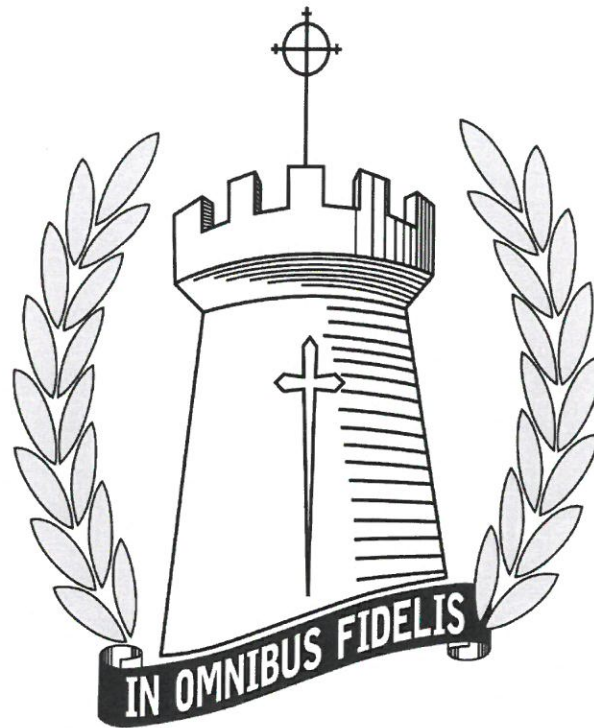


St Damian's R.C. Science College



Parental Information

Can your child Safely Use Snapchat?



What Is Snapchat?

In short, Snapchat is a “disappearing” messaging app. It allows users to send photos or videos accompanied by short text messages, which can be viewed for a short amount of time.

Snapchat is the fastest growing social media app, surpassing even Instagram, which has been ranked as the number-one favourite app for teens:

There are an estimated 82 million users, with most of them between the age of 13 to 25 years old.

There are roughly 350 million posts or “snaps” sent daily.

Four out of every ten teens frequent Snapchat.

Snapchat has equalled Facebook for its number of photos shared.

How Kids Can Safely Use Snapchat

Snapchat is an incredibly popular app among teens and pre-teens, and many of them gravitate to the app because Snapchat isn’t on their parents’ social media radar. 30 percent of Snapchat users frequent the app because their parents don’t use it.

The appeal of Snapchat is its veil of invisibility. Once a message or picture is ‘snapped,’ it instantly evaporates into cyberspace—supposedly never to be seen again. The idealistic illusion that those messages are gone once they are sent is a naïve notion that often gets teens into major hot water. While, yes, those snaps aren’t saved on the sender’s end, they can be saved and shared by other users. In fact, DMR reports that one million “Snapchat stories have been shared publicly.”

Snaps can be screen-shot by any user. They also can be shared and sent along in other ways. While the content disappears to the person sending the snap-chat, what happens after the picture or chat is sent is out of their hands.

Sexting and inappropriate photos via the app are so problematic that Snapchat addresses the issue via its **Community Guidelines** stating:

“Never post or send any nude or sexual content involving people under the age of 18 — even yourself” and “This includes adding drawings or captions to a Snap to make it sexual — even as a joke.”

The site also warns about the possibility that users may take screenshots of snaps or chat content...and Snapchat as a company doesn’t prohibit users from taking screenshots, although they do try to warn senders if a screenshot has been detected.

There are also Snapchat challenges or stunts that users like to chronicle for friends. To gain notoriety, one user attempted to jump off a railing to land on a nearby ledge. The teen died from the stunt.

Can Parents Monitor Snapchat?

Parents can monitor whether their child uses Snapchat through the Teen Safe app, but other than that there is no other way to view what your child sends. If as a parent you are going to allow your child to use Snapchat you should get on the app as a user, see how the app works, and send a few chats to friends. After you have tested out the app for yourself, you then need to talk to your child about how they are to conduct themselves on the app. Again, parents must be diligent in explaining the types of photos and content that cannot be sent via Snapchat.

The point that every parent must help teens understand is that Snapchats are not gone for good once they are sent...no app can make that promise.

Is it Safe for Younger Kids and Teens?

If your teen has a phone, they likely have Snapchat. The Terms of Service for Snapchat requires that teens be at least 13 years of age for an account. However, that doesn't mean that all 13-year-olds should have the app.

Parents should know what apps their child is using, and need to set out the guidelines for safety. Before allowing teens to download Snapchat, discuss and clarify all your expectations and responsibilities. Educate teens that no photo or chat is invisible. On the internet, it's safe to assume that every piece of information is forever. To think otherwise is dangerous.

Determining what age a teen should use Snapchat also depends on maturity. The app shouldn't be used by anyone under 13, and parents must respect the TOS...they exist for a reason. But an immature 14-year-old who has a streak of impulsivity absolutely shouldn't use the app. Good judgment on Snapchat is a must!

Key Safety Tips

Not all teens will abuse Snapchat, and some may even receive snaps and chats that make them uncomfortable. As a parent, you must instruct your child to tell you or another adult if they receive an image or message that makes them uncomfortable. It's always ok to tell.

Your Teens also needs to know that they should report bullying or other harassing messages to parents. However, parents also should empower teens to contact Snapchat directly. Victimized content must always be reported to the provider, and it is the direct way for Snapchat to help keep app users safe.

While Snapchat is the most popular social app for teens, the app isn't for everyone. The allure of disappearing messages lulls users into a false sense of security to snap and chat messages that perhaps they normally would not send. In the cyber world, however, nothing is ever gone for good. Teach your teens to Snapchat intelligently, so that those phantom pictures don't haunt them in the future.