WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SNAPCHAT

Snapchat is a very popular social media app students often use to keep in touch with their friends and family, but it also opens doors to meeting strangers, and predators finding students where they are.

The "disappearing" messages feature of Snapchat makes it very tempting for teens and tweens to share compromising photos or to engage in cyberbullying, and the Snapmap feature sharing a student's physical location can be a scary thought for parents who want to protect their kids from predators.

Negative effects of Snapchat for Teens

1. Location sharing: Snapchat Map shares your EXACT location in real time with other users on the app.

2. Predators and unwanted contact: easy connections to strangers & Snapmap dangers.

3. Screenshots: While Snapchat's gimmick is that all photos, videos and texts disappear, users can still screenshot or save them. Once a photo/video has been screenshotted, this can lead to blackmail.

4. Screen time addiction: gamification of staying on the app with Snapstreaks. 'Streaks' tell users how many days in a row they have spoken to or sent snaps to one another. What's dangerous about this? It forces young people into putting a false sense of importance on a number, to the extent that it can cause a confrontation between friends. This can place an incredible amount of pressure on children to maintain their 'streaks'.

5. Bullying: makes it more difficult to trace since all of the Snapchat posts "disappear" very quickly, with no way to prove who is involved.

6. Mental health: creates unrealistic image expectations with selfie filters & editing, which can lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues.

7. Inappropriate or harmful content. Children and young people could be at risk of viewing harmful or upsetting video content and images.

8. Access to drugs - rampant on the app

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Ensure that your child knows that snaps can be screenshotted, and teach them that if they post anything potentially embarrassing or harmful the message can last forever.

Educate your child about the risks of 'sexting'. While it can be awkward to discuss this topic with your child, but if it helps them protect themselves, then it is worth it.

Turn off 'Quick Add' on the app. Explain to the child that this feature can open up their profile to strangers.

Enter 'Ghost Mode' on Snap Maps. Your child's location will no longer be visible to anyone. To enable this, go onto the Snap Map and tap the cog in the top right corner. Change your settings to 'Ghost Mode'.

Restrict who can view their story. It is recommended that children have only close friends and family on the app.

Report inappropriate content. If your child receives inappropriate content, it's important that you report it. First, block the sender to stop the messages. Then, report by sending an e-mail to safety@snapchat. If the problem persists, contact Child Exploitation and Online Protection at ceop.gov/report.