Online Safety News
June 2025

WhatsApp Chat Lock – What Parents Need to Know

WhatsApp is one of the most popular apps used by younger children.

But did you know WhatsApp has a 'Locked Chats and Secret Codes' feature?

WhatsApp's 'Chat Lock' feature allows users to hide selected conversations behind a password, fingerprint or face ID. These chats are removed from the main chat list and stored in a hidden folder, making them much harder to spot.
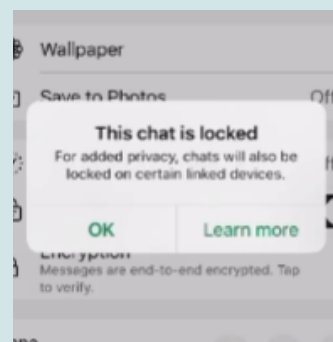
Why it matters:

- Children can use this to hide conversations from parents or carers, including those involving inappropriate content, bullying or risky behaviour.
- Locked chats won't show up in notifications, so it's easy for messages to go unnoticed.
- WhatsApp also offers Secret Codes, allowing users to access locked chats with a personalised passcode that isn't linked to the phone's main unlock code.

What can you do?

- Talk regularly with your child about who they're messaging and what apps or features they're using. Check who is in their contact list - anyone you don't know discuss with your child who they are and how do they know them.
- Check device settings together and encourage transparency around digital use.
- Remind them that privacy settings can be misused and that you are there to support and protect them online.

Staying informed about these hidden features is key to keeping children safe in a digital world.

Fortnite's New AI Chat Feature — What Parents Need to Know

Epic Games has introduced a new AI feature in Fortnite allowing players to talk to characters like Darth Vader using voice or text. It's powered by Google's AI and voice cloning tech, creating a highly realistic in-game experience.

🔓 Parental Controls Update

By default, AI voice/chat is switched off for under-13s (and those under the digital age of consent). But it can be manually enabled — so it's worth checking your child's settings.

Here's how:
Go to Parental Controls in Fortnite or log in to your child's Epic Games account.

⚠️ Why It Matters

- AI can sometimes respond unpredictably — including inappropriate content.
- Realistic voices may blur the line between real and virtual interactions.
- Voice cloning tech raises wider questions about digital safety and consent.

✅ What You Can Do

- Check settings to ensure they match your preferences
- Talk to your child about what AI is (and isn't)
- Stay involved in their gaming experience

More info and how-to guide here: Parental Controls – Epic Games

SAFETY FIRST

YouTube Shorts: The Hidden Screen Time Trap

YouTube Shorts — the platform's answer to TikTok — is exploding in popularity among children and teens. These fast, swipeable videos are designed to be addictive, often leading to much longer screen time than intended.

Unlike regular YouTube videos, Shorts can be harder to filter, and the algorithm may quickly serve up inappropriate or mature content.

It's important to know that YouTube's parental controls don't fully apply to Shorts. Consider turning off autoplay, setting screen time limits, and using YouTube Kids for younger users to create a safer, more manageable viewing experience.

Another great resource for making YouTube safer is using SafeVision

SafeVision is a parental control app that lets you manage and filter your child's YouTube experience by blocking specific channels, setting screen time limits, and creating custom video playlists for safer viewing

Understanding Your Child's Digital Footprint

Every photo they post, comment they leave, or account they create contributes to your child's digital footprint — a permanent online record that can shape how others see them now and in the future. From school applications to future job opportunities, what's shared today can resurface years down the line.

Help your child build a positive digital reputation by encouraging them to pause before posting, think critically about what they share, and regularly review their privacy settings. **Remind them: the internet remembers, even when we forget.**