



How Teenagers Communicate

As parents of Year 8 students, you'll know that this is an age where children are developing independence, forming opinions, and exploring social media. That's all part of growing up. But it's also a time when they may not always understand the seriousness of what they post or share.

This evening, we're going to have an open and honest conversation about some of the content and behaviours we're seeing among some of our Year 8 students, particularly on platforms like Snapchat and WhatsApp.

The aim of this session is to offer guidance on how to build and maintain healthy, respectful relationships, both online and offline, and how students can stay safe in an increasingly digital world. We understand that navigating the complexities of relationships and online interactions can be challenging for young people, and our aim is to provide both students and their families with the tools they need to foster a safe, supportive environment. We've become aware that some of our Year 8 students are being exposed to, or even sharing, content that's deeply concerning. This includes misogynistic views, online bullying and sometimes material that seems to promote gang culture. It's important to understand that often, the students sharing this content may not fully understand what they're engaging with. They may be copying something they've seen online, or trying to impress their peers. But even if it seems like a joke to them, the messages they're exposed to can have real, long-term effects.

What becomes concerning is when content glorifies violence, encourages criminal behaviour, or involves targeting people with abusive or threatening language. Some music videos, memes, or group chats might seem like jokes or just "edgy", but if they cross a line—such as promoting knife crime, sharing threats, or demeaning others—it can have real consequences.

The law is now catching up with the online world. Things like harassment, threats, and harmful messages—even if sent as a "joke"—can be investigated by the police. And social media platforms are working more closely with authorities to take harmful content down quickly.

But our aim isn't about scaring anyone. It's about giving our young people the tools to make good choices online, just as we teach them to do in the real world. We all want children to be safe, respectful, and responsible online. And with the right guidance and support, they absolutely can be.



Where is this content being shared?

This kind of content is often shared on platforms like **Snapchat** – because messages disappear, and stories can be shared with private groups – or **WhatsApp**, where students are in big group chats with little adult oversight. There are also links to platforms like TikTok and Instagram, where harmful ideas can become ‘trendy’ or glorified.

Most adults will be familiar with apps like WhatsApp and Instagram but know less about the likes of Snapchat and secret messaging apps like Telegram, Calculator Pro+ and Yubo. There is a link at the bottom of the slide to an article which covers the most common hidden messaging apps that young people are currently using. We don't have any specific evidence of our Y8 students using these platforms but the more we know about the potential apps that could be used the better.

Text messages are now the most commonly used form of communication, younger children usually start with WhatsApp in Year 7, despite the age limit being 13, and as they get older more young people switch to using Snapchat. This can be for genuine reasons for example messages not taking up storage space or it being the platform most of their friends use but it can be more difficult for parents and carers to navigate and control. Apologies to any of you who already know all of this but I know many don't so I will try to outline the basics. Snapchat gives 3 main options for messages: disappear immediately, keep for 24 hours and keep for ever. Message receivers have the option to save messages or take screenshots of messages before they disappear (this happens when you close the message or app) but the sender of the message will be notified that they have done this which makes some young people reluctant to do this even if they are getting unpleasant messages. Snapchat users don't have to have their name as their username so it isn't always obvious who people are.

Why are we concerned?

Because the content some students are seeing can have a real influence on how they see themselves, others, and the world. Repeated exposure to misogynistic or violent messages can lead to a desensitisation – in other words, they stop noticing how harmful it is. There's also the social pressure to conform – to be part of the group, to not speak out. And when that content is linked to things like gang culture, violence, or degrading views about women, it can start to shape how they think and behave. We want to help them think critically and make safe choices.

With Snapchat in particular, disappearing messages make teens think their content is temporary, but screenshots, screen recordings, or third-party apps can save everything



permanently. This can lead to oversharing personal photos or information they might regret later.

2. Exposure to Inappropriate Content

- ☐ Discover and Spotlight sections sometimes show sexual, violent, or harmful content.
- ☐ Teens can also receive unsolicited explicit material.

3. Sexting & Exploitation Risks

- ☐ Because snaps disappear, teens may feel pressured to send risky photos.
- ☐ Predators sometimes exploit this feature to groom or manipulate teens.

4. Cyberbullying

- ☐ Anonymous features (like certain Q&A add-ons) can encourage harassment.
- ☐ Temporary messages make it harder to prove bullying happened.

5. Addiction & Mental Health

- ☐ Streaks and notifications are designed to keep users hooked, which can fuel anxiety and compulsive checking.
- ☐ Constant comparison to others' "highlight reels" can harm self-esteem.

6. Location Sharing

- ☐ The Snap Map lets friends see where you are in real-time unless disabled. This can expose teens to stalking or unwanted attention.

7. Privacy & Data Concerns

- ☐ Snapchat collects large amounts of personal data, which raises long-term privacy issues.

Responding to online safety proactively

When children understand what healthy behaviour looks like — online and offline — they're more likely to **spot red flags**, make safer choices, and reach out when something feels wrong.

In school, our online safety curriculum, is taught through our PSHE lessons. These lessons support children to:

- ☐ **Recognise risky behaviour** online — like inappropriate messages or pressure to share personal info.
- ☐ **Understand the impact** of online bullying, trolling, and group exclusion.
- ☐ **Protect their privacy**, digital footprint, and personal boundaries.



