ScreenSafe
Social Media & Online Safety for Parents, Children and Schools

MASHAM C.E. SCHOOL
Learning & Caring Together

Online Safety News

September 2025

A New School Year:
Tips to Help Keep Your Child Safe Online

Now is a great time to set your child up for a safe and healthy year when it comes to being online. Here are some steps you can take:

- **Set Clear Boundaries**

Agree together on what devices, apps, and games your child can use, and where. Avoid devices in bedrooms and bathrooms – most harmful online activity happens when screens are used out of sight. Screens overnight are strongly linked to poor sleep, focus, and mood.

- **Refresh Parental Controls**

Check controls on all devices and apps your child uses – including your own or grandparents' devices. Many children first come across harmful content on a phone or tablet that hasn't been set up safely.

- **Check Connections**

Remind your child only to connect with people they know in real life. New schools and new friends can mean a flood of requests from people they don't really know. Fewer, trusted connections = lower risk of bullying or strangers slipping in.

- **Group Chats**

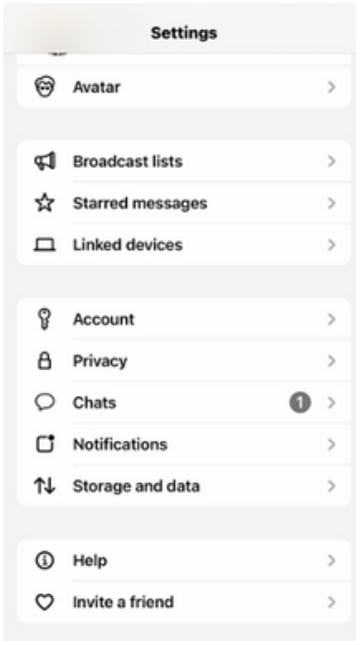
WhatsApp and other group chats can quickly get out of hand. Check settings so your child can't be added by strangers. Combine this with the point above for extra protection.

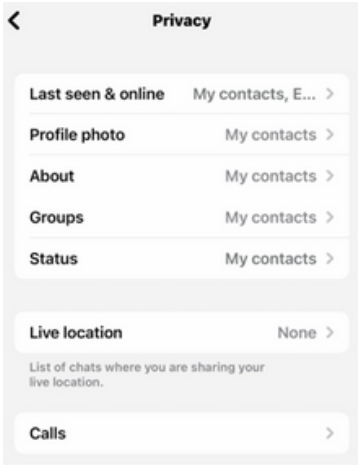
- **Keep Talking**

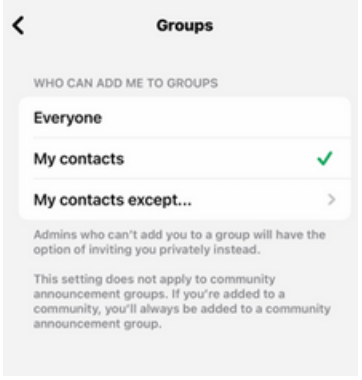
Short, everyday chats are more effective than the occasional "big talk." Ask what games they enjoy, who they're following, or play together. Make sure your child knows they can always come to you if something upsets them online – and that it's not their fault. Many children stay silent because they fear losing their device.

- **Be a Role Model**

Children learn more from what we do than what we say. Try to model healthy screen habits – like leaving phones outside bedrooms overnight, taking screen breaks, and putting devices down at mealtimes.







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WhatsApp Channels — Not Just Messaging Anymore

WhatsApp introduced Channels back in 2023, a feature that allows users to follow public content streams. While it may sound innocent, the reality is more worrying and it's one many parents and carers are unaware of.

- Anyone can create a channel — including those sharing sexual jokes, violent memes, or disturbing content
- There are no parental controls or filters
- Kids can easily follow channels from influencers, strangers, or even extremist groups
- There have been reports of very inappropriate and upsetting channels being found by children.

Unlike traditional WhatsApp chats, channels are public by default, and anyone can search and follow most of them — no mutual contact needed. The content appears in a separate "Updates" tab.

To check if your child is following any channels:

Open WhatsApp - Go to Updates icon (bottom left of the screen) have a look at channels. Use this as another opportunity to talk about what to do if they ever see anything upsetting or scary online - remember WhatsApp is very much a social media channel, not just a messaging app!

Chatbots and Children

A new Internet Matters report, "Me, Myself & AI", shows 64% of children in the UK are now using AI chatbots – for homework, advice, and even companionship. Over a third (35%) say it feels like talking to a friend, and six in ten parents worry their child may think chatbots are real people.

Vulnerable children are most at risk, with some saying they'd rather talk to a chatbot than a real person. Many of these platforms aren't designed for children and lack safeguards like age checks or content filters.

Quick Tips for Parents

- Ask your child what they use AI for.
- Remind them AI isn't a friend and can get things wrong and even give out harmful information.
- Explore AI together if they are curious
- Regularly check which apps they're using and set clear rules.

AI chatbots are the 'go to' for millions of children | Internet Matters

Youtube

YouTube is the number one platform for children of all ages. In primary school, many start moving from YouTube Kids to the main YouTube app.

YouTube Kids is designed for under-13s and is a safer option, with limited ads and more child-friendly content. But as children grow more independent, they often want the wider choice that comes with regular YouTube. You can see how to set up YouTube Kids safely here:

YouTube Kids parental controls guide | Internet Matters