

YOUR GUIDE TO Group Chats

Group chats are a type of communication involving multiple users that happen on most messaging platforms. While they have been around since the invention of online messaging (think chatrooms!), popular use has grown in the last decade.



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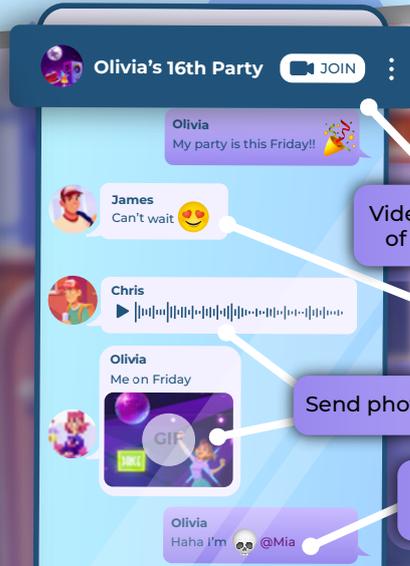
HOW DO THEY WORK?

Once a user creates a group chat on a messaging platform, they can:

Choose the name of the group & select a group photo

Set up the sharing and privacy settings

Add other users as members of the group



After the group is set up, users can:

Video or voice call all members of the group at the same time

Message into the chat

Send photos/videos/GIFS/voice notes

Tag other group members in specific messages

Who can be in a group chat?

Anyone can be in a group chat as long as they are a user on that platform. Most platforms have age restrictions (usually 13+) but there are not always robust age verification processes in place.

Why do young people use them?

- Stay connected to friends, family, or teammates.
- Send important information to multiple people.
- Discuss specific interests or events with others.
- Organise meetings for school, work, extracurriculars, etc.

More than 8 out of 10 parents



are concerned their child will be cyberbullied on a group chat.

The Risks of Group Chats

Bullying. Many young people have reported being left out of group chats, experienced bullying within them or have been made fun of in a chat they weren't included in.

Image sharing. Young people may feel pressured to share sexual imagery of themselves. Even if they choose to share an image with just one person, they may lose control if it is shared in a group chat.

Disappearing messages. A function of many group chats which allows users to delete messages or automatically make them vanish after a set time (e.g., on Snapchat) which can present opportunities for bullying or coercion when sharing inappropriate images.

Information leak. Being in a group chat could unintentionally lead to private information being shared, such as mobile numbers or live locations.

Stranger interaction. A young person may not know everyone they are in a group chat with, potentially exposing them to harmful interactions.

Inappropriate content. If someone sends in something that is inappropriate, it may expose a young person to content they were not prepared to see.

Excessive screentime. Some group chats might be receiving messages 24/7, which could draw a young person's attention at inappropriate times!

When using WhatsApp, images can automatically save to the user's camera roll, unless adjusted in the settings. This may lead to young people unintentionally possessing harmful or illegal images by default of someone else sending them into a group chat.

Group messaging functions exist across various social media and gaming platforms. The most common way 3-17-year-olds interact online is through communicating via messaging/video platforms.

The most used apps for this are:



The most important thing you can do for a young person is to ensure they know who their trusted adults are and that they can always talk to them without fear of consequences. Here are some other preventative steps that you can take:

- 1. Ensure they understand what information should be kept private.
- 2. Talk about appropriate behaviour towards others online.
- 3. Discuss the risks of sharing nude or semi-nude images.
- 4. Enable and review privacy settings together - use our Safety Centre to help!
- 5. Teach how to block, mute and report other users or chats.
- 6. Adjust auto-saving settings on WhatsApp.
- 7. Set family rules and screentime limits on devices.

If a young person does seek your help...

- Listen and reassure them that they have done the right thing.
- Include them in any decisions that follow.
- Screenshot evidence of bullying as soon as possible.
- Only ban the use of the platform where necessary for their safety.
- Involve parents or relevant staff if children are at risk.
- Contact organisations who can help.
- Do not respond directly to harmful or hurtful messages.
- If you believe a child is in immediate danger, contact the police without delay.

SOS

NEVER SCREENSHOT AN INDECENT IMAGE OF A CHILD!

