

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about HOUSEPARTY



WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Houseparty is a live streaming app described as a face-to-face social network where people 'drop in' on each other to video chat, leave messages and hang out in groups. The app is available for iOS, Android, macOS and Google Chrome and has tens of millions of users worldwide. It's important to note that children under the age of 13 must have a parent's permission to access the services, however, no proof of age is required to create an account.

STRANGER DANGER



Friends of friends can join conversations on the platform without the need to be connected or known to all the other users in the chat. Houseparty calls this feature 'Stranger Danger'. While it does alert users when individuals they may not know enter their chat room, it also suggests strangers might be a reason for 'party time'. There's also the danger of people attempting to deliberately mislead others by using false names or usernames.

OVERSHARING



Children often don't understand the risks involved in giving out too much personal information in a live stream or within their profile. They may also be less protective of personal details during online conversations. One example of this within a live chat could be their background revealing information about where they live or go to school without realising.

CONTENT SHARING



The 'facemail' feature lets users share moments from their Houseparty conversations by recording and sharing 15-second snippets of chats. They also have the option to save these moments to their gallery. For privacy purposes, every member of the group will see a notification if another member is recording - this could be a concern if a child shares something in the live chat they may later regret. Once recorded, they lose control over the video and how it is used. Screenshots of live streams and private messages can also be taken which could be shared widely and embarrass users.



CYBERBULLYING



Cyberbullying is when people use technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. Group chats can be used by bullies to make negative or hurtful comments which may cause offence or be harmful to others in the group. Exclusion from friendship groups within the platform may make children feel sad and left out/socially excluded.

SEXUALISED MESSAGES



People may use live streaming apps such as Houseparty to engage in inappropriate or illegal activities. There have been concerning reports directly linked to Houseparty, including one incident where two Mancunian children aged 11 and 12 were reportedly targeted by men exposing themselves back in 2017. Outside of their close friendship group, it's also important to note that friends of friends can also connect with children via the app, which may include people with this intention.

IN-APP PURCHASES



By tapping on the dice icon children can play a game called 'Heads Up!' where one person gives clues to describe someone or something and the other players guess. Three cards are included for free but additional decks cost real money. There's the potential for children to get carried away playing the game while working up a small fortune.

Advice for Parents & Educators

PROTECT THEIR PRIVACY



Children may unknowingly give away personal information during a live stream, including their location. Talk to them about what constitutes 'personal information' and make sure they do not disclose anything to anyone during a live stream, even to their friends. Advise them to remove any items in their live stream (school uniform, street name, posters etc.) that could potentially expose their location or personal information. Check children's privacy settings thoroughly. You have the option to opt out of certain uses and disclosures of personal information, such as turning off the app's location sharing option.

CHECK COMMUNICATIONS



Also, it's important to be aware of who is on their friends list and who they are communicating with. Remind children to not communicate with people they do not know and trust. If they experience something on the app that makes them feel uncomfortable then they should tell a trusted adult immediately. Remind children that if they get an invite to join a Houseparty room from someone they don't recognise, then they should ignore the request.

REPORTING & BLOCKING



If a child faces a problem while using the app they can report direct to the platform by shaking their phone. A prompt will pop up allowing you to report issues immediately by clicking on the 'report now' button. They also have the option to report and block users directly on the user's profile.

PROTECT DIGITAL FOOTPRINTS



As the videos are live, it may lead to the misconception that whatever happens in the video will disappear once the live stream ends. All content shared on the app can be recorded or screenshotted and shared to a wider community. It is important that children knows that what they do now may affect their future opportunities. In addition to this, the video chats can't be reviewed later which means unless a parent or carer is sitting nearby during a call, they won't know what has been said. It's worth bearing in mind that parents can see when their child has last communicated with someone and for how long for under the 'We Time' feature.

BE PRESENT



A study conducted by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) found that 96% of streams showed a child on their own, often in their bedroom or bathroom. If a child is going to conduct a live stream, ask them if you could be present for it. This will give you a greater understanding of what the child is doing during their live streams and who they are streaming to.

SAFER CONVERSATIONS



With live streaming being such a popular feature on apps, it is important that you are aware of the dangers associated with it in order to protect children effectively. Have regular and honest conversations with children about what apps they are using and how they are using them. It may be a good idea to have children show you how they use Houseparty and how to navigate through the platform so you are aware of how it works.

REMOVE LINKS TO OTHER APPS



Users can link their account to both Facebook and Snapchat, or can simply share a link to their profile. We advise that you remove these links and remind children not to publicly share access to their online profiles as there is the potential for strangers to get hold of children's information or communicate with them.

'LOCK' ROOMS



In regards to communicating with users on the platform, we advise that childrent uses the 'lock' feature to make their conversations private. This means that other users, especially strangers, can't join their conversations.

TURN ON PRIVATE MODE



One additional tip is to use the app settings to turn on 'Private Mode' which automatically locks the room, instead of doing it manually. Parents with questions can always find out more by emailing: hello@houseparty.com

