

Cotham School

Online Safety Newsletter

Academic Year:
2025/2026

Term: 3
Date: 12/01/2026



Newsletter Topic:

1. **What is:** Violent and Harmful Content Online
2. **Social Media Focus:** WhatsApp - Disappearing Messages

Research shows that 7 in 10 teenagers have encountered real-world violence on social platforms within the last year, with some exposure beginning in primary school. While only a small fraction (6%) deliberately search for such content, the majority stumble upon it unintentionally through automated recommendations or peer sharing. This includes everything from physical altercations and dangerous challenges to offensive language and disturbing imagery - a pervasive issue whose negative impact is frequently underestimated by parents and educators.

Key Risks to Understand:

- **Mental Health:** Can cause immediate anxiety or long-term distress, especially for vulnerable youth. Many hide their discomfort to appear "tough" among peers.
- **Behavioral Shifts:** May lead to avoidance (e.g., not wanting to go to school) or a dangerous normalization of aggression.
- **Desensitization & Harmful Ideals:** Older teens may dismiss extreme content as "normal" and fail to report it. Violent videos are often paired with extremist rhetoric that dehumanizes others.
- **Escalation:** Online challenges and conflicts can spill into the real world, encouraging imitation or physical altercations for social status.

Actionable Steps for Parents

1. **Start the Conversation:** Ask, "Have you seen anything online that made you uncomfortable?" Validate their feelings without dismissal.
2. **Clarify and Report:** Distinguish between "upsetting" and "illegal" content (e.g. real assault). Practice using platform reporting tools together. Resources like [reporterfulcontent.com](https://www.reporterfulcontent.com) can help.

3. **Teach Digital Literacy:** Discuss how violence is often staged for clicks. Encourage teens to critically assess what they see and to curate their feeds by muting keywords.
4. **Focus on Resilience, Not Just Bans:** Collaborate on screen-time rules instead of confiscating devices, which can drive behavior underground.

Recent Examples for Context:

Harmful and Violent AI Deepfake

Currently there are hyper-realistic AI-generated videos of celebrities or public figures suffering graphic, violent acts circulating the internet. They are now common and extremely difficult to distinguish from real footage. This content is deeply confusing and distressing. It erodes trust in reality, causes emotional harm, and desensitizes viewers to digital abuse, making violent non-consensual content seem normal. A high profile example involving Taylor Swift is linked below:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-68123671>

Social media platform X has been blocking searches for Taylor Swift after explicit AI-generated images of the singer began circulating on the site:

The Minneapolis ICE Agent Shooting Video

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cz7yv4524gqo>

A first-person video filmed by the agent who fatally shot a woman in Minneapolis spread online. The raw footage is framed by extreme partisan rhetoric from top officials, exposing teens to violence wrapped in intense ideological conflict. Parent talking point about this incident:

- Discuss how violent incidents can be weaponized online.
- Talk about how this video is used to tell two different stories.



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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: [Silence unknown callers](#)

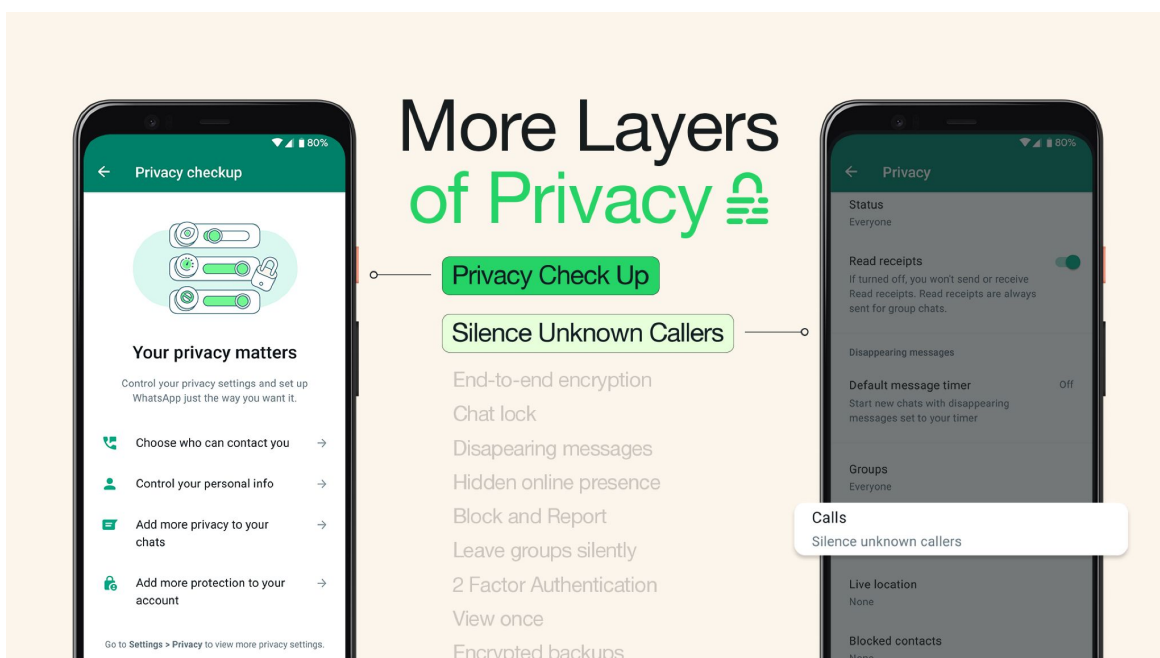
Anyone who has your phone number can call you on WhatsApp. An unknown caller might be someone you haven't contacted before or saved as a contact. You can block a phone number or silence calls from unknown callers by changing your privacy settings.

Silencing calls from unknown callers means you can focus on conversations that matter to you, while preserving your privacy and preventing unwanted contact.

Steps to silence unknown callers:

1. Tap More Options **:** (three vertical dots) > **Settings** > **Privacy**.
2. Tap **Calls**.
3. Turn on or off **Silence unknown callers**.

You can see silenced calls from unknown callers in the Calls tab and your notifications, but your phone won't ring. You can call an unknown caller back from within the Calls tab. Alternatively, tap the Silenced unknown caller message within a chat.



Note:

If you call or message the silenced caller, you won't be able to silence their calls in future.

You can stop receiving calls from other WhatsApp users by blocking them.