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Head teacher: Mrs Rachel Worsfold



7th November 2023

Re: WhatsApp

Dear families,

Over the past couple of weeks, a number of families have expressed concern to the school about Whatsapp groups which their children have been added to. Many of these groups have explicit or unkind names; have large numbers of children (not all of whom are known to the children); and have content which is inappropriate and could be perceived as bullying.

As I am sure you are aware, WhatsApp is one of the most popular instant messaging apps, used by over 2 billion people in 180 countries. It allows you to send and receive messages, as well as make voice and video calls. You can connect with people individually or join group chats where lots of people can contribute. All you need to set up a WhatsApp account is a phone number.

What people are less aware of is that in the UK, **Whatsapp is an app designed for use by young people 16 and older** which means that all children at Tithe Farm are too young to use Whatsapp. If you do allow your children to use Whatsapp, it is strongly recommended that this is done with supervision and that messages are monitored to ensure that content is appropriate. Monitoring content isn't an invasion of privacy, it is an important part of keeping your children safe and understanding the content which may be being sent to them or that they may be sending to others.

The NSPCC have published this useful information to support you to keep your children safe using Whatsapp:

Tips to help keep your child safe on WhatsApp

Get to know privacy settings

There are four main settings that you can use to help your child control who can see their information:

1. Everyone – allows all users to see your profile photo, about or status.
2. My contacts – only allows people from your phone contacts to see your profile photo, about, status, last seen and online.
3. My contacts except... – allows you to exclude certain people in your phone contacts from seeing your information.
4. Nobody – doesn't allow anyone to see your information.

The default setting on WhatsApp is 'everyone' but you can help your child to set their privacy controls by clicking the 'settings' cog and selecting 'privacy'. Here you can select each type of information and change it to the setting that you want.

To prevent children being added to groups by people they don't know, we recommend changing the group settings to 'My contacts except' and using the tick icon to select all contacts. This option means only your child's phone contacts, except those you exclude, can add your child to groups. But by

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selecting all contacts, it means that nobody can add your child to a group chat without first sending them an invitation.

In the same section, you can also switch off 'read receipts', which means other people cannot see when you have read their message. This might help if your child is feeling under pressure to respond to messages.

Make use of safety features

Show your child how to block and report other users of the app or inappropriate content. For information on how to block or report on WhatsApp visit: [How to block and report contacts | WhatsApp Help Center](#).

Talk about sharing

Talk to your child regularly about what they should and shouldn't share with others on WhatsApp. You can read more about this here: [Social media | NSPCC](#)

Remind your child that, even if they think what they are sending will stay private, others might save, forward or screenshot it. Talk to them about making sure others are comfortable with what they are sending and let them know they can come to you if they are worried about something they have shared on the app.

Set rules about location sharing

Decide with your child if it is appropriate for them to share their location with others and who they are allowed to share it with. You can disable location permissions by going into your device settings and switching off location services for WhatsApp

At Tithe Farm, the safety of our children is our priority. In today's technology and media rich world, teaching children how to stay safe online is a vital life skill which both school and families have a responsibility to teach and model. At school, we have filtering and monitoring systems which help safeguard pupils from any potential dangers; we deliver assemblies and lessons on how to keep safe and what to do if something is upsetting or worrying you online. As families, we need you to continue this teaching at home and monitor your children's usage and deal appropriately with inappropriate use of social media.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs R Worsfold
Headteacher

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