- ☐ **Report and block** unsafe content or individuals.
- ☐ Be **critical thinkers** — especially when they see toxic messages about gender, violence, or power online.

We want to raise young people who are **digitally literate, confident, and safe**.

Alongside online safety, we teach about **healthy relationships** — because relationships form the core of almost every challenge young people face.

This includes:

- ☐ **Respect, empathy, and consent** in relationships.
- ☐ How to **identify controlling, coercive, or toxic behaviour** — including misogyny and peer pressure.
- ☐ Understanding the **early signs of manipulation**, such as grooming.
- ☐ How to **communicate assertively** and say “no” safely.
- ☐ When and how to **ask for help**.

These lessons are age-appropriate and build gradually over time. For instance, our Y7 and Y8 curriculum focus specifically on friendships before moving on to look at romantic relationships in Y9.

So how does this actually help?

- ☐ A child who knows **what bullying looks like** is more likely to report it early — whether it’s happening to them or someone else.
- ☐ A teenager who’s had lessons about **respect and consent** is less likely to engage in — or tolerate — misogynistic behaviour.
- ☐ And young people with a **strong sense of self-worth and boundaries** are harder to exploit — online or in real life.

Education creates a **line of defence** before outside influences take hold. But we also know it’s **not infallible**. Young people are still growing, testing boundaries, and facing pressures we can’t always predict or prevent.

So when **incidents do arise** — whether it’s bullying, unkind behaviour, misogynistic language, or signs of gang influence — it’s **our responsibility as a school to respond quickly, firmly, and supportively**.

Responding to cyberbullying in school

We treat cyberbullying like any other form of bullying in school. We have zero tolerance and students are held accountable for their actions online. In accordance with the Education Act 2011, the school has the right to examine and delete files from students’ personal devices, e.g. mobiles phones, where there is good reason to do so. This power applies to all schools



and there is no need to have parental consent to search through a young person's mobile phone. The antibullying section of our school website offers a link to a QR code where parents and students can scan and report any form of bullying.

A parents guide to keeping your children safe online

"You know your child best. But here are a few red flags to be aware of:

- If they suddenly become very secretive about their phone
- If you hear unfamiliar slang or notice symbols or emojis that are linked to gangs or violence
- If their views about women or others seem to change, or they speak in a more aggressive or disrespectful way
- Or if they seem obsessed with money, power, or bravado that doesn't match their usual self

If you notice any of these things, it's okay to ask questions. You're not overreacting." If they get very annoyed by your questions it may be a sign that something isn't right.

"So what can you do as a parent or carer?

First and most importantly – **talk to your child**. Ask them about the apps they use, what they see online, and how it makes them feel. Be curious rather than critical.

Second – consider checking their devices together. You're not spying – you're supporting. Sit down and go through their friend lists, group chats, and settings.

You can also use parental controls – either built into the phone, or through apps like **Bark**, **Qustodio**, or **Google Family Link**.

And finally – model the values you want them to carry. They listen more than we sometimes think. Conversations at home about respect, equality, and kindness go a long way."

For Snapchat in particular:

Privacy & Safety Settings

- ☐ **Turn off Snap Map** → Go to Settings → "See My Location" → select **Ghost Mode** so others can't track location.
- ☐ **Restrict who can contact** → Change "Who Can Contact Me" and "Who Can View My Story" to **Friends only** (not Everyone).
- ☐ **Block & Report** → Teach teens how to block/report users who send inappropriate or harassing snaps



Prevent Risky Sharing

- ☐ Remind teens: **Nothing online disappears** — screenshots or recordings can make snaps permanent.
- ☐ Encourage a “Would I be okay if a parent/teacher saw this?” check before sending.
- ☐ Avoid sharing personal details (address, school, phone number).

Open Communication

- ☐ Keep conversations judgment-free so teens feel safe coming to you if something goes wrong.
- ☐ Ask curious questions like: “What’s your favourite thing about Snapchat?” instead of only warning about dangers.

Mental Health Awareness

- ☐ Talk about streaks and how they’re designed to make people feel pressured.
- ☐ Encourage breaks from the app to reduce anxiety and FOMO (fear of missing out).

Parental Involvement

- ☐ If appropriate, set boundaries (e.g., only adding people they know in real life).
- ☐ Use parental control tools (like Apple Screen Time or Google Family Link) to set limits on app use.
- ☐ Learn the app yourself — knowing how it works makes it easier to guide teens.

☒ Bottom line: Snapchat isn’t automatically “bad,” but its **design encourages risky behaviour**. With strong privacy settings, clear boundaries, and ongoing communication, teens can use it more safely.

Where to get support?

If you ever feel worried or come across something online that you’re not sure how to handle at home, please remember—you’re not alone. The school is here to support you and your child. A great first step is to visit our **school website**, where we’ve gathered lots of useful information and links to help you navigate online safety.

There are also some excellent trusted resources online that many parents find helpful:

- ☐ **National Online Safety** offers clear advice on a wide range of online issues.
- ☐ **Internet Matters** provides practical tips for keeping children safe online.
- ☐ **CEOP** (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) is the place to report any harmful or concerning behaviour you see online.
- ☐ The **NSPCC** offers free and confidential advice to parents whenever you need it.



King Edward VI School, Lichfield

So, whether you want guidance, want to talk to someone, or need to report something, there's support available to help you through it.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to us at school—we're here to help every step of the way.