



Clarity Independent School

20th October 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

E-Safety Newsletter (Autumn term first half 2026)

As part of our ongoing commitment to keeping your child safe, we wanted to share some important information about online safety. With the autumn half term break coming up, children will likely have more time online, making this the perfect moment to have important conversations about staying safe. Technology is changing rapidly, and with it come new risks that we all need to understand. Two areas that are causing particular concern right now are Snapchat and artificial intelligence (AI). You may have heard about these in the news, or your child may already be using them. This newsletter will help you understand what the risks are, why they matter, and most importantly, give you practical steps you can take at home to protect your child during the break and beyond. We know this can feel overwhelming, so we've kept it short and straightforward. Please do read it and use it as a starting point for conversations with your child over half term. Remember, we're always here if you need support or have questions.

Snapchat: The Risks

"It Disappears" - But Does It Really?

Here's the truth many children don't realise while Snapchat messages seem to disappear, they can easily be saved through screenshots, screen recording, or simply taking a photo with another device. Once an image is shared, you've lost control of it forever. While Snapchat looks like fun with its filters there is still a risk of:

- **Strangers Making Contact:** Snapchat makes it easy for adults to contact children through features like Quick Add and public stories. This can lead to grooming and exploitation.
- **Location Sharing:** The Snap Map feature shows your child's exact location in real-time to all their contacts - a serious safety risk.
- **Mental Health:** Features like 'streaks' create pressure and anxiety. Constant comparison with others affects self-esteem and wellbeing.

AI: The New Danger

Artificial Intelligence can now create incredibly realistic fake images and videos. Someone can take your child's photo from social media and use AI to place their face onto sexual or nude images. These "deepfakes" look completely real and cause devastating emotional harm.

Our safeguarding guidance now explicitly covers AI-generated images. They're treated as seriously as real photographs and require an immediate safeguarding response.

AI also brings other risks: inappropriate chatbots that engage children in harmful conversations, privacy concerns when children share personal information, and convincing fake news that looks authentic.

When Snapchat and AI Combine

The real danger comes when these technologies meet. AI-generated fake images can be rapidly shared via Snapchat. Children think content disappears, not realising AI can recreate or manipulate saved images. Predators use AI to create fake profiles and manipulate images to exploit children.

The most important thing is regular open conversation. Ask what apps they're using and make it clear they can come to you if something goes wrong, without fear of punishment. Explain that images shared online are never truly private and that AI can create fake images that look real.

If your child uses Snapchat (minimum age 13), sit down together and set up the safety settings by:

- Turning off Snap Map or set to "Ghost Mode"
- Changing "Contact Me" to "My Friends" only
- Changing "View My Story" to "My Friends" only
- Disable "Quick Add"
- Review their friend list regularly

It is always a good idea to create family rules by agreeing on which apps are okay, time limits for social media, what can be shared online, and where devices are kept at bedtime. Many families have a charging station in a communal area where all phones go at night.

Trust your instincts and watch for "warning signs" such as your child becoming secretive about online activities, spending excessive time online (especially at night), seemly upset after being online, or receiving gifts from people you don't know.

If your child comes to you with a concern, stay calm and listen without judgement. Thank them for telling you and don't blame them. Contact school immediately - we're here to help. Never delete evidence or forward inappropriate images, even with good intentions (this is illegal).

The online world offers amazing opportunities - we just need to help children navigate it safely. You're not alone. Having conversations now can prevent serious harm later, and it's never too late to start.

We take online safety extremely seriously. We teach age-appropriate lessons, respond immediately to incidents, and work in partnership with you. Please contact us if you have any concerns. By working together, we can keep children safe online.

