Northern Lights

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WHATSAPP:
ADVICE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging app, boasting over 2 billion active users. Its end-to-end encryption ensures that only the sender and receiver can view the contents of messages sent on its platform (even WhatsApp itself can't see what its users write). Though this is welcomed by privacy-minded users, it has opened the platform up to concerns about inappropriate or even illegal content that cannot be traced.

What are the risks?

Contact from Strangers

If your child has ever given their phone number to a stranger, that stranger could contact them via WhatsApp.
Your child can also be added to group chats with people they've never met before by a friend.

"View Once" Content

WhatsApp has a feature to send images or messages that can only be viewed once.

This has led to some users sharing inappropriate or abusive content, knowing that the recipient cannot retrieve it later to be used as evidence.

Evolving Scams

WhatsApp's popularity makes it an extremely tempting hunting ground for scammers.

Popular scams include posing as the user's child and requesting a money transfer due to a spurious "emergency," and attempting to log into your account, then calling you while posing as WhatsApp staff and requesting the verification code.

Visible Location

WhatsApp's "Live Location" feature lets users share their current location with friends in order to help organise meet-ups or allow parents to check they're safely on the way home.

This information can be seen by anyone on the user's friend list and in mutual group chats, creating potential for strangers to get access.

Fake News

WhatsApp's popularity and ease of use make it very easy to share false information on the platform.

Users must be careful about trusting information sent to them.

Chat Lock

WhatsApp's "Chat Lock" function allows users to store messages and chats in locked folders.

This creates the potential for young people to hide conversations their parents wouldn't approve of, such as chats sharing age-inappropriate material.

So how do I keep my child safe?

Emphasise Caution	Encourage your child to treat any unexpected messages with caution. Encourage them to consider whether they sound like something a friend or relative would say, ensure they know to be wary of clicking links and to *never* share personal details over WhatsApp.
Think Before Sharing	Help your child to understand why it is critical to stop and think before posting or forwarding something on WhatsApp. Encourage them to consider how an ill-judged message might damage their reputation or upset a friend who sent them something in confidence.
Adjust The Settings	It's wise to check your child's privacy settings and specify which of their contacts can add them to group chats without needing approval. If your child needs to use Live Location, emphasise that they should turn it back off as soon as they can.
Chat About Privacy	Some parents like to check in with their child about how they're using WhatsApp, explaining that it will help keep them safe. If you spot a locked chats folder, or your child has used the "view once" function, you should have an honest, open conversation about their reasons for doing so without judgement.