	<b>Discord</b> - 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 <a href="#">HERE</a> .
	13 and over	<b>Instagram</b> - is a photo and video sharing app where people can upload photos, videos and messages to share with others. Parental settings can be found <a href="#">HERE</a> .
	13 and over	<b>Snapchat</b> - is a very popular app that lets users swap 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 <a href="#">HERE</a> .
	13 and over	<b>TikTok</b> - 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 <a href="#">HERE</a> .
	13 and over	<b>Twitch</b> - is where people come together to chat and interact live. Think YouTube, but it is live rather than pre-recorded. Parental settings can be found <a href="#">HERE</a> .
	16 and over	<b>WhatsApp</b> - is a messaging app which uses text, images, video and voice record features to connect with others. Parental settings can be found <a href="#">HERE</a>
	18 and over	<b>Reddit</b> - 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.