



Group Chats

Through messaging apps, on social media and in online games, groups chats are among the most popular ways that young people engage with their peers online. These groups allow multiple users to send messages, images and videos to everyone in one place. While there are useful for helping friends to communicate and coordinate activities, they can also leave young people feeling isolated and bullied. It also provides opportunities for inappropriate content to be shared.

Bullying

Unkind comments or images which are purposely aimed at an individual can be shared freely in a group chat. This allows and sometimes encourages others to join in with the bullying behaviour.

Unknown members

Within larger group chats, it's more likely your child will be communicating with people they don't really know. These strangers may be friends of the host but not necessarily friendly towards your child.

Notifications and FOMO

Large group chats often come with huge amounts of notifications. Every time someone sends a message in the group your children device will 'ping' with an alert. This could potentially mean hundreds of notifications each day. Not only is this highly distracting but young people's fear of missing out on the latest conversation results in increased screen time as they try to keep up with the chat.



Inappropriate content

Some discussions in the group chats may include inappropriate language, images or videos. These could be viewed by your child whether they actively engage in the group chat or not. Some chat apps have a disappearing message function so your child may be unable to report something they've seen because it can only be viewed once or for a short time.

Sharing group content

It's important to remember that while the content of the chat is private between those in the group – individual users can easily share a message, photo or video with others outside of the group or screenshot what has been posted. Therefore something your child intended to be private could become public.

Advice for parents and carers

Consider other people's feelings

Encourage your child to consider how other people might feel. If your child does upset a member of their group chat, support them to reach out, show empathy and apologise for their mistake.

Give support, not judgement

Remind your children they can confide in you if they feel bullied or excluded in group chat, instead of responding to the person who's upset them. Validate their hurt feelings and help put them back in control by discussing how they'd like to handle the situation.

Avoid inviting strangers

Sadly, many individuals online hide their true identity to gain a child's trust. For example, to gather information on them, to exchange inappropriate content or to coax them into doing things they aren't comfortable with. Ensure your child understands why they shouldn't add people they don't know to a group chat or accept chat invitations from strangers.

Silence notifications

Having a phone or tablet bombarded with notifications can be annoying and a distraction, especially if it is happening late at night. Explain to your child that they can be part of the group chat but that it would be healthier for them to turn off or mute the notifications and catch up with them at time that better suits them.

Block, report and leave

If your child is in a chat where inappropriate content is being shared, advise them to block the users sending the material, report them to the host app or platform and exit the group. If the content could be putting a minor at risk, contact the police. Emphasise to your child it is ok to leave any chat they don't want to be a part of.



SMART Rules

The SMART rules are basic E-safety rules that we teach the children in our school each term. Although the online world can be very complex, we think these rules are simple to remember and a good starting point. Take time to discuss these with your children and help reinforce them at home.

More information about these SMART rules, including videos and support can be found at [SMART rules | Childnet](#) including links for symbol based SMART rules which may help some of our children.



The infographic consists of five horizontal bars, each representing a SMART rule. Each bar has a large letter in a circle on the left, a title in bold, and a brief explanation. The bars are: 1. 'S SAFE' with a padlock icon, explaining to keep personal information safe. 2. 'M MEET' with a 'THINK U KNOW' logo, warning against meeting online friends. 3. 'A ACCEPTING' with a thinking face icon, advising to think before clicking on links or ads. 4. 'R RELIABLE' with a question mark icon, stating not to trust everything online. 5. 'T TELL' with an icon of a person talking to another, encouraging to tell a trusted adult if bullied or confused.

S SAFE Keep your personal information safe. When chatting or posting online don't give away things like your full name, password or home address. Remember personal information can be seen in images and videos you share too. Keep them safe to keep yourself safe.

M MEET Meeting up with someone you only know online, even a friend of a friend, can be dangerous as this person is still a stranger. If someone you only know online ever asks you to meet up, for personal information or for photos/videos of you then tell an adult straight away and report them together on www.thinkuknow.co.uk

A ACCEPTING Think carefully before you click on or open something online (e.g. links, adverts, friend requests, photos) as you never know where they may lead to or they may contain viruses. Do not accept something if you are unsure of who the person is or what they've sent you.

R RELIABLE You cannot trust everything you see online as some things can be out of date, inaccurate or not entirely true. To find reliable information compare at least three different websites, check in books and talk to someone about what you have found.

T TELL Tell a trusted adult if something or someone ever makes you feel upset, worried or confused. This could be if you or someone you know is being bullied online. There are lots of people who will be able to help you like your teachers, parents, carers or contact Childline – 0800 11 11 or www.childline.org.uk

Starting the conversation

Having a conversation with your child about their online life can be daunting for some. You want to give your child some privacy, but you also want to keep them safe. Childnet have created this guide to starting the conversation and provides prompts of things you might ask.

[My Life Online - Conversation Guide | Childnet](#)

The best way to keep our children safe is to provide them with a safe, non-judgemental space where they feel they can share things with you. This will ensure no matter what happens they will always come to you with their worries.

Inclusive Digital Safety Resource Centre

[Inclusive Digital Safety Resources centre | Internet Matters](#)

This website provides support to parents, carers and professionals working with children and young people who may be more at risk of online harms. The site provides a range of recommended specialist resources available to use.

Smartwatches / Fitness trackers

Check what the smartwatch allows your child to do and if available, set appropriate restrictions. Talk to your child about the different settings and if you have, why you have set up the restrictions.



What are the risks?

- Some smartwatches allow you to take photos. It is important to talk to your child about appropriate behaviour when taking and sharing photos. Once a photo is shared, they lose control of it.
- Some smartwatches have internet access with the ability to download apps. You need to be aware of the potential of in app purchases and viewing upsetting content.

Depending on the brand of smartwatch, you may be able to set up parental controls for example to restrict content and prevent purchases. More information about Apple Watch parental controls can be found here: <https://support.apple.com/en-gb/guide/watch/apd54d0a51fb/watchos>

As always, ensure your child knows to talk to you or another trusted adult should they see anything inappropriate or that worries them whilst using their device.



Further information

- [Digital family basics: Smart watches and fitness trackers | Parent Zone](#)
- [Smart toys and wearable gadgets for children | Internet Matters](#)