

A Parent's Guide to Snapchat



Tops 5 Questions...

1. Why do kids love Snapchat?

Kids love Snapchat because they love talking to their friends. Snapchat is a spontaneous and creative way to communicate with unique features that are just plain fun—Snapchatters can send images and short videos called “Snaps” that can be drawn on or modified with tools like Filters, Stickers and Lenses. Snapchat is playful and “in the moment,” a refreshing change from the world of social media, where you often become the sum of everything you’ve shared.

2. What's the appeal of having your messages disappear in seconds?

Snapchat’s ephemerality mirrors “real life” conversations. When you go to lunch with a friend, the conversation doesn’t last beyond the meal — and Snapchat has managed to recreate that light, low-pressure feeling. Because Snaps aren’t on display anywhere forever, there isn’t the reputation anxiety or image-curation fatigue people feel in other services.

3. Does Snapchat have a minimum age?

Yes, the minimum age is 13, in compliance with the U.S. Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). Snapchat ask for a date of birth upon sign up, and if the birth date indicates that the user is under 13, they’re not allowed to create an account.

4. What are the risks in using Snapchat?

Some adults worry that Snapchat’s ephemeral nature will encourage people to Snap without worrying about the consequences, but most people don’t use Snapchat that way. They use it because it’s a fun, visual way to communicate that lets them be silly without worrying about what comes next. However, as with all digital media, there are risks in broadcasting personal information like location to strangers and to posting content that violates Snapchat’s [Community Guidelines](#). And users should know that there are ways for others to capture virtually any digital content, including “disappearing” images and video on Snapchat.

5. What's the best way to help kids stay safe on Snapchat?

A positive experience on Snapchat ultimately depends on how it is used. It is important to talk to kids about being thoughtful while using social media. Remind your kids that they should speak to a trusted adult when they see something that concerns them and to avoid meeting up with strangers, even if they have an online friendship with them. Parents should also make sure their kids’ privacy settings are set to “My Friends” only, as explained below.

Snapchat is all about fun and spontaneity. By default, the text, photos and videos you send disappear seconds after they're viewed – you get to decide how long your friends have to view them. One thing users love about that is they can share a moment that's digital footprint-free – they don't have to think about how their photos, videos or comments make them look to some unknown audience somewhere out in the future. Snapchat is “in the moment” - not so much about taking pictures to look at later in life (though you can do that) but to let people experience them right now and then move on.

However, as we'll show you below, there are ways to save what you share. So no one should develop a false sense of security.

Snapchat runs on Android phones and tablets and on iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch. In September 2016, Snap, Inc., the company behind the Snapchat app, announced its first hardware product, Spectacles, which consist of sunglasses with a built-in video camera (more on this later).

Snapchat's features

Please see <https://support.snapchat.com/en-US> for detailed information about how to use Snapchat's features.

- **Snaps.** Every Snap starts with a photo or video. Snapchatters can layer text, emojis, doodles, and more on top, and choose how long they want the Snap to be displayed (up to 10 seconds). Then, you can send the Snap to one or more friends. During a Snapstreak, a 🔥 emoji shows up next to a friend's name. This means you and your friend have Snapped each other within 24 hours for more than one consecutive day. Your privacy settings determine who you can receive Snaps from.
- **Stories.** Stories is a feature that lets you string Snaps together into one longer narrative that stays available for 24 hours. When you take a Snap, you have the option to add it to your Story. Each Snap you add helps to tell a Story in chronological order, the way you actually experienced it.
- **Live Stories.** Live Stories are compilations of Snaps submitted by Snapchatters from events and locations around the world. Live Stories might feature a local concert or sporting event or offer a unique perspective of a city or a news events.
- **Discover.** Discover allows you to explore channels from established publishers who curate their own content. The Discover screen in Snapchat also includes a selection of the day's Live Stories.
- **Video & text chat.** Snapchat also allows for one-on-one chat. Like Snaps, chats are cleared when a recipient leaves the Chat screen. But you always have the option to save a message you'd like to keep.
- **Lenses, Filters and Stickers.** There are a ton of ways to customize the look of your Snaps. Lenses add real-time special effects and sounds to a Snap. Filters offer

different design overlays, like the current time or weather. Geofilters are a popular way to customize your Snap at specific locations or events around the world. Stickers are colorful images and cartoons that give you additional ways to express yourself.

