Wormit Primary School Mobile Phone and Social Media Policy

A first thought: as an adult, do you always feel safe online? Have you ever worried you are about to be scammed? Have you ever sent a message to the wrong chat? Or shared on social media and regretted it? Have you ever had a fall out with a friend or relative because a social media message was misinterpreted? During Covid lockdown, did you relish greater opportunities to be in touch with friends and family online or did you miss face to face contact? Think of the best and happiest moments from your childhood – did they involve a screen?

Background, Rationale and Aims

Prior to the writing of this policy in June 2024, the school policy on mobile phones was:

> *We do not generally allow pupils to bring mobile phones into school. However, we understand that there are occasions when older children need them before or after school e.g. because they are going straight to a club not associated with school. In this event parents should make sure their child knows their phone should be switched off and in their bag at all times on school property. We can't take responsibility for phones that may get broken or go missing. Please be reassured that if your child needs to speak to you, we will let them use a school phone.*

During session 2023-34, we had increasing concerns about our pupil's use of smartphones and/or social media (Appendix 1). At the same time, we were aware of national discussions around smartphones in schools and several members of staff had read and been influenced by Jonathon Haidt's research published in March 2024 – *The Anxious Generation* (Appendix 3). In response to this, we carried out a parental survey to get a clearer picture of smartphone use in our community (Appendix 2). We also carried out research into the national picture:

> Ofcom's annual study of technology use across Britain (published 19th April 2024) found that:
> - School children are increasingly online and given more digital independence by parents.
> - A quarter of 3 to 7 year olds now have their own smartphone. This is an increase from about a fifth compared to last year. The figure climbed to 59% for 8 to 11 year olds.
> - 51% of children under 13 used some form of social media. Among 5 to 7 year olds, 38% used social media, with WhatsApp (29% to 37%), TikTok (25% to 30%), Instagram (14% to 22%) and Discord (2% to 4%) seeing particular growth among this age group.
>
> Source: A window into young children's online worlds - Ofcom

Given our observations in school and recent research, we find the trend within the Ofcom study worrying and feedback from parents at our school suggests they share our view. Our aim is to work with parents at Wormit PS to support them to gain a healthy balance in their child's online world.

Consultation

This policy was written in response to parental feedback in a survey of March/April 2024 and in response to the national context and research. It was drafted in June 2024 and put out to consultation with the whole parent body and staff in June and July 2024. All responses were positive and so policy is now agreed and is in place from 21st August 2024.

Pupils were not directly consulted on the development of the policy but it has been written using research, knowledge and experience of the issues they face online. Now that the policy is in place, we will work to inform our pupils about it and support them to understand the reasons behind it. It is interesting to consider the viewpoint of those who have grown up in a world with social media and smartphone technology. Click here to read some views of young adults (in America) who grew up in the world of social media: In their own words: What young people wish they'd known about social media

Mobile Phone and Social Media Policy

1. Every family is different and it is not the role of the school to enforce a restriction on when a child gets given a smartphone. This being said, in line with views expressed by parents (Appendix 2) and the research of Jonathon Haidt (Appendix 3), we make a strong recommendation that no child at our school be given a smartphone until P7 at the earliest. This recommendation is shared with children along with a reassurance that the final decision is their parents not ours and that we understand there are reasons why someone may have a phone at a younger age. Staff do not ask children if they have a smartphone and do not comment positively or negatively if they mention having one.

2. We recommend that parents give younger children who are walking to school unsupervised or playing out alone a device that can make calls and send messages but which does not connect to the internet and does not have the capability for apps to be downloaded. This will allow them to keep in touch with home in an emergency.

3. We recommend that our pupils do not use a social media app or platform or a gaming app or platform which includes the facility to send messages. This includes but is not restricted to Whatsapp, Roblox, Snap Chat, Instagram, Tik Tok, Coverstar and Fortnite. We further recommend that no child has a YouTube account to be able to upload videos. (See Appendix 4 for further information about these apps and platforms). We recognise the right of parents to have choice in this matter and understand that some parents will choose to allow their child access to these apps and platforms but we ask that if you do, your child does not talk about using the app at school. We request that children do not bring items to school which are branded with these apps e.g. a Tik Tok pencil case or a Fortnite school bag. We do teach internet safety and we do encourage children to ask for help if they are worried about something they have seen online.

