SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

Working together to keep our young people safe

Primary | April 2025

The British School
Working together for our children's future

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Keeping your child safe on Snapchat: A parent's guide

Many children become more engaged with social media at a young age and Snapchat is one of the most popular apps among them. It is important to note that the minimum age requirement for using Snapchat is 13 years old.

While Snapchat can be a fun way for children to stay connected with friends, it also comes with risks.

What is Snapchat?

Snapchat is a social media app that allows users to send photos, videos and messages that disappear after being viewed. It also includes features like Stories, Snap Maps, and AI chatbots.

Risks of Snapchat

While Snapchat can be enjoyable, there are risks parents should be aware of:

- **Disappearing messages:** disappearing Snaps encourage children to participate in more risky behaviour. They might send things that they wouldn't usually as they know it will disappear.
- **Stranger danger:** strangers can contact your child if their privacy settings are not secure.
- **Snap Maps:** this feature shows a user's location in real-time, which can put children at risk if not managed properly.
- **Inappropriate content:** children may come across content that is not age appropriate.
- **Pressure to maintain "Streaks":** Streaks (sending Snaps daily) can create unnecessary pressure and anxiety for children.

Safety features parents should know

Snapchat has built-in safety features that can help protect your child. Here are some important ones:

- **Privacy settings:** go to Settings > Privacy Controls to ensure only friends can contact your child and view their content.
- **Ghost Mode on Snap Maps:** this hides your child's location from others. Enable this by going to Snap Maps and selecting 'Ghost Mode'.
- **Report and block:** teach your child how to block or report inappropriate content or users.
- **Family Centre:** Snapchat's parental control tool allows you to see who your child is communicating with while respecting their privacy.

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Helping your child navigate healthy friendships
As children grow, friendships become a central part of their lives. While most friendships are positive and supportive, some can become unhealthy and even coercive. Coercive controlling friendships can be difficult to spot, but they can have a significant impact on a child's well-being, confidence, and self-esteem.

What is a coercive controlling friendship?
A coercive controlling friendship is one where one child exerts power over another in a way that is manipulative, pressuring, or emotionally harmful. Unlike typical fallouts or disagreements, these friendships involve ongoing patterns of control and intimidation.

Some common features may include:

- One friend making all the decisions and expecting the other to comply
- Threats of exclusion or withdrawal of friendship unless demands are met
- Emotional manipulation, such as making a child feel guilty for spending time with others
- Pressure to do things that make them uncomfortable
- Name-calling, teasing, or undermining self-confidence
- Making the child feel responsible for the other's emotions or actions.

Signs your child may be in a coercive controlling friendship
If your child is experiencing a controlling friendship, they may show some of the following signs:

- Increased anxiety or stress about seeing a particular friend.
- Changes in mood or self-esteem, such as becoming withdrawn or overly worried about pleasing one person.
- Loss of other friendships or reluctance to spend time with different friends.
- Secretive behaviour or reluctance to talk about their friendship.
- Fear of upsetting their friend, even when the demands are unreasonable.
- A sense of obligation to always agree with their friend's choices.

Encourage your child to reflect on their friendships and ask themselves:
"Do I feel happy and safe with this friend?"
"Can I be myself around them?"
"Do we respect each other's choices?"

Friendships play a vital role in childhood development and helping children recognise and navigate healthy relationships is essential. By staying engaged and supporting your child, you can empower them to build strong, positive friendships that enrich their lives.