

In today's digital world, group chats on platforms like WhatsApp, Snapchat, and others have become a common way for children to stay connected. While these chats can foster friendships, they also come with risks that are especially concerning for primary school-aged children.

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The realities of group chats

Group chats are often viewed as harmless, but they can expose children to risks parents might not anticipate. These digital spaces can quickly become environments where negative behaviours thrive without adult supervision. Primary school-aged children, still developing social and emotional maturity, may struggle with the fast-paced and often unfiltered nature of these chats.

Many parents are unaware of what can occur in group chats. Unfortunately, children can be exposed to:

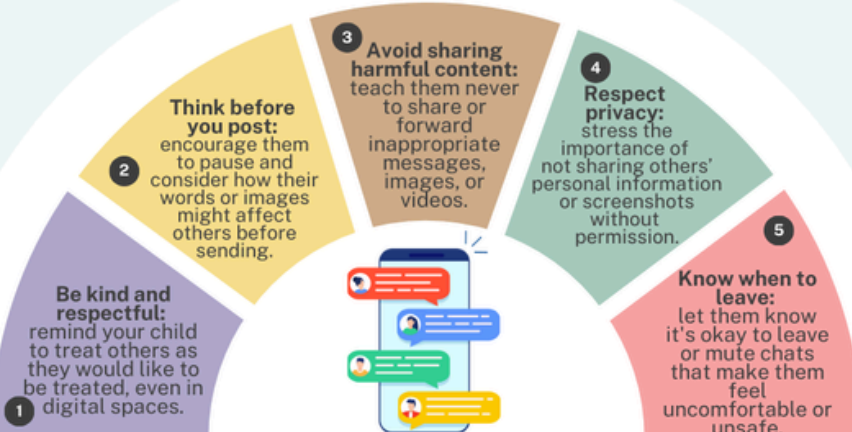
- **Unkind behaviour:** teasing, exclusion, and bullying can occur more easily behind a screen.
- **Inappropriate content:** children may encounter or share inappropriate language, images, videos, or other harmful content.
- **Peer pressure:** children may feel pressured to participate in conversations they are uncomfortable with.
- **Overuse and distraction:** constant notifications can interfere with sleep, homework, and family time.

How can parents help?

As a parent, there are practical steps you can take to educate and monitor your child's use of group chats:

- **Have open conversations:** talk to your child about the importance of kindness, respect, and the impact of their words online.
- **Set boundaries:** establish rules around screen time and appropriate online behaviour.
- **Monitor group chats:** regularly check the content of your child's chats and discuss any concerning messages.
- **Teach privacy awareness:** encourage your child to think before sharing personal information or images.
- **Promote reporting:** let your child know they can come to you if they feel uncomfortable or witness inappropriate behaviour.
- **Use parental controls:** utilise built-in tools on devices and apps to limit access and monitor usage.

Five rules to teach your child for positive group chat experiences



Teach your children to stick to these five rules from the very start of using group chats. Emphasise the importance of being kind to others and ensuring that everyone's experience is positive.

SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

Promoting positive behaviour and setting boundaries among young children

Ensuring that young children develop positive relationships and understand personal boundaries is essential for their well-being and growth.

Understanding child-on-child abuse

Child-on-child abuse happens when one child harms another, whether through physical aggression, verbal bullying, or inappropriate touching. It can also include less obvious behaviours such as looking under toilet doors, sending inappropriate messages, or invading someone's privacy online or in person. Recognising and addressing these behaviours early helps create a safe and respectful environment for all children.

Encouraging appropriate behaviour

Here are key points to help children understand and practice respectful behaviour:

- **Respect for others:** encourage kindness, polite words, and empathy.
- **Personal space:** teach children about personal space and the importance of asking permission before touching others.
- **Inappropriate touching:** explain that certain body parts are private and off-limits, using age-appropriate language.

Tips for parents

- Have regular conversations with your child about their day, friendships, and any concerns they might have.
- Be a role model by respecting boundaries, showing how to say no politely, and demonstrating empathy and kindness.
- Reinforce positive behaviour with praise and specific feedback, such as acknowledging when they respect someone else's boundaries.
- Provide age-appropriate examples of boundaries and discuss what to do when someone crosses them.
- Encourage children to trust their instincts and express their feelings.
- Regularly discuss online safety, including what is appropriate to share and how to handle uncomfortable messages.

TEACHING ABOUT CHILDREN BOUNDARIES
SETTING AND RECOGNISING BOUNDARIES IS AN IMPORTANT LIFE SKILL.
HERE'S HOW TO GUIDE YOUR CHILD:

- 1 HELP THEM IDENTIFY BOUNDARIES**
Talk to your child about personal boundaries, theirs and other people's. This includes physical touch, sharing belongings, or personal space.
- 2 PRACTICE SCENARIOS TOGETHER**
Role-play common situations where they might need to assert themselves, like saying "No" to a hug or telling a friend to stop a game if it feels uncomfortable. Include situations where other people may say no to them.
- 3 EMPOWER WITH LANGUAGE**
Teach specific phrases such as "I don't like that," "Please stop," or "I need space." Reassure them that it's okay to say these even to friends or adults and that they must respond when people say similar phrases to them.
- 4 RECOGNISE WARNING SIGNS**
Help children recognise behaviours that cross boundaries, like unwanted touching, teasing, or pressure to do something they dislike.
- 5 ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION**
Let your child know they can always come to you with concerns or questions without fear of judgement.
- 6 BUILD CONFIDENCE**
Praise your child when they assert their boundaries, reinforcing that their feelings and comfort matter.