4. We do not support the use of any 'group chats' on Social Media Apps. We ask parents to ensure that their child does not set up or join a 'class group'. Any class group is not associated with school or monitored by us.

5. We do not allow children in P4 or younger to bring a phone (or any device capable of making calls or sending messages) to school under any circumstance. This is because children of that age should not be away from an adult for long enough periods that they would need a phone.

6. We do not allow children who travel on school transport to bring a phone (or any device capable of making calls or sending messages) to school as they are collected from home and dropped at school and vice versa. The time on school transport is not adequately supervised for a primary aged child to necessarily make safe choices about phone use.

7. We do not allow children to bring a phone (or any device capable of making calls or sending messages) on school trips as they are always in the care of an adult.

8. Children in P5-7 are allowed to bring a phone (or device that can make calls or send messages) to school only if needed for safety before and after the school day. Their parents will complete a form (just once) so that we know who is bringing a phone to school and they will be asked to follow this guidance:

   - if possible, please disable your child's phone between 9 and 3.05 on weekdays.
   - their phone must be switched off and safely stored in their bag at all times on school property.
   - the school can take no responsibility for any phone that goes missing.
   - if your child has their phone out of their bag on school property, they will need to hand it into the office and we will call you to come and collect it.
   - we ask that you check your child's phone each evening after school to make sure it has not been used in school and to make sure no photos or videos have been taken.

Any child needing to contact their parents during the school day will be supported to do so using a school phone.

Curriculum
We continue to deliver digital learning to support children to learn safe use of devices to support learning and internet safety is part of the curriculum which we aim to keep relevant and deliver to all children.

Anti-Bullying

We recognise the concern of cyber bullying. This policy should be read alongside the School's Anti-Bullying Policy which is out to consultation in draft form in August 2024 and will be finalised by end September 2024. Within a school based survey of May 2024, 32% of parents responding indicated that one of their children had experienced bullying behaviour face to face and 15% indicated that one of their children had experienced bullying behaviour online. 74% of parents responding indicate that they worry equally about online and face to face bullying, 16% say they worry more about online bullying, 6% say they worry more about face to face bullying and only 4% say they do not worry about bullying at all.

We agree with (and emphasise the importance of) this statement within Fife Council's Anti-Bullying Policy (January 2024):

"Families have a crucial role in supporting children and young people, and increasingly in managing the bullying behaviour associated with social media used outwith school, as well as supporting schools around mobile phone use within school."

It is our belief that this policy, if followed by all families, will significantly reduce the risk of online bullying in our school community.

Appendix 1: What we saw in school in 2023-24

In session 2023-24, we saw a worrying trend towards some children in the upper school coming to school not ready to learn due to negative interactions on social media (including games with messaging features) at home. Whatsapp, Roblox, Snap Chat, Instagram, Tik Tok and Fortnite causing the biggest problems. All of these apps are recommended for age 13 and above and not for primary aged children. The problems are not solely down to smartphone use as pupils can access these apps from other devices but the biggest problems seem to occur when children are unsupervised on a smartphone. It is our observation that children communicate through social media using words and phrases they would never use face to face. Social media gives a false sense of security and children are more likely to make hurtful or inappropriate remarks without considering the consequences of it.

This impacted on the learning of the children involved but also on the learning of others in the class due to the time it takes to resolve the issues.

Appendix 2: Parental Views

During March and Early April 2024, all parents at the school had the chance to complete a survey on their child's smartphone use and their thought on school policy. The survey was completed for 125 children, 27% of whom had a smartphone. The responses to a question asking at what age parents had bought their child a phone ranged from 4 to 12 with 9,10 and 11 being the most common age – 70%.

