Snapchat is a photo sharing app for mobile phones and tablets. The app allows users to share images for a limited number of seconds, chat with users before messages disappear, and share images with their friends list through a 'story'.

What parents need to know about SNAPCHAT

SNAP MAP

In 2017, Snapchat introduced a new feature called 'Snap Map', which allows users to see the EXACT location of the people on their friends list in real-time and watch stories from around the world. Users can view a map called a 'Snap Map'. This feature completely exposes your child's location and users can potentially follow your child from their home to their school.

'SNAP STREAKS'

'Streaks' tell users how many days in a row they have spoken or sent 'snaps' to one another. What's dangerous about this? It forces young people into putting a false sense of importance on a superficial number to the extent that it becomes something that can make or break a friendship. For example, if a person forgets to message or send a picture to their friend, breaking their 200-day streak, this could cause a confrontation between the friends. This can put an incredible amount of pressure on children to keep streaks.

SCREENSHOTS

While Snapchat's gimmick is that all photos, videos and text disappear after a maximum of 10 seconds, users can still screenshot or save them. Users may sometimes forget that screenshotting is a possibility in the app and send an image to someone they trust.

SEXTING

Due to 'Snaps' disappearing soon after they've received, (users can even send a one second photo or video), Snapchat has become the chosen platform for sending sexually explicit images or 'selfies' to someone. The short amount of time gives children the confidence to send the pictures.

Once a photo/video has been screenshotted, this can lead to further dangers, such as blackmail and cyberbullying. It is illegal to make, possess, download, store and share sexual images, photos and videos of a person under the age of 18. This also includes any sexual images, photos and videos that a child may have taken of themselves.

However, if a young person is found creating or sharing images, the police can choose to record that a crime has been committed, but that taking formal action isn't in the public interest.

National Online Safety Top Tips for Parents

THINK BEFORE YOU SNAP

Ensure that your child knows that 'Snaps' can be screenshotted and teach them that if they post anything potentially embarrassing or harmful (either of themselves or someone else) it can have severe consequences, as if the message lasted forever.

TURN OFF 'QUICK ADD'

Quick add' helps friends find each other on the app. This is based on mutual friends or if their number is in their phone book. Explain to your child that this feature can open up their profile to strangers. We highly recommend that your child turns off the 'Quick Add' feature.

EDUCATE ABOUT RISKS OF SEXTING

It can be slightly awkward talking about this topic with your child, but if it helps them protect themselves, then it is worth it. Talk to them about the consequences of sexting and make sure that they're aware of the risks prior to using Snapchat.

REPORTING INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

If your child is receiving inappropriate content, it's important that you report it. First block the sender to prevent any further messages. You can then report this by sending an email to safety@snapchat.com. If the problem persists, contact CEOP at ceop.gov/report.

RESTRICT WHO CAN VIEW THEIR STORY

Your child can add videos and images to their 'story' throughout the day which last for 24 hours. By default, anyone in their friends list can see their story. We recommend that children only have their close friends and family on the app.

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ENTER 'GHOST' MODE ON SNAP MAPS

We highly recommend enabling Ghost Mode on the app so that your child's location will no longer be visible to anyone on the 'Snap Map'. To enable this, go onto the Snap Map and tap the cog in the top-right corner. Here, change your settings to 'Ghost Mode'.

HOW TO DEACTIVATE SNAPCHAT

If your child wanted to delete their Snapchat account, simply deleting the app from their phone is not enough. To deactivate the account, users will have to log in to their account on desktop or on their mobile device (not through the app). Here, you:

1) Go to support.snapchat.com/delete-account
2) Here, click on 'Delete my account'
3) You will then be asked to enter your username and password again

DISAPPEARING ILLEGAL CONTENT

Snapchat 'deletes by default' which means every opened snap image or video is automatically deleted. If your child has seen criminal activity on Snapchat, you should report it immediately - See 'Reporting Inappropriate Content' above.

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