August 2023

New school year – new chat groups!

Mobile phones are a great way for children and young people to keep in contact with their parents, carers and friends, especially as they begin a new school year. However, issues may arise if our children and young people excitedly share their mobile phone number with other pupils in their new school year group and even wider, as they perhaps join 'WhatsApp' group chats or other social media group chats. *The minimum age for WhatsApp users is 16.*

This can lead to your child or young person sharing their mobile phone number with a whole year group and being included in what could amount to over one hundred school pupils on single group chat!

The reality of this is that they don't all know each other. They will all have different levels of online awareness and they will most likely be seeing messages, images and even video footage shared in the group which you, as a parent or carer, would not like them to see but which is out with your control.

This situation can be difficult to manage and could be distressing in relation to what is read or seen.

Learn about inappropriate content online | Internet Matters

Coupled to this, peer pressure could lead to bullying.

Cyberbullying facts and advice | Internet Matters'

WhatsApp is by far the most used messaging App, although there are many other similar messaging Apps, and it allows users to send instant messages only to contacts that they have added to their WhatsApp account.

Only users who have a WhatsApp account can send and receive messages through the app. Messages can be sent 'one to one' or within a 'group conversation' and for all messages sent, WhatsApp sends "read receipts" to tell sender if the message was **delivered, read**, **seen or played**. These settings can be changed, see the 'how to guide for parents' link below for more information.

In relation to a group chat on any social media platform, you have no control what will be sent, seen or shared, so it is worthwhile having a conversation with your child or young person about this. We know peer pressure can lead to people of any age doing something they otherwise would not do, online or offline, so this awareness during your child or young persons' early years is very important.

Our colleagues at Internet Matters have created information resources below to inform you of how the social media platform " WhatsApp" operates and how you can you can put measures in place to protect what your child or young person sees on the app and awareness on the apps security settings.

WhatsApp safety: a how to guide for parents - Internet Matters

Guide to monitoring apps for parents | Internet Matters

Social media advice hub | Internet Matters

OFFICIAL