The most common reason parents gave for buying a smartphone for their child was to allow them to contact home in an emergency, then to help them learn how to use the technology, then to stay connected with family.

34% of parents said they feel in control of their child's smartphone use. 47% said they generally feel in control and 10% said they feel their child uses their phone a little more than they would like.

10% said they often regret buying their child a smartphone, 27% said they sometimes regret it and 63% say they never regret it.

When parents whose children do not yet have smartphones were asked about their attitude towards getting one, the most common response was 'My child doesn't need a smartphone.' Followed by 'I don't want by child to get a smartphone until they leave primary school.' And then by I don't want my child to get a smartphone until P7. 63% of parents whose child does not have a smartphone picked one of these responses.

The next most common response was 'I really don't want my child to have a phone but I know in time I will need to get them one because everyone else has one.' This brings the total responses indicating parents wish to delay the day they get their child a smartphone to 55%.

12% of parents feel confident that they will be able to understand and monitor apps when their child gets a smartphone.

3% of parents feel technology is a part of life that their child needs to learn about so they will get them a phone while still at primary school.

1% of parents are looking forward to getting their child a smartphone because it will be part of them growing up and they will be able to do things online together.

When asked about the existing policy, 78% of parents (those whose children have a phone and those who do not) were fully aware of it. 12% were aware of parts of it, 11% were not aware of it at all.

When asked their view of the policy, 73% of parents said they felt it was exactly right and they supported it. 17% said they'd prefer it went further and only allowed devices that and designed for children and controlled by parents. 12% said they'd prefer it went further and did not allow any phones of any type in school. Less than 1% of parents said they felt the policy was too strict.

60% of parents said they would support a strong recommendation by the school that children should not be bought a smartphone until they are in P7. 30% were opposed to the school making such a recommendation. The remaining replies supported a school recommendation but felt P7 was too late.

89% of parents supported the school giving advice to parents about age ratings on apps and games and asking parents to stick to them to avoid online issues preventing children's readiness to learn and happiness at school.

42 comments were left in total. A balanced selection are included below.

Conclusions from the Survey

- Most children at our school do not yet own a smartphone. The majority of those that do are in the upper school.
- Our parents are reflective on their child's smartphone use and are learning how to keep their child safe.
- Parents recognise peer pressure as a factor in getting their child a phone/their child wanting one.
- Parents get their child a phone because they want them to be able to contact home in an emergency – this does not need to be a smartphone, a mobile phone which does not connect to the internet or a controllable child's smart watch would give this same safety advantage.
- Parents get their child a smartphone so that they can learn how to use the technology – they can also learn this by using an ipad, tablet or a parent's smartphone under supervision.
- Parents get their child a smartphone so they can keep in touch with family – they can also do this using an iPad, tablet, laptop or device belonging to their parent(s).
- Almost all parents (99%) support the existing school policy with 29% feeling the policy should go further.
- The majority of parents support a school recommendation that children should not be bought a smartphone until P7. Other parents make convincing points against this idea.

Comments made by Wormit PS Parents regarding smartphone use in the original survey of March/April 2024

I am aware of children in the class using an app that seems to have an age limit of 4 when downloading the app in the app store but in reality it is not intended for people under the age of 12/13. The children can be contacted via this app by strangers and its very frightening to think some parents are not fully aware of this when allowing children to have certain apps.

My younger child can become very attached to her phone and I find the age group can be full of fall outs and drama. In hindsight my child is too young but would have been left out.

Children can become addicted to playing games on devices at too young an age to their detriment both in their social development and from a learning perspective

Any help the school can provide … is welcome - if we are all consistent with our approach we stand a chance of keeping the children safe and focussed on school work.

Also, I would be interested to know what the experts recommend is a suitable age for children to have mobile phones and the pros and cons of this. Any links to relevant research studies would be useful. This would help us all make informed choices.

The school needs to stay in their lane, there are millions of things you could start emailing recommendations about. Every child is different …

School should be smartphone free zone, technology learning can provided as part of the curriculum.

