

Snapchat is 13+ but it is always talked about when I go into primary schools. Just yesterday I had pupils from as young as year 3 and 4 telling me how they use Snapchat.

The risks and dangers are wide ranging within Snapchat - almost everything about it is designed to be sneaky and remove or hide any trail of activity from messages, to pictures.

But their Snap Map feature, which is widely used by millions of children and teens, is often overlooked in terms of the potential risks. So I wanted to highlight these to you today.

- Snap Map is a built-in location-sharing feature that shows your child's real-time location on a map to everyone on their Snapchat friends list, every time the app is open. A newer add-on called Ghost Trails goes even further, **showing where they have been over the previous 24 hours**. Of all the new features available with Snapchat Plus, this one is probably bound to cause the most drama.

Here is what you need to know:

The risks are not just about strangers. They include:

- **Predators who pose as friends** or friends of friends can, once added, see your child's live location and build a picture of their routines, school journey, and home area. **Real-Time Tracking and Stalking** becomes very easy!
- **Social pressure** means many children feel they cannot turn the feature off without their peers questioning where they are or why they have gone "off the map" (I am seeing this a lot!)
- Even with location shared only with friends, that information can be screenshotted or passed on further by those friends
Repeated location patterns over time can allow someone to piece together very specific personal information, even without a street address being directly visible
- **Harassment** can escalate when someone knows where a child physically is. There have been a number of cases where a child has been tracked by bullies with horrendous outcomes.

Here are a few simple things you can do today:

1. **Delay Snapchat as long as possible.** It is currently 13+ and according to reports from the NSPCC and Police it is the number one platform for grooming. This makes it even more dangerous for any children or teens with SEND needs.

If you have a teen who does use Snapchat:

1. **Open Snapchat with your child and check Ghost Mode is enabled** (tap the map icon, then the settings cog in the top right corner). This hides their location from everyone and they can decide who can see it.

2. **Look at who is on their friends list.** Snap Map shares location with all of them, including anyone added through Snapchat's Quick Add suggestions, which can surface strangers. Many kids using Snapchat have hundreds, some into the thousands of 'friends' on Snapchat - many of them able to see where that child is at anytime.

3. **Have a calm conversation about it.** Ask your child: "Did you know your location is visible to everyone you have added?" This often opens up a much bigger conversation around privacy and personal space. This works both ways so....

4. **Check who your child is tracking** - there is a really unhealthy, toxic culture forming where it is considered 'normal' to track and be tracked with and by your friends 24/7 and that is a huge concern.