A guide to Snapchat

Snapchat is an application used to share photos, videos, text, and drawings. It's free to download the app and free to send messages using it. It has become hugely popular in a very short space of time, especially with young people. There is one feature that makes Snapchat different from other forms of texting and photo sharing: the messages disappear from the recipient's phone after a few seconds.

A guide to Snapchat: How and why do children use it?

Young people are using Snapchat for various reasons; the largest common factor is probably down to cost, once you're on wifi, sending a message with Snapchat is free. Traditional sms text or photo messages can be pricy to send; especially for young people who are on 'pay as you go' phones.

For some people text messages and posts on Facebook and Twitter are too permanent. Snapchat offers its users spontaneity to communicate without any long term consequences, a trait almost completely absent from most social media platforms where users connect with 'friends' in a one-up-manship parade of who went out to the coolest party and who has the best clothes. This perceived freedom from a trail of archived messaging activity is very attractive to teens as they strive to go, 'off the grid'.

The app boasts a large younger user demographic and for many teens the fact that their parents do not use Snapchat is a big draw.

Snapchat is popular as messages sent disappear within seconds

What are the Risks?

The majority of Snapchats are sent in a frivolous and fun manner with the most common topics for Snapchat messages being to document meals about to be eaten and funny faces to friends. The main selling point to young people of this app is the way images self-destruct and this has led parents groups and online communities to flag the potential for cyber bullying and sexting type activity.

We generally advise young people to take a screen capture of posts or texts they deem offensive or inappropriate. In the case of Snapchat, screen captures can be difficult to perform as the Snapchat app requires the user to keep one finger on the screen (on certain devices) to view the image. If a user does manage to make a screen capture, the sender of the image is notified. This feature could dissuade teens and children from even attempting to screen capture an offensive message. This could lead to offline bullying which most parents would like to avoid.