Setting a time age as far as school is concerned is very difficult, whilst I understand the sentiment I feel that individual circumstances and each child's own maturity/understanding of the technology is a huge factor.

Whilst I do feel it is up to parents what items they buy and what advice they give their children, having recommendations from the school can help support children to understand what is more widely advised than their own home

We will decide when our child has a phone. This will be dependent on the need for independence and probably coincide with when they start walking home or going out. This will be solely our decision.

I believe the use of smart phones at school is a problem UK wide and beyond. They can interrupt school routines and discourage children in their face to face interactions. As with online computer games (eg Fortnite) once children are allowed access to it, it is not possible to take it back.

I think the school's policy is good perhaps to ensure this policy is adhered to- mobile phone should be collected and the start of the day and returned at the end of the day to avoid filming/gaming or unnecessary usage in times where they "should be" switched off.

…happy for school to make a (soft) recommendation for age appropriate for getting a smart phone, but understand that different families have different circumstances..

My child is a part of 1 or 2 group chats on whatsapp. However (they are) NOT permitted to comment on anything unless (they) seek my permission first. I have read some shocking comments in these chats.

Advice from parents whose child has a smartphone to those who are thinking of getting their child one (Survey March/April 2024):

Setting boundaries from initial purchase avoids conflict if tried to implement later. Rule setting - all passwords/codes given to me. No secrets. Screen time limits.

Ensure as a parent you are fully aware what your child is accessing/watching on their phone. Make sure you are fully aware of age restrictions on certain apps and the reasons why they are set at a certain age. Do not let your child access apps that are not appropriate for their age. Check their messages to ensure they are not talking to people online that they do not know. Do not be pressured into allowing your child to get an app like Snapchat just because their friends have it.

Check their WhatsApp's!

… this generation of older primary school children are awful to each other online. I have read messages on WhatsApp group chats and regularly delete ones that are not very nice... it never has continued into school as the children are keyboard warriors. They would never talk to someone face to face they way they do online… It is a headache for parents however these devices are a way of life now and we need to teach our children to be kind at all times.

Pros, they have means to get in touch if they are stuck. Cons - social media, tik tok and Snapchat are not healthy apps. Lot of peer pressure to have them even though there are min. Age restriction. Ability for them to connect with others out with school on Snapchat and we don't know who, where and what age they are? All free time spent on YouTube shorts or chatting. Phone doesn't give kids break from school disputes or issues as they bring them home with them on Snapchat.

Avoid adding WhatsApp or social media apps. We added WhatsApp to (our child's) phone but it appeared that some of (their) friends were on it constantly and I felt (my child) was getting distracted, group chats are hard to monitor too so you have to watch who is being added into group chats. Pros are the connection they can feel with their friends that they don't see too often.

Be very careful about tik tok, it's very addictive and Snapchat, because of the functionality on this app it means other kids can always see where your child is and this can cause an amount of anxiety (you can turn off this function but that can also lead to anxiety) my older child has these apps but my younger one doesn't. I wish I'd looked into them both more before allowing my older child to get them. Also Google family link is great for controlling app downloads and phone downtime. But I'd also like to say phones can be a positive my younger child is much more in touch with (their) friends now (they have) a phone and I hear (them) having a lot of fun on group calls with… pals. It's not all bad but tread carefully!

Think about downloading parental control apps from day 1

Social media and smartphones have completely changed the world, if I could go back I would not allow myself to feel under pressure by my child being left out for not having the smartphone and iPad. I feel like the smartphone would be very useful come high school with them having to travel on school buses but for the social side of things no it takes there childhood away.

Comments made by parents on draft policy (now adopted)

We are 100% behind this draft Mobile Phone Policy.

Fully appreciated. I agree that use of mobile phones for primary aged children is not necessary and creates pressure among their peers.

We fully support this proposal and our family will adhere to the recommendations made.

I think the proposed policy is a positive step in handling the use of smartphones. I think normalising children having a a phone that isn't a smart phone but for making calls for safety and basic messages is also a good thing.

