

WhatsApp

GO-TO GUIDE



Is there a safe way to communicate on WhatsApp?

What is WhatsApp?

WhatsApp is an instant messaging app. It can be downloaded and used for free. Users can send text and voice notes, share media, make voice and video calls, share links and user locations. It is popular for its group chat function. Multiple contacts can be added to a group chat, where everyone can share messages and chats can be named so they're easily identifiable.

Good to know:

- To use WhatsApp, you need to be at least 13 years old. This aligns with many regulations for data protection worldwide.
- WhatsApp messages are end-to-end encrypted – which means that no one but the people who send and receive the message can see it or retrieve it, not even WhatsApp
- The app uses the Internet for voice and video calls, rather than traditional phone lines.
- WhatsApp has a dedicated business app and platform in addition to the personal app.

How is WhatsApp used in sports clubs, community groups and physical activities?

- to communicate details of group sessions such as, timings, who's playing, what kit or equipment is needed and venue details or directions
- to share updates, results and details of ongoing matches, competition, events or tournaments
- to share messages, images, videos, emojis, gifs, documents and sharing a person's live location

WhatsApp

GO-TO GUIDE



Why is WhatsApp often chosen over other apps?

- easy to set up an account and to create groups (you just need a mobile phone number)
- user-friendly and easy to use
- free
- it is widely used by people of all ages
- it can be used on the go and wherever you have Internet
- it uses end-to-end encryption

The downsides

- Phone numbers are viewable by all users in chats. This has the potential to leave young people vulnerable to abuse from adults and leaders, with an opportunity to communicate one-on-one. Or it could open up the potential for peer-on-peer bullying.
- It's instant sharing, which doesn't allow for much thinking time before information is shared.
- Organisers of groups can't control what others post. However, the group admin for the chat can delete other people's messages, videos or images. (There is a time restriction.)
- Messages can be set to disappear from chats after a particular length of time, but this does not delete them from a device or backup if downloaded. So unless the group is monitored closely, inappropriate messages could fly under the radar.
- Live locations poses an obvious risk when children share their location with others outside of specific situations.
- WhatsApp collects data about online behaviour and can be shared with Meta for advertising purposes.
- Not everyone has a smart phone, or Internet access to use WhatsApp, so they would be excluded from potentially important information.
- Features like 'last seen' and 'online' status can create social pressure and anxiety to respond immediately.

- The broadcast list feature enables private responses, which poses an obvious safeguarding risk to any child or young person being messaged.

The positives

- It's fun, fast, free, easy to use and share information with your contacts.
- You can invite people to join your WhatsApp group chat as long as you have their phone number, which can be access controlled by a group administrator.
- You can directly communicate with parents and carers, quickly and efficiently, on a platform that is almost instantly accessible.
- Read receipts show you quickly and easily who has or hasn't seen the information you have shared (by displaying two small blue ticks).
- Information can be sent on the go and directly to your group of contacts.
- If children and young people are part of the group chat, they are able to see the messages and feel part of the online community.

Important to know:

Coaches and leaders should not message any child or young person directly on an individual WhatsApp chat.





End-to-end encryption possible concerns

Encrypted messages pose a risk to young people, as only the people within the chat can read and listen to the messages. This could be used to bully or abuse a young person.

This level of security could also be used to share inappropriate, potentially harmful or illegal messages, with little to no accountability to outside agencies if under investigation. If a user reports a message, WhatsApp can access recent messages to investigate the issue.

If someone asked for the data to be erased in accordance with GDPR, you can't erase anything from WhatsApp and have no central monitoring capabilities if you are not using the Business Account.

Good to know:

The Online Safety Act 2023 is a new set of laws that aims to protect children and adults online. It puts new duties on social media companies to make them more responsible for user safety on their platforms.

Possible safeguarding concerns and risks to consider

- only the people within the chat can see the information shared – so it's important to have a least two trusted adults as leads for your WhatsApp group and business account. They should be accountable to each other, your online safety policy, codes of conduct and safeguarding procedures.
- inappropriate, harmful or illegal messages or videos can be shared
- bullying or grooming behaviour could take place
- the 'read once' feature, allows a message or image to be sent and then deleted once it has been seen.
- disappearing messages could go unnoticed if the chats are not monitored regularly
- live locations could be shared in the group showing a young person's live location
- Broadcast Lists can receive private responses, which can expose young people to potentially harmful behaviour
- If businesses use the personal version of WhatsApp, they cannot comply with GDPR, due to end-to-end encryption. There is also the risk that data is backed-up and these secondary sources could be accessed by others.





Thinking about setting up a WhatsApp group with young people? Here's what you need to think about...

This example from Noah will help you think about the kinds of processes you'll need to put in place in your group to make it as safe as possible for young people.

Noah is setting up a WhatsApp Business group for a group of young skateboarders. There's a big national 2-day competition coming up and young people need to know the arrangements for this event. Details such as travel arrangements to and from the venue, which is located 2 hours away, need to be shared. As the competition is a 2-day event, accommodation is required, so information regarding this also needs to be confirmed to all members and their parents or carers.

Noah has asked for **parents or carers permission** to add young people and their parents and carers to a new WhatsApp group. Noah has **researched WhatsApp** and understands how to use it, including how to delete messages, how to invite new people to the group and block members if necessary.

Noah has asked the young people that wish to be part of the WhatsApp group to **sign-up to a [code of conduct](#) and a [safer use policy](#)**. They have also drafted some rules on the use and acceptable behaviours (codes of conduct) as the first post in the group chat.

Noah has **invited parents** to this group chat and have made sure they are also aware of, and have **signed-up to, a code of conduct** for parents and a safer use policy/online safety policy.

Noah will have an **'in-person' discussion** with the parents and young people about using WhatsApp safely and the codes of conduct. They will do this as a group at a training session prior to the event.

He has considered what to name the chat, so it's easily identifiable to reduce the potential for mistake or human error posting. They have asked their colleague Fran, to help monitor the chat, so there are **two staff members supervising** the group chat. Fran is also DBS checked and has been [safely recruited](#) to the role, just like Noah.

Noah and Fran have a basic level of **safeguarding training** and understand the groups safeguarding reporting procedures. They've also **signed up to a code of conduct** for staff, and read the groups' online safety policy.

Young people have been **sign-posted to online safety information and resources**, which included how to remove the app if needed, [Childnet](#), [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) and [Childline](#) for online safety and social media guidance and support. Noah has told the young people, parents and carers, who to go to if they experience bullying or feel uncomfortable with anything in the chat, have any concerns or worries or need help.

WhatsApp

GO-TO GUIDE

WhatsApp Checklist

Use this handy printable checklist when setting up your own WhatsApp group for your sport or physical activity organisation.

We have...

Researched WhatsApp Business and understand how to use it.	
Sought permission to add young people to a new WhatsApp group (from both the young person and their parent or carer).	
Asked young people, parents and carers to sign up to codes of conduct and a safer use policy/online safety policy.	
Considered the name of our group chat carefully.	
Ensured we have at least two staff members or volunteers who are part of the WhatsApp group to have responsibility and are trained to monitor and moderate the group chat. These individuals are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DBS checked • understand the app and the risks • have safeguarding training • understand our safeguarding procedures • know what's expected from them through our staff code of conduct, safeguarding policy and online safety policy. 	
Invited parents to the group or have created a separate group for parents and carers and considered the advantages and disadvantages of both options.	
Signposted young people to helpful resources, websites and support (for online safety and social media usage).	
Let young people, parents and carers know who they can go to if they have any worries, concerns or need any help.	

Make sure you print out these wallet cards for parents and young people too!

