

Snapchat: protecting your pupils

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Introduction

Teachers have warned that social media apps, such as Snapchat and Facebook, are making it easier for pupils to abuse each other. According to Business Insider, a recent survey of teenagers revealed that Snapchat is the most popular social media network – with 81 percent of respondents saying they used it.

Snapchat is a photo messaging app that allows its users to take photos, record videos, add text and drawings, and send them to friends. These ‘snaps’ aren’t saved by default, so the concept feels more like messaging and having an ordinary conversation rather than photo sharing. Once everyone has viewed a snap, Snapchat’s system is designed to automatically delete it from their servers – opened snaps typically cannot be retrieved from the server by anyone, for any reason; however, a user can replay a snap they have received twice but only immediately after it has been opened.

This guidance document outlines the best way to help keep pupils safe whilst using Snapchat, alongside advice to educate pupils on what to do if they want to delete or block friends or if they have any safety concerns regarding the app.

Features of the app

Snaps

These are images or videos taken within the app – they can be layered with text, emojis, and doodles, and can also contain information such as the temperature or location of where the snap was taken. These snaps can be sent to one or more friends, or even posted as a story which all friends will be able to view for up to 24 hours. Snaps can also be saved to the user’s account; however, other users cannot save another user’s snap.

Stories

‘My Story’ is a feature that allows the user to string images or videos together into one, longer narrative. Snaps in ‘My Story’ appear in chronological order, and can be viewed for 24 hours by all friends.

Chat

The app allows for video, image and text chat – like snaps, these chats are deleted by default, but users always have the option to save a message if they would like to keep it.

My Eyes Only

Users have the option to move their saved snaps into a 'My Eyes Only' folder, which is passcode protected.

Snap Map

The 'Snap Map' shows a user's 'Bitmoji' – their cartoon avatar within Snapchat – located on a map; users can then zoom into the map and pinpoint their friend's exact location. The feature also allows users to see location-based photos and videos from around the globe.

Our Story

Snapchat's feature, 'Our Story', is a space in the app where users' pictures can be posted, at user's discretion, centred around a specific event, such as Glastonbury. The feature allows users who are at an 'Our Story' event, and who have their location services enabled, to post their individual photos on a collective album within the app for public viewing. As is the same with all pictures posted on Snapchat, any photos posted are self-deleted after 24 hours.

Associated risks

Although Snapchat says there is nothing inherently dangerous about their app, it is often referred to as "the sexting app". There is no solid evidence to prove that this is the case; however, like any media-sharing service, Snapchat can be used for sexting, harassment and bullying. Snapchat can be a particularly hurtful tool as it is typically used among friends.

Snapchat also says that there are risks in broadcasting personal information such as locations – which is a feature of the app.

Although Snapchat has a minimum age of 13, users have to manually enter their date of birth, and can, therefore, adjust the date to make them older and thus, allowing full access to the app.

Snaps sent via the app are not automatically saved by default; however, snaps can be saved as screenshots or photographed with another phone and shared with, or without, the originator's knowledge. This could be used to embarrass the sender as the image may contain content that was not intended to be shared – this could be particularly damaging in schools.

Keeping pupils safe

Remind pupils to be careful about sharing any personally identifiable information. Information like phone numbers, home addresses, and financial or medical information should never be shared.

Pupils should be reminded to be careful about allowing other users to see their location through the 'Snap Map' function. There are three settings for sharing your location on the feature:

- 'Ghost Mode' – which means friends are unable to see your location
- 'My Friends' – this means all your contacts on Snapchat can see your location
- 'Select Friends' – this setting allows you to look through your friend list and then decide which friends you want to be able to view your location

It should be noted, however, that sending snaps to 'Our Story' makes your location visible to anyone viewing the story. 'Our Story' is an account run by the Snapchat team and allows users to view snaps, and consequently the user's location, from around the world.

Pupils should be aware of the risks involved in sharing their location on Snapchat and should be encouraged to keep their location private; however, should pupils wish to share their location, they should only share it with people they know in person.

Snapchat has published further guidance about using 'Snap Map' [here](#).

Snapchat's [Community Guidelines](#) state that they do not tolerate bullying on the platform, and that if any user is worried about bullying or is being bullied, then they should report the Snapchat account.

Schools should have systems in place that keep pupils safe online and make them aware of the threats the internet can pose to their safety and wellbeing. It is also important to stay up-to-date with the latest technological information and advice, and recognise that phones and social media apps, such as Snapchat, provide a new medium for giving and receiving forms of personal abuse.

Aside from violating Snapchat's Community Guidelines, pupils need to be taught that storing or exchanging nude or sexually explicit images of anyone under the age of 18, including themselves, is a serious crime.

Spotting signs of abuse

It is not always easy to tell when cyber bullying is happening, and it largely comes down to a member of staff's judgement.

The DfE characterises bullying as "behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally".

Symptoms of being a victim of cyber bullying can include the following:

- Becoming withdrawn, for example, not talking, or spending more time alone
- Changes in eating habits
- Changes in behaviour, such as becoming aggressive or anxious
- Complaining of headaches, stomach aches or faking illness
- Worrying about going to school
- Achievement in school suddenly deteriorating

Safety concerns

If one of your pupils is receiving abusive snaps from another user, you should inform them that they should block the user and report them to Snapchat's safety team to ensure they aren't abusing other users. Below is a list of what pupils can do if they have any safety concerns.

Blocking other users

Users can block someone from sending them images, videos or private messages. To delete or block a 'friend', go into the settings on the app, click 'My friends' on the profile screen and tap on the name of the user you wish to block. Next to their name you can click on the settings button and select 'Block' to prevent them from sending you images and chats, and from viewing your story.

Changing your privacy settings

By default, only users you add to your friends list can send you snaps. If someone who isn't a friend tries to send images or videos, the user will receive a notification that they have added you; however, you will only receive this content if you add them to your friends list.

Users can change who is able to send them content – they can do this by going into their settings on the app and clicking on the 'Who Can' section.

In this section, users can click the 'Contact Me' option and adjust their settings to either allow anyone to send them content (even strangers), or choose to make sure content can only be sent to them if they are in their friends list. The latter should be heavily encouraged amongst pupils to ensure their safety whilst using the app.

Users are also able to adjust who can see their story in this section by clicking on the 'View My Story' option and adjusting the options to everyone, my friends, or custom – which allows you to choose which friends can see your stories. Choosing the 'everyone' option should never be picked as this will enable any user to view the snaps you put as your story.

Reporting abuse

Users can report abuse to Snapchat's safety team by going to the Snapchat Support page and reporting a safety concern. Users can report inappropriate pictures and videos by pressing and holding on the snap they want to report and clicking on the flag icon in the bottom-left corner.

If you believe one of your pupils is at risk of harm, immediately inform your headteacher and contact any relevant external agencies, such as the police.

Deleting Snapchat accounts

A user can delete their account by going to accounts.snapchat.com and filling out the relevant information.

Bibliography

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