I generally agree with the comments and support the policy, which on most points mirrors our own attitudes towards our children's use of mobile phones.

I am in full support of this policy. Our child is (under 10) and we do not envision them having a phone until secondary school. Having this policy helps supports that and gives everyone guidance if they do need a phone.

I am happy with the extent of the policy and support it going forward.

We agree with the new policy and our only suggestion for inclusion would be to mention 'coverstar' which is also being used by children who are far too young - it is supposed to be a safe TikTok alternative for children.

This policy would definitely reassure us that a safe and consistent approach was being taken in school and would also help us to delay smart phone introduction at home.

…we're 100% supportive.

Appendix 3: What does Jonathon Haidt's research suggest?

A review of the anxious generation is included below. Haidt proposes 4 rules:

1. **No Smartphones Before High School:** Instead of smartphones, consider giving kids flip phones before high school. This approach helps them to stay connected for safety reasons without the distraction of a fully-fledged smartphone. (Haidt uses 'flip phone' to mean a basic phone with no internet access).
2. **No Social Media Before Age 16**: Delaying social media use until age 16 can help protect young minds from potential negative effects. Social media platforms can be overwhelming and addictive, especially for younger users.
3. **Phone-Free Schools:** Encourage schools to implement phone-free policies. Options like lockers for students' phones can help create a more focused learning environment.
4. **More Free Play and Responsibility in the Real World:** Prioritize unsupervised play and outdoor activities. Children need opportunities to interact without constant digital supervision, fostering independence and social skills.

After more than a decade of stability or improvement, the mental health of adolescents plunged in the early 2010s. Rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide rose sharply, more than doubling on many measures. Why?

In *The Anxious Generation*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt lays out the facts about the epidemic of teen mental illness that hit many countries at the same time. He then investigates the nature of childhood, including why children need play and independent exploration to mature into competent, thriving adults. Haidt shows how the "play-based childhood" began to decline in the 1980s, and how it was finally wiped out by the arrival of the "phone-based childhood" in the early 2010s. He presents more than a dozen mechanisms by which this "great rewiring of childhood" has interfered with children's social and neurological development, covering everything from sleep deprivation to attention fragmentation, addiction, loneliness, social contagion, social comparison, and perfectionism. He explains why social media damages girls more than boys and why boys have been withdrawing from the real world into the virtual world, with disastrous consequences for themselves, their families, and their societies.

Most important, Haidt issues a clear call to action. He diagnoses the "collective action problems" that trap us, and then proposes four simple rules that might set us free. He describes steps that parents, teachers, schools, tech companies, and governments can take to end the epidemic of mental illness and restore a more humane childhood.

Haidt has spent his career speaking truth backed by data in the most difficult landscapes—communities polarized by politics and religion, campuses battling culture wars, and now the public health emergency faced by Gen Z. We cannot afford to ignore his findings about protecting our children—and ourselves—from the psychological damage of a phone-based life.

Appendix 4 – advice regarding the apps named in this policy

The apps named in this policy (Roblox, Instagram, Snapchat, Fortnite, YouTube, Coverstar, WhatsApp) are all forms of social media and fit under three headings:

Video sharing

Chat

Gaming

All of these apps cause us worry in school based on research, manufacturers' advice and experience and we do not recommend any primary aged child use them. The online world develops quickly and soon new apps will emerge so as well as giving advice about the specific apps, we are also giving advice on the pros and cons of the three types of social media. The information being shared here is based on research and experience:

Video Sharing Apps – Negatives: these apps can lead to your child impulsively oversharing information, sharing an image or voice of a friend without their permission, sharing content you would not want them to divulge or making comments which can be misinterpreted. Comments which others post on their video can lead to misunderstandings, upset and even to problems with self-esteem and body image. Engaging with video sharing can lead to over concern regarding appearance. However good the privacy settings, nothing shared online is ever truly private and videos can be downloaded or recorded and shared without your child's knowledge and consent. And if you remove the video, you cannot be sure that this hasn't happened in the time it was up. Use of video sharing apps also leads to your child viewing inappropriate content without you knowing and forming opinions based on the 'influencers' they watch.

