

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
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Snapchat

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— What is Snapchat?

A communication app that allows users to exchange pictures and videos that disappear after the amount of time prescribed by the sender OR after the receiver closes it, depending on settings chosen by the sender. Users can also exchange private chat messages that can be saved. Though pictures/videos disappear, they can be saved by the receiver via screenshot (the sender will be notified if this happens, but they cannot stop the receiver from doing so). Currently, phone calls can also be made.

— What's a Snapchat "Story"?

A set of photos or videos that [can be made public](#). The story is only viewable for 24 hours, but other users can view it an unlimited number of times during that window. (Recently, both [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) copied Snapchat by adding a story feature to their platforms.)

— What's a "Snapstreak"?

[A record](#) of how many days in a row two users have Snapped (not chatted) each other. It's denoted by the fire emoji and a number, which indicates how long that streak has been going on. If an hourglass emoji appears next to the fire emoji, it means that the streak will expire unless both users Snap each other soon.

— What do emojis next to users' names mean?

The emojis mark how often a user interacts with other users, creating a hierarchy of friendship. It's a private feature, meaning a user's friends can't see who that user's "best friend" is. Here's [Snapchat's official explanation](#) of all the different emojis and what they mean.

— Any other notable features?

The [Discover section](#) is a place where brands can post their own curated stories for users to view, as well as where [new original TV shows](#) made specifically for Snapchat are found. As is true for traditional media outlets, the content in this section is full of ideas, good and bad, but it's much harder to monitor what users are viewing. Also, one's "[Snap score](#)" is a measurement of how often one interacts with others on the app.

— Why do my teens use it so often?!

Snapchat is very private, and largely the appeal is that whatever is sent doesn't have to be permanently out there for anyone to see ([although this is never actually the case](#)). In addition, the communication style is quick and easy, meaning you can visually share an experience with anyone anywhere with a push of a button, rather than spending time finding the perfect angle and filter before posting, as is the norm on Instagram these days. In addition, there is [pressure to be "cool" amongst friends](#) by having a high Snap score, so more interaction with the app equals a higher score, which sadly translates to higher social worth.

Who can see my child's Snaps?

As with Facebook, users must “add” one another on the app to be connected—meaning each user has control of who can see their snaps and who can chat with them. However, there are other [privacy settings](#) that can be changed to ensure that only certain people can send a user snaps or view their story.

What are the dangers?

Sexting has always been [the main concern](#). The app also comes with many picture filters that can completely alter someone's appearance, [for better or worse](#), meaning a user never has to show his/her real appearance. This isn't a new concept, but when it comes to issues of self-image and peer validation, it needs to be addressed. Keep in mind also the residual dangers of a user's choice of friends: Anyone who uses the app to sexually attract other people, slander someone else's name, or even simply post vulgar content can always have their privacy settings open, so that anyone—[friend or not](#)—can view their Story. [This dad](#) also warns that the app can be used by predators to groom and lure users into sex trafficking. Finally, the Discover section is full of ideas (often highly sexual) from brands that could be influencing your child. [Buzzfeed](#), [Comedy Central](#), [Cosmopolitan](#), and many other brands may be subversively teaching your child how to view the world.

Can I see who my child is friends with?

If you can't log directly into his/her account, no. A user's “best friends” used to be public, but in keeping with its roots, Snapchat made that information private [in 2015](#). The privacy/secrecy is part of the appeal of the app for younger generations.

Is it bad to ask to be friends with my child?

There's something to be said for learning to speak your child's language and communicate with him/her in a way he/she understands. So for some kids, connecting with them on Snapchat could be the only way you can reach them or the way they prefer to communicate with you. However, younger generations are all about authenticity, so using the app without understanding its nuances and etiquette could actually bother your teens more than help you reach them. And being connected with your child on Snapchat doesn't mean you can see everything he/she does, so consider doing so carefully. If you're concerned about inappropriate behavior or relationships, a better approach might be temporarily revoking app privileges and having conversations with them about your concerns until trust is restored.

Can I access my child's account? *Should I?*

By having the username and password, an account can be accessed via the app or [by computer](#) (with some difficulty, though; the platform is designed for mobile, so snapchat.com doesn't offer much in the way of account use and access). Be careful—even if you ask your child to remove his/her account, there are [many ways to hide it](#) on a phone. As for whether you should access your child's account, absolutely. Especially when dealing with minors, parents are directly responsible for their child's social media actions, whether they have prepared and monitored them or not. The decision to let a child access social media does not begin and end with the creation of an account. Our children need help understanding how their reputation, habits, and interactions all have great consequences.

— At what age should I let my child use it?

Each child's capacity to handle the responsibilities of online interaction grows differently, depending on their journey. A good place to start would be asking them questions like: "What are the main reasons you want a Snapchat?" "Would you be comfortable letting me view what you snap to other people?" or even "Can we be friends on Snapchat?" Open conversation is always a great first step in determining if your child is ready for social media. Allow your child the opportunity to slowly build trust and be responsible while still making it clear that there will be consequences for poor decisions. Ultimately, social media is an earned privilege, not a right.

— How do I delete the app or an account?

Here are instructions for [deleting an app](#) (Android and iOS), as well as instructions for [deleting the whole account](#). But please be aware! Simply deleting the app from your child's device or deleting his/her account doesn't mean that he/she won't find ways to access it later. Many parents have mentioned that their teens simply login from a friend's phone or give their friends their login info so that their friends can use their account and keep streaks going. Or they will simply use a friend's phone to create a new account, though they will lose their scores and streaks and have to start all over again, which could do more harm than good for their relationship with you. Having a conversation with them about why you think they're using it inappropriately or how it's harming them could be much more beneficial than simply reacting out of anger or fear and making them delete their account.

— My child is sexting! Now what?!

First, wait 24 hours to address the issue. It can be a shock to discover your child doing something inappropriate or that you never thought he/she would do, but taking the time to calm down, think rationally about the situation, and ask God for guidance is worth it. Once you've done that, you *must* address it by talking about it. Start by asking questions and understanding his/her perspective and motivations. From there, show your child why such behavior grieves God, dishonors and disrespects others, and harms him/her. Often, teens engage in such behavior because of pressure to be like everyone else, to be "cool," or to keep guys interested in them. Usually they haven't taken the time to consider other outcomes of their behavior, so widening their perspective can help them see the action very differently. And finally, allow your teen to experience the consequences of his/her actions. Examples: Have him/her apologize to those impacted by the behavior, including other teens' parents. Revoke social media privileges until trust has been reestablished. Don't allow devices into bedrooms or behind closed doors.

— Final thoughts

Snapchat is a fun, powerful social media platform. As with any similar platform, there are many risks involved with allowing your child to be on it. But it's not inherently evil, and with the right guidance and wisdom from you, it can be a fun platform through which your child can connect with friends. Yet accountability is paramount in our tech-based world, and as the parent, you can establish good boundaries and practices that better protect your children. We highly encourage implementing a social media contract in your home, like [this one](#) or [this one](#). And for any boundaries you implement, help your children see that those boundaries are motivated by helping your children flourish and live the best life God has for them.