Omegle

You must be 18+ to use or 13+ with parental permission. Omegle is a social networking/chat website that **connects two strangers** together for either a text or a video chat. Chats are anonymous unless a user provides this information within their text or video chat. Omegle states that "Omegle video chat is moderated. However, moderation is not perfect. You may still encounter people who misbehave."

What should I be aware of?

- No registration is required to access Omegle (therefore no age verification) and there are no reporting facilities.
- Users are given an option to save the chat's log and share the link. It is always possible for other users to take screenshots of text and video chats.

We recommend that Omegle is not used by children due to the potential imagery shared and language used which can be particularly explicit.

Net Aware rate the safety features of this app as very poor.
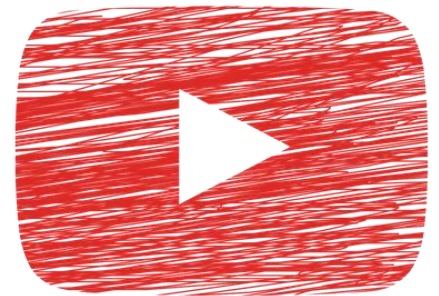https://www.net-aware.org.uk/networks/omegle/

This blog from UK Safer Internet Centre features further information including how to talk to your child about Omegle:

https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/what-omegle-key-things-parents-and-carers-need-know

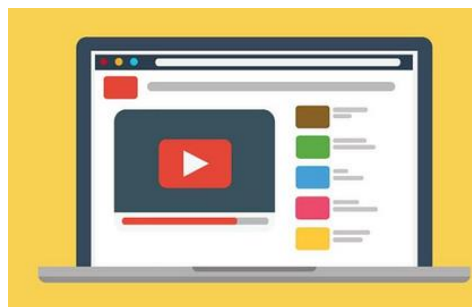# YouTube – new supervised experience (beta version)

YouTube have created a new 'supervised experience' for children who perhaps are ready to explore more than what is offered by YouTube Kids (YouTube Kids is still recommended for younger children) but are not old enough to use YouTube (you should be over 13 years of age). This new experience is managed by you by creating a supervised Google Account linking to your child's account.

The supervised experience is still in beta version. It offers three content settings which are as follows:

- **Explore:** For children ready to explore content on YouTube, this setting will include content generally suitable for ages 9+.
- **Explore More:** Content generally suitable for viewers ages 13+, this setting will include more content as well as live streams.
- **Most of YouTube:** This setting will contain almost all YouTube content (except age-restricted content) so it *will* include sensitive topics that may only be appropriate for older teens.

Whilst YouTube have systems in place to block inappropriate content, no system is perfect so your child may still see something unsuitable. Talk to your child about how to stay safe online and what to do if they do come across anything unsuitable (they should talk to a trusted adult). There are reporting mechanisms within YouTube so make sure you and your child know how to report anything inappropriate.

YouTube, along with several partners have created this family guide to supervised experiences:

https://tinyurl.com/4k8hdasj

Your Digital footprint

What is a Digital Footprint?
A Digital Footprint is any information that is available online about you (even information shared by others), for example, photos, posts, and comments that you have made. We need to support children in developing a positive footprint by encouraging them to think about what they share and that they have appropriate privacy settings in place.

Further reading:
Childline provide further information as well as tips on how to protect your privacy and how to delete things online:

https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/taking-care-your-digital-footprint/

Screen time

What is screen time?
It is the amount of time that we spend on a phone, computer, watching television or on a games console. Often, we worry about how much screen time our children are having and unfortunately, there is a lack of research to determine how much screen time our children should have. Following guidance released in 2019 by the Royal College of Paeditrics and Child Health (RCPCH), Professor Russell Viner, President of RCPCH suggests:

"that parents make decisions about screen time based on their child's development and health, and whether they are getting enough exercise and sleep. It remains a question of balance, as it is when screen use gets in the way or restricts other activities that a child's well-being can be negatively impacted."

[https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/rcpch-responds-social-media-screen-time-guidance-chief-medical-officers Accessed 20.5.21]

Further information:
- https://parentinfo.org/article/screen-time-should-i-be-worried
- https://swgfl.org.uk/resources/young-people-and-screentime-a-good-start/
- https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/digital/5-a-day/

Gaming apps with adult themes you should know about

This article also includes tips to help you:

https://www.net-aware.org.uk/news/gaming-apps-with-adult-themes-you-should-know-about/

SEND Online Safety Hub

Net Aware have worked with Ambitious about Autism to create a hub featuring online safety tips, advice and activities for parents/carers of children with SEND.

https://www.net-aware.org.uk/send-online-safety-hub/

What age can my child start social networking?

All social networks have age restrictions, it's important to review these to check what your child is using is appropriate for them. Internet Matters provide further guidance here as well as listing the minimum age for many of the platforms we see being used:

https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/what-age-can-my-child-start-social-networking/

The Reverse Selfie by Dove

The Dove Self-Esteem Project have created this powerful video highlighting retouching apps and the pressure to post the perfect selfie. It's worth a watch!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2T-Rh838GA

Nintendo Switch

Did you know there is a free Parental Controls app that you can download to your phone to link to your child's Nintendo Switch? You will need to set up a Nintendo account first to use it but then you can:

- view a report to see what video games your child has been playing.
- see how long your child has been playing for and set time limits and what time they can play.
- set which games can be played based on their age rating.
- limit in game communication.
- restrict purchases in the Nintendo eShop.