Video Sharing Apps – Positives: Making videos can be a way for your child to express their creativity and ideas. Once made, it is lovely to share these with family and friends. If you feel that is something your child would benefit from, you can supervise them uploading videos onto your account. That way, you can monitor the content and check there is nothing been shared that shouldn't be. Down time watching videos is something we all do but children are far better watching on a TV, where the screen is further from their eyes and you can fully monitor the content. Watching together is by far the best and watching something which requires concentration to follow a storyline of idea (e.g. a movie, documentary or TV series) is far more beneficial that watching short clips.

Chat apps – Negatives: Children can be added to a group without their knowledge and people can be added to a group and see your child's number without them knowing them. Their messages, photos and videos can be screen shotted, downloaded and shared onwards without their consent and even after they have been removed if they were captured while the post was up. These apps can lead to your child impulsively oversharing information, sharing an image or voice of a friend without their permission, sharing content you would not want them to divulge or making comments which can be misinterpreted.

Chat apps – Positives: These apps can provide a good way to stay in touch with friends and family who don't live locally and if your child should need to be off school it is a helpful way to keep up to date with the social scene! But your child doesn't need their own device and account to do that. They can use your device and account to make call and send messages, photos and videos. That way you are fully in control of who they speak to, what they send and when they use the device.

Gaming Apps – Negatives: – One of the worries with these apps is the violent nature of the games but even leaving that to one side, if the app/platform has messaging capability, it has all the same downsides of video sharing and chat apps. Sometimes parents feel less concerned as their child is on a games console not a smartphone but if it is connected to the internet and allows messaging then it is a form of social media. We see little impact of the violent nature of the games in school but fall outs online while using these games is having a significant impact in the older classes. This is not to say we aren't concerned about these games which normalise violence.

Gaming Apps – Positives: A few parents report that these games are positive as they allow their child to interact with friends outwith school time and that their child gets enjoyment from it. The positives of these games are not evident within school and, in our opinion, it is not a healthy environment for children to interact in.

Advice on the specific Apps Named in this policy:

YouTube – video sharing
The minimum age intended for YouTube users is at least 13. This is because the parent company Google and its makers have been rigorously filtering out the channels and have enforced the Children's Online Privacy Act. Children under 13 years of age are legally not allowed to create Google or youtube profiles. Common Sense Media agrees with the 13+ rating and gives the following advice: *Parents need to know that YouTube is a video-sharing site and app, and there are many videos on YouTube that may not be age-appropriate for kids… The site is entirely user-generated and relies on its community to flag videos that violate YouTube's terms of service (mostly for sexual content, language, and hate speech)… Plenty of inappropriate content can surface after typing in the most innocent of search terms, so parents will want to monitor kids' use. Violent and emotionally distressing pranks and stunts have been banned from the site, and conspiracy theory videos and disinformation videos are no longer getting promoted through search.*

Fortnite – Gaming App
The Fortnite age rating is PEGI 12 for Fortnite Battle Royale and Fortnite Save the World. Each separate game under the Fortnite umbrella has been given its own age rating, and the PEGI rating for Fortnite as a whole is simply 'Parental Guidance' with an exclamation point. Essentially this means that some elements of the Fornite Games may be suitable for under 12s but only if an adult is beside them fully supervising. Common Sense Media recommend age 13+ and warn: *The game does push players to make additional in-game purchases to acquire many cosmetic items, objects, and celebratory animations, though they're not required to play. While there isn't any profanity in the game dialogue, the game's online nature could expose younger players to iffy language from random strangers in voice or on-screen text chat.*

Tik Tok – video sharing
TikTok requires that users be at least 13 years old to use the basic TikTok features. Common Sense Media recommends the app for age 15+ mainly due to the privacy issues and mature content: *Parents need to know that TikTok is a social network for sharing user-generated videos, many of which feature music and sound effects. The app involves a lot of songs, and you can expect swearing and sexual content in some. Though videos viewed during the review process contained only some tight/revealing clothing, depending on which accounts users follow and what content they like, it's possible to encounter sexually suggestive and explicit material.*

