Lagan College

EBALC East Belfast Area Learning Community

Knowsley City Learning Centres

Online Safety Newsletter July 2026

Social media to be banned for under-16s

The government has announced that social media platforms will be blocked from offering services to under-16s from next Spring. The ban will include platforms like Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and X.

Furthermore, there will also be blocks on live streaming and communication with strangers (these restrictions will also apply to 16 and 17-year-olds) and the government will also be looking at overnight curfews and breaks in infinite scrolling.

You can read the Government's press release here: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-media-to-be-banned-for-under-16s-in-landmark-government-move-to-givekids-their-childhood-back

In addition, you can find some FAQs here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fact-sheet-new-rules-to-protect-children-online/fact-sheet-new-rules-to-protect-children-online

Would you like to read this newsletter in a different language? You can use the translate tool on our web version: https://www.knowsleyclcs.org.uk/july-2026-secondary/

WhatsApp

We frequently receive reports of children using WhatsApp inappropriately, such as sharing images to embarrass others, sending hurtful messages, spreading rumours, or excluding people from group chats to make them feel left out. It is important to think about whether WhatsApp is the right platform for your child. For example, you should consider if your child has the critical thinking skills to recognise bullying and can they manage peer pressure and refrain from joining in on hurtful behaviour?

Users should be at least 13 years old to use WhatsApp. WhatsApp have announced that they are rolling out the option of Parent-Managed accounts for those under the age of 13. The settings will include allowing you to choose who can contact your child and ensuring only you can add them to groups. Find out more here: https://faq.whatsapp.com/894871699629864

What should I be aware of if my child is using WhatsApp?

- **Group chats:** Everyone within a group, even if they are not one of your child's contacts, can see all messages within that group.
- **Inappropriate content:** users can be exposed to content that is not suitable for their age.
- **Location sharing:** talk to your child about the potential danger of sharing their location.
- **Chat lock/secret code:** users can lock chats as well as apply a secret code setting, so a chat does not appear in the main chat.
- **Screentime due to addictive nature**
- **AI:** WhatsApp includes Meta AI including Incognito Chat with Meta AI so nobody (including Meta) can read your conversations.

What can I do?

- Check privacy settings e.g. who can add them to groups.
- Ensure your child understands that they can leave a chat at any time. Find out more here: https://faq.whatsapp.com/424124173736394
- Show your child how to block and report other users. Find out how here: https://faq.whatsapp.com/1142481766359885/
- Set up appropriate parental controls.
- Talk about who they are chatting with, encourage them to think carefully about the messages they send and how they might be received.
- Chat to your child about the groups that they belong to.

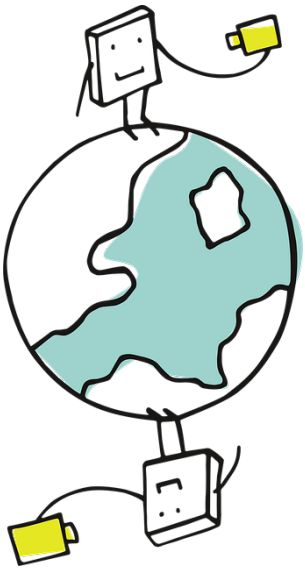
Further information

- https://parentzone.org.uk/article/whatsapp
- https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/chat-apps/

Livestreaming

What is livestreaming?

Livestreaming is when an individual broadcasts video live over the internet. People can watch livestreams from any device that is connected to the internet.



What are the risks?

There are risks associated with watching livestreams that you should be aware of. The main risk being that your child may see or hear something inappropriate as your child may come across themes or content that is not suitable for them. It is difficult to moderate live content as it is happening in real time.

How can I help my child?

- All online platforms have an age rating, ensure your child only accesses platforms that are appropriate to their age. For example, TikTok has an age rating of 13.
- For any platforms that your child uses, ensure appropriate parental controls and privacy settings are applied.
- Take an interest in what your child is doing online and on a regular basis, ask your child to show you what they are accessing.
- Ensure your child knows how to use any reporting/blocking tools on the app that they are using and as always please ensure that your child knows to talk to a trusted adult if they see anything that concerns them online.

Further information

- https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/livestreaming-parents/
- https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/what-is-live-streaming/

Instagram: New supervision tool

You must be over 13 years of age to set up an account. Instagram is used to post photos and videos as well as send direct messages, make voice/video calls, and send disappearing messages.

Instagram have introduced a new supervision tool allowing parents/carers to view the general topics their child is engaging in. Find out more here: https://about.fb.com/news/2026/05/new-supervision-tools-parents-insights-teens-algorithm/

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Zangi Private Messenger

Although we always recommend checking age ratings, it is important to remember that a low app-store rating does not mean it is risk free for your child to use. Zangi has a low age rating, but because it is a private, messaging app, you should be aware of the potential safeguarding concerns.

Zangi allows users to send messages and make calls without using their personal phone number or inputting any other information on registration. Instead, on sign up, users are given a Zangi number, which they must share with others before they can be contacted. The app also uses end-to-end encryption, meaning messages are private.

These privacy features can make it harder for you to know who your child is communicating with. A particular concern would be if a child is encouraged to move a conversation from another app, game or social media platform onto Zangi, especially if that person is a stranger.

The usual risks with messaging apps also exist as outlined in our WhatsApp article overleaf.

Zangi also has a premium service available at £5.49 per month, which offers features such as PIN protected, hidden chats.

We would recommend having clear rules in place if you are allowing the use of messaging apps. Consider creating a family agreement as outlined here: https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/digital-family-agreement-template/