At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one app of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

Snapchat is a photo- and video-sharing app which also allows users to chat with friends via text or audio. Users can share images and videos with specific friends, or through a 'story' (documenting the previous 24 hours) visible to their entire friend list. Snapchat usage rose during the pandemic, with many young people utilising it to connect with their peers. The app continues to develop features to engage an even larger audience and emulate current trends, rivalling platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.

#### **Connecting with Strangers**

Even if your child only connects on the app with people they know, they may still receive friend requests from strangers. Snapchat's links with apps such as Wink and Hoop have increased this possibility. Accepting a request means that children are then disclosing personal information through the Story, SnapMap and Spotlight features. This could allow strangers to gain their trust for sinister purposes.

#### Inappropriate Content

Some videos and posts on Snapchat are not suitable for children. The hashtags used to organise content are determined by the poster, so an innocent search term could still yield age-inappropriate results. The app's Discover function lets users swipe through snippets of news stories and trending articles that often include adult content. There is currently no way to turn off this feature.

## **Compulsion and Excessive Use**

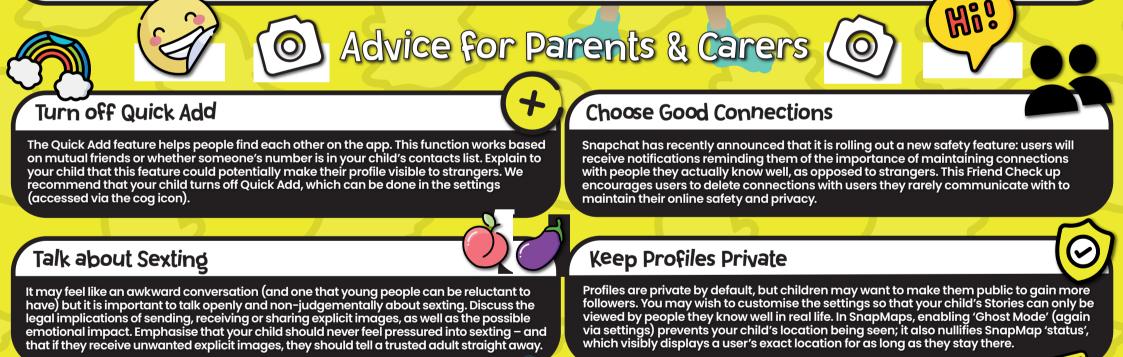
Many users spend vast amounts of time trying to become a Snap Star. Snapchat is offering a share of \$1 million, and the chance of online fame, to users who create and share the best videos. Children are therefore becoming obsessed with producing appealing content. The Spotlight feature's endless scroll of videos makes it easy for children to pass hours watching content, slowly getting addicted to the app.

## Sexting

Sexting continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat. The app's 'disappearing messages' feature makes it easy for young people (teens in particular) to share explicit images on impulse. While these pictures *do* disappear – and the sender is notified if it has been screenshotted first – users have found alternative methods to save images, such as taking pictures with a separate device.

## Damage to Confidence

Snapchat's signature filters and lenses are a popular way for users to enhance their 'selfie game'. Although many are designed to entertain or amuse, the 'beautify' filters on photos can set unrealistic body-image expectations and create feelings of inadequacy. Continually comparing themselves unfavourably against other Snapchat users could threaten a child's confidence or sense of self-worth.



#### Be Ready to Block and Report

If a stranger *does* connect with your child on Snapchat and begins to make them feel uncomfortable through bullying, pressure to send explicit images or by sending explicit images to them, your child can select the three dots on that person's profile and choose report or block. There are options to state why they are reporting that user (annoying or malicious messages, spam, or masquerading as someone else, for example).

#### Chat about Content

Talk to your child about what is and isn't wise to share on Snapchat (e.g. don't post explicit images or videos, or display identifiable details like their school uniform). Remind them that once something is online, the creator loses control over where it might end up, and who with. Additionally, Snapchat's 'Spotlight' feature has a #challenge like TikTok's: it's vital that your child understands the potentially harmful consequences of taking part in these challenges.

# Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia. Nos National Nos Online Safety #WakeUpWednesday

Sources: Status of Mind: Social media and young people's mental health | Life in Likes - Children's Commissioners Report | https://netsanity.net/snapchat.com/en-US https://netsanity.net/snapchat-parent-review/ | BT.com | Independent.co.uk, https://mashable.com/article/snapchat-status-snap-maps/?europe=true
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