Yours sincerely

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Michelle Deveney,

Assistant Headteacher, DSL

BA (Hons Open), QTLS, DTLLS

Member of SET (Society for Education and Training)

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

SNAP STREAK

97

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

With over 900 million active monthly users and billions of 'Snaps' sent each month, Snapchat is a popular messaging app among children and young people. It allows users to share fun, spontaneous pictures and videos with friends and family while using playful filters. One of Snapchat's unique features is that pictures, videos and messages are only viewable for a short period of time.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Snapchat's use of artificial intelligence (AI) includes features like the 'My AI' chatbot and AI-powered filters, offering interactive experiences that can be fun but also pose risks. These tools may share unfiltered or inaccurate responses, promote unrealistic beauty standards, and collect personal data. Advanced filters and deepfake-style lenses can distort reality, potentially leading to manipulation, impersonation, or inappropriate content.

SCREEN ADDICTION

Snapchat boosts user engagement and daily use with features like streaks (daily Snapchat exchanges between you and a friend). When a streak's been going for a few days, users will see a 🌟 emoji. The number alongside it shows the number of days, but if users miss a day and break the streak, the only way to restore it is to pay. This encourages daily use habits, and frequent notifications can keep users returning to the app even more often.

SEXTORTION

Because Snapchat's disappearing messages feature may foster a sense of safety, users may become targets of sextortion. For example, a predator may pressure someone into sending nude images, then somehow capture those images to threaten and intimidate the victim. This might involve claiming they will share the images with friends or family unless money is paid.

SNAPCHAT+

Snapchat+ is the platform's premium subscription service, offering early access to new and exclusive features. In June 2025, Snapchat introduced a new tier called Lens+, giving subscribers access to hundreds of lenses and AR experiences for playing, creating, and sharing Snaps. These paid features may encourage young users to spend money to access exclusive content, increasing the risk of overspending or feeling pressured to make in-app purchases.

ACCESSIBILITY

Snapchat is now accessible from a web browser, meaning children can use it on a laptop or tablet without downloading the app. This can make activity harder to monitor, reduce the effectiveness of parental controls, and increase the risk of unsupervised communication or exposure to inappropriate content.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some content on Snapchat isn't suitable for children. The hashtags used to group content are determined by the poster, so even an innocent search term could still yield age-inappropriate results. The app's disappearing messages feature also makes it easy for young people to share explicit images on impulse – so sexting continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat.

Advice for Parents & Educators

ACCESS THE SNAPCHAT FAMILY SAFETY HUB

Created with guidance from Common Sense Media, Snapchat has developed a Family Safety Hub that explains how the app works and how to use its in-app protections for teens. It's recommended that you review this guidance before allowing a child to download Snapchat. Remember, the app is only intended for children aged 13 and over.

ENCOURAGE OPEN DISCUSSIONS

Snapchat's risks can be easier to handle if you nurture an open dialogue. Talk about scams and blackmail before letting children sign up. If they're lured into a scam, encourage them to tell you immediately. Talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting, emphasising its inherent risks. Furthermore, explain how popular 'challenges' on the platform can have harmful consequences.

BLOCK AND REPORT

If a stranger connects with a child on Snapchat and makes them feel uncomfortable by pressuring them to send or receive unwanted or inappropriate images, the child can tap the three dots on that person's profile to report or block them. There are options to state why they're reporting that user, with a tailored reporting section under the 'Nudity and Sexual Content' category. In this category, there's the option to report somebody for threatening to leak sexually explicit images, or 'nudes'.

USE PRIVACY SETTINGS TOGETHER

Sit down with the children in your care and explore Snapchat's privacy settings as a shared activity. You can help them adjust who can contact them, view their stories, or see their location on Snap Map. It's a good opportunity to explain why some settings are safer than others, reinforcing their understanding of online boundaries. Encourage them to regularly review these settings, especially after app updates or changes in their friendship groups.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian Government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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Source: See full reference list on guide page at: <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/snapchat>

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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about AI COMPANIONS

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Powered by generative AI models like ChatGPT and Google Gemini, AI companion apps and virtual chatbots such as Character.ai, Snapchat My AI, Replika and Taikie, allow users to create, customise, and chat to synthetic avatars around the clock. While many young people use them for harmless entertainment, creative writing or homework help, these tools are designed to simulate genuine human empathy, emotional bonding and deep friendship.

EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCY

AI companions are programmed to be endlessly agreeable, attentive, and available 24/7. Unlike human friendships, an AI companion never disagrees, sets personal boundaries, or gets tired. Young people (especially those experiencing loneliness, social anxiety, or low self-esteem) can quickly develop an unhealthy emotional attachment, viewing synthetic software as their 'best friend' or a surrogate romantic partner.

DANGEROUS MENTAL HEALTH ADVICE

AI chatbots possess no genuine empathy, professional clinical knowledge, or moral reasoning. While developers state these tools are not therapists, vulnerable teenagers often turn to them in crisis. Chatbots have previously hallucinated unsafe medical guidance, validated depressive spirals, and failed to safely escalate disclosures of self-harm or suicidal ideation to real-world protective services.

DATA HARVESTING & OVERSHARING

Because conversational bots simulate warmth and understanding, children often lower their guard and treat the chatbot as a trusted friend. They may disclose sensitive personal information, including full names, school details, private family problems, or secrets, unaware that their conversations are being logged, may be analysed by third parties (including advertisers), or used to train future AI models.

DISTORTED SOCIAL SKILLS

Navigating real-world friendships can be messy, involving dealing with conflict, compromise, boredom, and awkwardness. If a teenager spends hours interacting with an AI that is tailored specifically to validate and flatter them, they may become impatient with real-world relationships. Over time, this can lead to social withdrawal, heightened anxiety in peer groups, and isolation: a vicious circle of growing online dependency coupled with a heightened sense that relationships in the 'real world' are too challenging to maintain.

INAPPROPRIATE OR EXPLICIT CONTENT

While most mainstream platforms feature safety filters and guardrails, young people frequently discover 'jailbreak' prompts to bypass them. Some companion platforms subtly nudge users towards mature themes, romantic roleplay, or sexually suggestive conversations. In worse cases, third-party apps with weak safety checks have been found to generate sexually explicit text or intimate images.

"FREEMIUM" UPSELLS & SUBSCRIPTIONS

Many companion platforms operate on a freemium model. While basic chat is free, features like voice calls, uncensored responses, custom avatars, or 'deeper bonding' tiers are locked behind expensive monthly recurring subscriptions or in-app token purchases. This can lead to significant hidden costs and pressure on young people to spend money to maintain the 'friendship'.

Advice for Parents & Educators

TALK OPENLY ABOUT FAKE RELATIONSHIPS

Demystify how these tools work. Explain to young people that an AI companion has no feelings, memories, or consciousness; it is simply calculating the next most mathematically probable word based on its training data. It is helpful to explain to them the mechanics of large language models so that they understand how they are trained and how they are designed to always flatter and be helpful.

ENCOURAGE REAL-WORLD CONNECTION

Ensure technology habits do not replace face-to-face peer socialisation, sports, hobbies, and family time. Create healthy boundaries at home (such as keeping phones and tablets out of bedrooms overnight) to prevent late-night, unmonitored attachment loops with conversational chatbots when young people are at their most vulnerable.

AUDIT PRIVACY SETTINGS & AGE LIMITS

Check which companion apps are installed on your child's phone or tablet. Many dedicated companion apps carry an App Store rating of 17+, while platforms like Character.ai set a minimum age of 13+ (or 16+ in the UK/EU). Review the privacy settings together: turn off data-sharing toggles, disable model training where possible, and ensure location permissions are blocked.

REINFORCE WHERE TO GET REAL HELP

Make sure young people know that a machine can never replace professional pastoral or mental health care. Remind them of the trusted adults they can turn to at school – such as their Form Tutor, Head of Year, or the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) – as well as dedicated youth support services like Childline (0800 1111) or Shout (text 85258).

Meet Our Expert

Darren Coxon is the Founder and Executive Director of Compass Education, a consultancy specialising in supporting educators, students and parents in making wise choices with AI. His book *Ethical AI and Education*, co-authored with Clara Hawking, will be released later in 2026 by Taylor and Francis.



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