Roblox – Gaming App

Roblox is a popular online gaming platform that allows players to create their 3D avatar, explore virtual worlds, and play games with friends. Like many other online gaming platforms, there are restrictions in place to ensure the safety of its users. One such restriction is age; only players over 13-years-old can join the Roblox Community – you have to be 13 to create an account. Once logged in, some of the games have an 'all ages' rating which implies that a younger child could play them if logged in via an over 13's account but content created by other users may contain more mature language or themes than what is appropriate for younger players. In addition, online interactions can sometimes lead to cyberbullying, so Roblox has an age restriction to protect those most vulnerable.

Coverstar – Video Sharing App

This app has been designed to be a safer version of Tik Tok for children. Although its security features are better, it is still recommended for age 10 and over and even then it is a video sharing platform and brings all the issues listed above. So we (Wormit Primary School) still advise against its use for primary aged children with the possible exception of P7s while being closely supervised.

Snapchat – Chat App

Users must be at least 13 years of age to create an account and use the platform in accordance with Snapchat's terms of service and community guidelines.
Common sense media recommends age 16+ and shares this information:
Parents need to know that Snapchat is a popular messaging app that lets teens exchange user-generated photos, texts, videos, and calls. According to the developer, users can place viewing-related time restrictions on the Snaps they send -- making them visible for one to 10 seconds before disappearing from the recipient's device. They can also now opt to have friends view them for as long as they'd like, and while senders will be able to see a record of it, recipients can also potentially take a screenshot of the image. Users can share their location and see where friends are on Snap Map and view Stories from users in various locations, but Ghost mode allows you to conceal your location.

Instagram – Chat App

The makers say: we require everyone to be at least 13 to use Instagram and have asked new users to provide their age when they sign up for an account for some time. While many people are honest about their age, we know that young people can lie about their date of birth. We want to do more to stop this from happening, but verifying people's age online is complex and something many in our industry are grappling with. To address this challenge, we're developing new artificial intelligence and machine learning technology to help us keep teens safer and apply new age-appropriate features, like those described below.
Common Sense media recommend 15+ and give the following information:
Parents need to know that Instagram is a popular social network available on iOS and Android devices, and the platform's core feature is instantly enhancing photos and videos with cool effects and sharing them across a number of other social media platforms. The terms specify that users should be at least 13 years old and shouldn't post partially nude or sexually suggestive photos but do not prohibit the portrayal of violence, swear words, or drugs. People must enter their birth date to use the platform. Though it's easy to lie, the platform says it will use artificial intelligence to determine if the birth date is authentic. Users can flag photos for review, but mature content still appears in some photos and in the comment sections.

WhatsApp – Chat App

13+ age restriction, recently reduced from 16. Common Sense Media recommend age 14+ and give the following information:

Parents need to know that WhatsApp Messenger lets users start video calls and send text messages, videos, photos, and audio messages to one or many people with no message limits or fees. Messages can only be sent to other smartphone users who also have WhatsApp, which is available on different devices. The app checks your phone's address book for WhatsApp users and connects you automatically. It also encourages you to urge friends not using the app to sign up. Privacy and security can be customized in settings, including a two-step verification feature uses a PIN for added account security and the ability to turn off location sharing. Users also have the ability to send disappearing photos, videos, and GIFs through the Status feature, which is similar to features on Instagram and Snapchat.

A final thought (ending as we began): as an adult, do you always feel safe online? Have you ever worried you are about to be scammed? Have you ever sent a message to the wrong chat? Or shared on social media and regretted it? Have you ever had a fall out with a friend or relative because a social media message was misinterpreted? During covid lockdown, did you relish greater opportunities to be in touch with friends and family online or did you miss face to face contact? Think of the best and happiest moments from your childhood – did they involve a screen?