

# Online Safety News

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## AI Chatbots & Companions

In simple terms, AI is technology that can learn from information and perform tasks and respond in ways that can feel human. One of the most common ways children may encounter AI is through **chatbots**.

### What are chatbots?



Chatbots are computer programs designed to hold conversations. They can answer questions, help with homework, tell stories or simply chat back and forth. Children may come across them through apps, games, websites, search tools, or schoolwork – often without realising they're interacting with AI. Did you know Snapchat has its own chatbot – My AI?

Many chatbots are **easy to access and don't have strong age restrictions**, which means even primary-aged children can use them.

### Why does this matter?

A quick search on the App Store for 'AI Chat' and you will see hundreds of apps, many rated 17+. Unsupervised use isn't suitable for younger children. Risks can include:

- ! Incorrect or inappropriate information
- ! Exposure to adult topics
- ! Children treating chatbots like real friends and forming emotional attachments

### How can parents help keep children safer?



- ✓ **Talk about it** – ask what children have seen or used and keep conversations open
- ✓ **Supervise device use**, especially in shared family spaces
- ✓ **Use parental controls and safe search** where possible. Ensure your child has the right date of birth on any device and all apps have to be approved before they can be downloaded.
- ✓ **Explain clearly** that chatbots aren't real people and can make mistakes. Highlight the importance of verifying what they see online.
- ✓ **Encourage children to come to trusted adults** with worries or big questions

The NSPCC has further information and support available: [Artificial intelligence safety tips for parents | NSPCC](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/artificial-intelligence-safety-tips-for-parents/)



- ! Sharing personal information without understanding privacy
- ! Over-reliance on AI for answers instead of thinking for themselves

Chatbots are not people, and they don't always get things right, appropriate, or safe – something children may struggle to understand.

## Why the correct age on your child's device matters

The age set on a child's device plays a much bigger role in their online safety than many parents realise:

- ✓ The age set on a device controls **what content your child can see**
- ✓ Safety features, filters and parental controls **rely on accurate age settings**
- ✓ Setting an older age can **switch off important protections**
- ✓ Some apps unlock **adult features** based on age alone
- ✓ Correct age settings help limit **inappropriate content, contact and ads**

It's also important to remember that not all age settings on apps are appropriate. There are face and body editing apps rated 4+ on the App Store, so always check what apps have been downloaded and set a device to require approval.



## Snapchat AI Setting Parents Need to Know About

As more social media platforms introduce AI, they all rely on one key thing: **data**. In many cases, that data can include children's content — especially anything posted publicly.

On Snapchat (13+) a setting is switched on by default that may allow public photos, videos, voice notes and text to be used to train its AI tools. Most parents — and many young people — aren't aware this setting exists, and it's easy to miss.

Hidden inside Snapchat's privacy menu is an option called "*Allow Use of Public Content*".



### Generative AI Settings

#### Allow use of Public Content

Let Snap use public content you've shared (such as images, videos, audio and text from Spotlights, Public Stories and Snap Map Snaps) to develop and improve Snap's generative AI technology. This can help improve the quality and safety of our generative AI models for all Snapchatters.



When this is turned on and it is by default, Snapchat can use anything your young person shares publicly such as:

- Public Stories
- Snap Map updates
- Spotlight videos
- Other public posts

This public content can then be fed into the platform's generative AI systems to help improve features within the app.

#### How to Check and Turn Off the Setting



If you want to review this together with your child, it only takes a minute.



Open Snapchat → Settings → My Privacy and Data → Generative AI Settings → Toggle off "Allow Use of Public Content."

This is a great opportunity for a chilled chat about how AI works, why platforms collect data and how your young person can stay in control of what they share online.



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