

Cotham School

Online Safety Newsletter

Academic Year:
2025/2026

Term: 1
Date: 15/09/2025



Newsletter Topic:

1. What is: Child Sexual Exploitation
2. Social Media: WhatsApp - Disappearing Messages.

IMPORTANT: This newsletter discusses child sexual exploitation, which may be upsetting. Use discretion when reading and sharing with children.

What is: Child Sexual Exploitation

It's the one area that strikes the greatest fear into many parents, carers and professionals. It's the one that people don't want to hear or talk about, but as adults it's vital we understand the reality of what is going on.

Online child sexual exploitation involves using the internet to harm children such as:

- Coercing them to take/share indecent images/videos.
- Befriending in order to meet up for sexual purposes.

This can happen when offenders contact children over social media, gaming or chat apps, gaining their trust to coerce them into sexual conversations or actions, often leading to further abuse. Offenders may also threaten to share private images unless the child complies with their demands, this is known as sextortion and commonly boys (14+) are targeted, often for money.

Who is at risk?

Any child of any age can be at risk, this is because many of the online services which children use have a means of contact. However, vulnerable children can be at higher risk.

Examples of vulnerability would include:

- Children who are socially or emotionally isolated/lonely as they will seek out friendships.
- Children who don't have much family support.
- Children with low self-esteem, depression or anxiety. Offenders can exploit these vulnerabilities by pretending to offer emotional support.
- Children with additional needs or disabilities.

IWF - Statistics

The Internet Watch Foundation is based in Cambridge, UK. They are a charitable organisation whose sole purpose is to remove illegal imagery from websites and to proactively search for and remove content. Their most recent annual report (April 2024) identified year-on-year increases of child sexual abuse material (CSAM). In 2023 they:

- Assessed over 275 thousand reports (containing tens, hundreds or thousands of images/videos) sent via 53 reporting portals around the world.
- 54% of these were children aged 11-13.
- 41% were children aged 7-10

Of the 275 thousand reports, 254 thousand (92%) contained 'self-generated' imagery. This is where a child is coerced into indecent acts on camera (often in their bedroom or bathroom), which is recorded by the offender.

- 98% of all imagery includes girls.
- Imagery of 7-10 year olds has increased by 65% in one year.
- There has been a significant increase of self generated imagery by 3-6 year olds. As younger and younger children are given access to smartphones and tablets, sometimes unsupervised, this risk is increasing.

Children get a lot of age-appropriate education in school about online risks, but children are children and don't always realise what is going on. As parents we need to be there to help keep them safe, encourage them to talk to us if something isn't quite right, and to support them if things go wrong.

Where can I go for further help?

If you're concerned about online communication with your child, report to your local police or CEOP (www.ceop.police.uk).

Learn about online grooming and child safety at Internet Matters (www.internetmatters.org/onlinegrooming).



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Social Media: WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a popular messaging application used worldwide. It enables users to send text messages, make voice and video calls, share multimedia content such as photos and videos, and use group chat features, all through an internet connection



Age Requirements:

13+ (reduced from 16+ in April 2024)

Key Features:

- Messaging and Group Chats
- Voice and Video Calls
- Media Sharing
- End-to-End Encryption

Safety and Privacy Features:

- Last Seen and Online Status
- Profile Photo and Info
- Block Unknown Calls
- Block/Report Contacts
- Group Invites
- Two-Step Verification
- Read Receipts

How to: [Use disappearing messages](#)

Disappearing messages is an optional feature you can turn on for more privacy.

You can set messages to disappear **24 hours**, **7 days**, or **90 days** after they're sent unless that message is **kept**. The duration you choose only affects new messages in the chat, not messages you've already sent or received.

How to use disappearing messages

You can enable disappearing messages for all chats or choose specific ones. In individual chats, either person can turn them on or off. In group chats, anyone can do so unless admins restrict this setting to admins only.

To set disappearing messages as the default for new chats, go to [Settings](#) > [Privacy](#) > [Default message timer](#) and [select a duration](#).

Note:

- If a disappear message in WhatsApp isn't opened in time, the message disappears, but [previews may remain until viewed](#).
- [Forwarded disappearing messages stay in chats](#) where disappearing messages are off.
- [Quoted disappearing messages might remain visible](#) after their time limit.
- Messages included in backups before disappearing will be deleted upon restoring.
- Disappearing messages aren't available for payment/order-related chats in some countries but can be deleted individually.

Kept messages

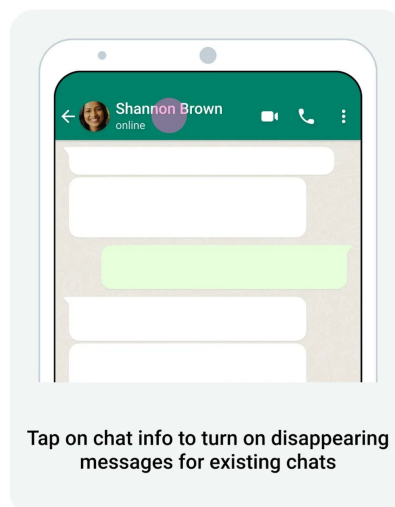
Anyone in a group chat can keep disappearing messages, as long as the set duration time hasn't passed.

- A kept message will be visible to everyone in the conversation and won't disappear when its duration expires.
- The message sender has ultimate control over who can keep it. [If someone keeps a message you've sent, you'll get a notification.](#) If you decide to unkeep the message, no one else in the chat can keep it again.
- You'll have approximately 30 days to unkeep a message from the time it was kept.

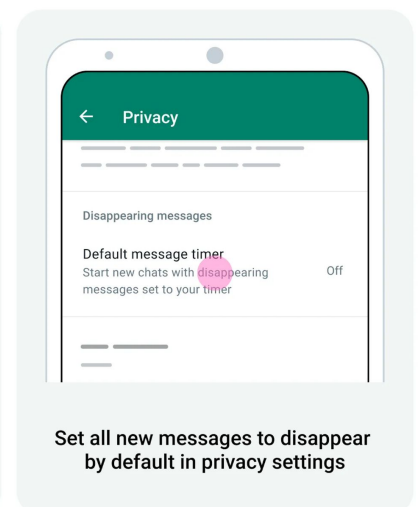
Link to learn more about [kept messages](#).

Media in disappearing messages

By default, any media you download in WhatsApp will be automatically saved to your photos. But **if disappearing messages are turned on, media sent in a chat will disappear and won't be saved** to your photos.



Tap on chat info to turn on disappearing messages for existing chats



Set all new messages to disappear by default in privacy settings