



E-safety Newsletter end of Autumn term 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

As we head into the Christmas holidays, we hope that our children and their families are looking forward to lots of fun festivities. No doubt most of our children will be enjoying socializing in their virtual worlds, as well as trying out new apps with their friends and exploring any new games that Santa brings them.

It has been very reassuring to hear from our pupils in school that they are making very mature and sensible decisions about their online activities. However, we know that they don't always understand why we, as adults, worry about the risks and consider them vulnerable online so showing an interest in what they're doing and giving them the opportunity to discuss their online activities in a non-judgmental way is the best way for us adults to assess their levels of risk-awareness and to open the door for discussions about any concerns that arise.

It is also, therefore, vitally important for us to keep our own knowledge up to date so that our children value our opinions and advice. Follow this link to find out more about the Essex [online safety campaign](#) and to find a wealth of additional links to useful websites with regularly updated information and advice forums.

Attached to this newsletter, you will find a poster about the popular app Discord which is used as a chat and networking forum for many popular games. Accompanying this poster, are some additional tips provided for you by one of our pupils who wishes to be known only as '**an experienced user of the platform**'.

If your child has expressed concerns, that you would like to receive advice for, please do not hesitate to let us know; we will be more than happy to support and advise you or signpost you to further advisory services.

I hope that you and your children have a lovely and safe Christmas holiday exploring all the festive experiences you can have in the real world and the virtual world as well.

Yours sincerely

Sharyn Ailara, Deputy Head Teacher  
*BSc (Hons), PGCE, SENDCo Accreditation*

# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about DISCORD

AGE RATING

13+

Servers and channels marked as 'NSFW' require users to be 18 or older to join.

Discord is a free app which allows users to communicate in real time via text, video or voice chat. Available on desktop and mobile devices, it was originally designed to help gamers cooperate – but has evolved into a more general networking platform for a range of online communities, discussing topics like TV series, music, Web3 and more. Discord is organised around closed groups, referred to as 'servers'. To join a server, users must be invited or provided with a unique link. It's a space for users to interact with friends, meet others with shared interests and collaborate privately online – but it's also a place where young people can be exposed to risks if the right precautions aren't taken.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### CYBERBULLYING

Discord's easy accessibility and connectivity, unfortunately, makes it an ideal place for cyberbullying to occur – especially as audio and video streams disappear once they've ended, meaning that bullying could take place without leaving any evidence. Closed groups can also be created, giving young people the opportunity to exclude their peers or send cruel messages without adult oversight.

### DIFFICULT TO MODERATE

Like many private communication apps, Discord's real-time messaging can be difficult to control. The system enables content moderation through each individual server – so different groups can set their own rules for what's acceptable, and some groups may not monitor for unsuitable content. Anything that happens in an audio or video stream is also virtually untraceable once the stream has concluded.

### INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Discord mainly hosts private groups, making it easier for unsuitable or explicit content to be shared on channels. Pornography, racism and inappropriate language can be found in some groups. Server owners are required to add an age-restriction gate to channels where 18+ content is being shared – but this solution isn't foolproof, as the platform doesn't always verify users' ages when they sign up.

### ACCESSIBLE TO PREDATORS

On many chat platforms, users can lie about their age or true identity – and Discord is no exception. Predators have attempted to abuse the platform by using it to contact and communicate with underage users – by initially chatting with a child on an age-appropriate channel, for example. While Discord has improved its safety settings, some users will still try to bypass them for malicious reasons.

### CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Discord does have strict Terms of Service and Community Guidelines to protect its users – but, sadly, not everyone adheres to them. Criminal activity including grooming, hate speech, harassment, exploitative content, doxing and extremist or violent material have all been found on Discord servers over the last two years. In 2020, Discord received almost 27,000 reports of illegal activity on the platform.

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### REVIEW SAFETY SETTINGS

Discord has a series of safety settings, enabling users to choose who can direct message them or send them friend requests. Your child's experience on Discord will be much safer if the app's privacy and safety settings are configured to only allow messages or friend requests from server members. This will minimise the chances of potential predators from outside the group contacting them.

### EXPLAIN AGE FILTERING

While Discord requires users to be at least 13 to sign up, many servers geared towards older users are flagged as NSFW (not safe for work), which indicates they probably contain material that's inappropriate for children. It can be easy to click through settings without properly reviewing them, so ensure your child understands why age filtering is important and that it's there to protect them.

### SCREEN OUT EXPLICIT CONTENT

In the privacy and safety settings, Discord users are offered the ability to filter direct messages for inappropriate content: a setting that should be enabled if your child uses the platform. Discord automatically tries to flag images that are explicit, but the setting must be manually enabled for text. If a young user is sent explicit content in a direct message, Discord will scan and (if necessary) delete it.

### MONITOR ONLINE ACTIVITY

It's wise to regularly review your child's activity on Discord. This can include checking their safety settings to ensure they're correctly enabled, talking about which servers they've joined and reviewing some of their friends and direct messages. Ask if anything has made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Things can change quickly online, so plan routine check-ins and follow up frequently.

### DISCUSS GOOD ONLINE BEHAVIOUR

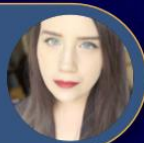
The anonymity offered by the internet often leads people to communicate more openly online and behave differently than they would at school or home. It's crucial to bear in mind, though, that every internet user is still a real person. Talk to your child about the severe and lasting consequences that cyberbullying or exchanging inappropriate material online can have in the real world.

### HAVE CANDID CONVERSATIONS

It can sometimes be awkward to discuss topics like grooming, pornography, racism or explicit content with your child – but it's important to ensure they're aware of the harms these things can pose. Talking openly about these subjects is a great way to help your child feel more comfortable about coming to you if they experience an unwanted encounter on Discord (or anywhere else online).

## Meet Our Expert

Coral Cripps is a Canadian-born, London-based tech journalist at [gmw3.com](http://gmw3.com): a website specialising in all things Web3, gaming and XR (extended reality). With a focus on brands and culture, she researches and writes about the ways that our current innovations – including the metaverse and Web3 – are impacting people, places and things.



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Sources: <https://www.defendyourmindz.com/post/dangers-of-discord-6-steps-to-guarding-teens-on-popular-chat-app/> <https://support.discord.com/hc/articles/4415114347241-discord-is-a-haven-for-gamers-and-sexual-exploiters/> <https://kotaku.com/discord-deleted-thousands-of-violent-extremist-accounts-1846623264>



[www.nationalonlinesafety.com](http://www.nationalonlinesafety.com)



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Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into. Current as of the date of release: 18.05.2022

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## **Discord top tips from an experienced user of the platform:**

- Very highly regulated and moderated content
- Warning for unknown people messaging you directly.
- Boterators (Robot Moderators) moderate chats 24/7 in discord servers.
- Discord servers allow for fun games and public chat but are highly moderated for explicit content.
- Direct messages are NOT moderated so make sure to choose who you allow to message you carefully.
- There is no need to stop teens from receiving direct messages as long as they know how to react to and report explicit content.
- Younger children are not advised to operate without supervision from adults/carers.
- Discord will automatically warn you when someone that is not on your friends list messages you directly and will prompt you to ignore the message.

“(WARNING) This messenger is not in your friends list and could attempt to send explicit content.”

