



Safer WhatsApp for Parents

Simple steps to reduce risk, recognise private-contact warning signs and keep conversation open.

The risk is not simply who has your child’s phone number, but who gains private access to them.

Before saying yes

If calls and ordinary text messages meet your child’s needs, it is reasonable to wait. If they do use WhatsApp, set it up together and agree how it will be used before problems arise.

WhatsApp usernames are a welcome privacy improvement, but not a complete child-safety solution. They can avoid revealing a mobile number, yet a stranger may still gain access to a private conversation.

The platform migration warning

CONTACT	MOVE	PRIVATE CHAT
A conversation starts on a game, app or social platform.	“Let’s talk on WhatsApp.”	The child is now in a more private, encrypted space.

Teach your child that a request to move a conversation is a moment to pause: Who is this person? Why do they want to move somewhere private? Should I tell someone I trust? It is not proof of harm, but it deserves attention.

Set up WhatsApp more safely

1	Use usernames carefully Use a username instead of sharing the mobile number where possible. Avoid names, age, school, location, clubs or a handle used publicly elsewhere.	4	Limit what strangers see Set profile photo, About, Status and Last Seen to My Contacts. Review live-location sharing and linked devices.
2	Use the username key Turn on the optional username key when available. Do not publish either the username or key on social media or gaming profiles.	5	Reduce unwanted contact Turn on Silence Unknown Callers and two-step verification. Use WhatsApp’s Privacy Checkup when available.
3	Limit groups Set Privacy → Groups to My Contacts or My Contacts Except.... Shared groups can create routes around some contact protections.	6	Use parent controls If parent-managed accounts are offered on your child’s account, review contact, group and activity controls together. Explain what is and is not visible to you.



Keep safety rooted in trust

Settings help, but they cannot replace a relationship in which a child knows they can ask for help without shame, blame or automatically losing their phone.

Agree these things as a family

● We do not chat privately with people we only know online.	● We do not keep online relationships or requests secret from trusted adults.
● We pause before moving a conversation to another app.	● We never send intimate photos or videos, even to someone we trust.
● It is always OK to leave a group, block someone or ask for help.	● Phones charge outside bedrooms overnight where possible.
● You can show me anything worrying. I will help first and stay calm.	● We review settings together as features and friendships change.

Warning signs worth noticing

Love bombing or fast intimacy intense attention, constant compliments, gifts or promises; “only I understand you” or “we are meant to be”. Notice when this quickly becomes exclusive, secret or controlling.	Moving platforms a push from a public space into a private chat.
Pressure to reply constant messages, guilt, anger or threats.	Disappearing evidence view-once media or requests to delete chats.
Sexual requests questions, images, videos or “dares”.	Control and isolation gifts, flattery, blackmail or attempts to turn a child against people they trust.

If something feels wrong

1 Stay calm Thank your child for telling you. Say clearly that they are not in trouble and it is not their fault.	2 Make them safe End immediate contact. Do not confront or negotiate with the person yourself.
3 Preserve evidence Keep the device, chat, username, number, dates and screenshots where safe. Avoid forwarding sexual images.	4 Report and get help After preserving what may be needed, use WhatsApp block/report and contact the appropriate service below.

Help and reporting in the UK

Immediate danger Call 999.	Police, non-emergency Call 101 or report at police.uk .
Online sexual abuse or grooming Report to CEOP at ceop.police.uk/safety-centre	A child needs to talk Childline 0800 1111 · childline.org.uk
Intimate images of someone under 18 Use Report Remove through Childline.	Advice for parents NSPCC 0808 800 5000 · nspcc.org.uk

A note about changing features WhatsApp is rolling out usernames, username keys and parent-managed accounts gradually. Availability and menu wording may vary. Review the latest information in WhatsApp Settings → Help and revisit your child’s settings regularly.