Further information

- https://www.nintendo.com/switch/parental-controls/
- https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/gaming-consoles/nintendo-switch/

Snapchat

Snapchat remains a popular app for messaging and sharing photos and videos. **You must be 13+ to sign up.** The app has some privacy settings which we would recommend you explore with your child and suggest why certain options are safer, for example, setting your account so only friends (rather than everyone) can see your content.

What should I be aware of?

- **Who is your child friends with –** talk to your child about who they are friends with and why it is safer to be friends with only those they know in real life.
- **Group chats -** in a group chat, there may be people that they're not friends with on the app who can then communicate with them in the group chat, which increases their risk of interacting with strangers.
- **Snap Map -** The map lets users see where friends are. Location sharing via the map is optional and is off by default (we recommend that it remains off).
- **Snapchat streaks -** Streaks count how many consecutive days two people have been sending Snaps to each other, this can increase pressure to respond daily.
- **Inappropriate content –** due to the nature of the app your child may come across content that is inappropriate.
- **Screenshots –** whilst Snaps disappear, users may take screenshots before they do, potentially resulting in them losing control of what they have shared as it could be sent to other people.
- **Bullying –** there is a risk of bullying on all platforms so please ensure your child knows how to block and report other users if necessary.
- https://snap.com/safety/safety-reporting/
- https://support.snapchat.com/en-GB/a/remove-block-friends

Safety tips

It is important to talk to your child regularly about what they are doing online and make sure that they know that they should always talk to you or another trusted adult if they have any concerns. **Please make sure the appropriate privacy settings are set up and your child knows how to block and report other users if necessary.**

- https://support.snapchat.com/en-GB/article/privacy-settings2

Further information

- Parents' Ultimate Guide to Snapchat: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/parents-ultimate-guide-to-snapchat

Snapchat Safety Centre: https://snap.com/en-GB/safety/safety-center

Houseparty

Houseparty is a face to face (video) social network available as either an app or web version. **You need to be 13+ to create an account,** however, no age verification takes place when you set up an account.

What is Houseparty?

It allows you to video chat with other users (your connections) as well as play in app quizzes and games with each other, it's designed to feel like a house party. Up to 8 people can join each room and you can join several rooms at any one time by swiping across.

How to lock rooms:

Once you are in a video chat (room), your connections and their connections can join the same video chat session regardless of whether you invite them or not **unless** you lock the room. So, if you do not lock the room, then a friend of one of your friends can join that video session. If somebody that isn't your connection is about to join, then you will receive a notice that they are joining the session. *We would recommend locking the room by simply tapping on the padlock at the bottom of the screen once everybody that you want is in the room/has joined the session.*

If you enable privacy mode, then every room you go into will automatically be locked.

Reporting

As with all apps, it's important that your child knows how to use the reporting tools within it. You can report direct to Houseparty if you see any inappropriate behaviour by tapping their name, then tap the "Friends" button and choose "Report" or "Report or Block". Ensure your child knows how to un-friend or block a person as well.

What you need to be aware of

- **In-app purchases:** One feature of Houseparty is the ability to play games and quizzes with your friends. These can be chargeable.
- **Content:** Other users may take screenshots/recordings of your private chats without you even realising and there is also the potential to see inappropriate content.
- **Strangers:** your child may encounter people they don't know (friends of friends).

Further information

- https://houseparty.com/guidelines/
- https://www.net-aware.org.uk/networks/houseparty/

Discord

What is Discord?

Discord is a social networking app that is used by gamers to **chat to each other**. There can be in app purchases through Discord's premium subscription service. The minimum age to access Discord is 13.

How does it work?

Discord is made up of 'servers', which are spaces for groups of friends to chat, upload files and share images etc. Anybody can set up a server and they can either be public or private. Users can video call and send direct messages to other individuals or to groups of up to 9 people. By default, all direct messages are scanned and explicit content is blocked.

How can I make it safer?

Discord have created this article, which outlines four steps to creating a safer account, including how to block users. https://discord.com/safety/360043857751-Four-steps-to-a-super-safe-account

How is it linked to other games?

Children who play online games such as Fortnite may use Discord to chat about the game (rather than the game's own chat facility).

What do I need to be aware of?

We always encourage you to chat to your child to see why they use different apps/websites and ensure that they know how to block users and what to do if they see any inappropriate content. It's important to be aware that Discord does include video/voice calling which cannot be filtered.

Discord is used by an array of users and therefore adult content can be found on Discord as well as inappropriate language. Discord have produced this article which answers common questions:

- https://discord.com/safety/360044149591-Answering-parents'-and-educators'-top-questions

Further information

These articles provide you with further advice illustrating the safety and reporting features:

- https://parentzone.org.uk/article/discord-everything-you-need-know-about-chat-service
- https://discord.com/safety