- **Memories.** Memories is a private collection of the Snaps and Stories that you choose to save and that don't disappear. You can use Memories to create new Stories and Snaps. You can also choose to store certain Memories in the password-protected "My Eyes Only" section, which is an important feature for parents to be aware of.
- **Snapcash.** Snapchat's payment feature is not for users under 18, but parents will want to know about it so nobody "borrows" their debit card to pay someone back or receive money via Snapchat. Snapchat partnered with Square, Inc., to enable users to link their Snapchat and debit card accounts to be able to make "peer-to-peer" payments (for things like paying someone back for movie tickets, lunch, etc).
- **Spectacles.** Spectacles consists of sunglasses with a built-in video camera. The glasses light up to show that you are taking a Snap, though this may not be obvious to everyone at first so if your kids are using Spectacles, talk with them about protecting other people's privacy by asking permission before recording them. You can connect the glasses directly to a phone via Bluetooth or WiFi to add videos to Memories.



Tips for you and your kids

- *Manage your settings:* Snapchat's privacy settings are important to understand. The default "My Friends" setting only allows users to send and receive media from users they have added to their friends list. We recommend that any minor using Snapchat continues to use this setting. For more help with this, visit <https://support.snapchat.com/a/privacy-settings>.
- *Personal information:* Remind your kids to be careful about sharing any personally identifiable information. Information like phone number, home address, financial and medical information should never be shared.
- *Saving Snaps:* Even though Snaps aren't saved by default, it's always possible for the creator to save a Snap before sending it or for a viewer to take a screenshot. One can even take a picture of the screen with another camera or use other tools to save a copy. So it's important to remind kids to never send Snaps that are illegal, could get them in trouble now or in the future, or would be embarrassing if seen by people like grandparents or college admissions officers.

- *Protect passwords:* Like all services, make sure your kids have a strong and unique password that they don't share with anyone. If someone has their password, it's possible for them to impersonate them or to compromise their account. For more on this, visit <http://www.connectsafely.org/tips-to-create-and-manage-strong-passwords/>.
- *Device-level controls:* Android and iOS operating systems offer parental controls for mobile devices. Use these to actively manage your child's phone usage.
- *Keeping it real:* Snapchat is a service designed for "real life" friends, but there are still ways for your kids to find people they don't know (such as finding their Snapchat username on other services). Remind your kids that it's not safe to meet-up with a person they meet online.
- *Bullying:* Bullying violates Snapchat's Community Guidelines and is not tolerated on the platform. Make sure to talk to your kids about why bullying is wrong. Also remind them to talk to you or any other trusted adult if they are ever on the receiving end of bullying or unwanted content. For more advice on talking to your kids about cyberbullying, visit <http://www.connectsafely.org/cyberbullying/>.
- *Nudity:* Aside from violating Snapchat's community standards, teens need to know that exchanging nude or sexually explicit images of anyone under 18, including themselves, can be a serious crime. For more on this, see <http://www.connectsafely.org/tips-for-dealing-with-teen-sexting/>

What to do about harassment or unwanted Snaps

If your child's settings are set to "My Friends" but they are still receiving abusive Snaps from another user, they should block the user and report them to Snapchat's Safety team.

- *Block another user.* Snapchat allows users to block someone from sending them Snaps. For more information on how to block another user visit <https://support.snapchat.com/en-US/article/block-friends>.
- *Report abuse.* If anyone receives inappropriate photos or someone's harassing him or her, contact Snapchat's Safety team by going to <https://support.snapchat.com/en-US/ca/policies-and-safety> and navigating to the "Report a Safety Concern" tab in the menu. In the event you encounter anything that appears to be illegal or dangerous, or if you have reason to believe someone is at risk of harm or self-harm, immediately contact local law enforcement.
- *Delete the account:* You can delete your child's account by going to https://accounts.snapchat.com/accounts/delete_account as long as you have the username and password. If you wish to delete the account without your child's username and password, you can submit a deletion request at www.snapchat.com/static_files/deletion_request.pdf.

Some closing thoughts for parents

Snapchat is one the most popular messaging apps that kids use, but new apps are popping up all the time. That's why it's important to talk to your kids and to help them develop critical thinking skills about staying safe in their digital lives: safety is typically more about how you use an app than what particular app you use.

As parents, it's important to keep the lines of communication open and to work together to figure out what's appropriate for your family in terms of safety, privacy, reputation and time management. It generally just works better to talk with your kids about their favorite tools – with genuine interest, not fear – because they're more likely to come to you when they need help, and you're much more likely to be kept in the loop about all the cool technology that they use and you get to learn about.