



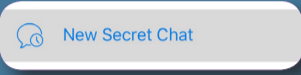
Telegram is a free messaging service which is very similar to WhatsApp. Users can message each other as well as send images, videos, audio clips and other files using end to end encryption. People can also create groups and broadcast messages to a worldwide audience. Telegram differentiates itself from WhatsApp due to operating via a cloud-based system which means users can access the app across any device and can share and receive much bigger files. It also prides itself as being faster and more secure than any other messaging app on the market.



What parents need to know about TELEGRAM



SECRET CHATS



Telegram gives users the ability to chat both publicly and in private. The so called 'Secret Chat' option allows two users to chat in private with added security features. Messages can be timed to 'self-destruct' in a similar way to how Snapchat works and no record of the conversation itself is held by Telegram. This means children could speak to strangers in extremely private circumstances with no trace of the content available, should parents wish to check.

CREATING A PUBLIC USERNAME

On initial sign-up, Telegram asks users for their phone number, as well as their first and last name in order to create their profile. Public access to these can be restricted via the privacy settings. However, users also have the option to create a public username for their profile which makes it possible for others to find them via a contact search under 'global results'. This means that people could send messages to your child, even though they don't know their number.

NO MINIMUM AGE VALIDATION

Telegram provide a 16+ age rating for users which is reinforced by Apple who provide a minimum age rating of 17+. However, Telegram provide no way of checking that users are over the recommended age limit and all that children need to sign up is access to a mobile phone.



RISK OF HACKING

Although Telegram allows users to log in on any device and continue conversations seamlessly, this also presents a risk on shared devices, such as laptops, PC or tablets, particularly if users log in on public access devices. Unless added security features are enabled or your child logs out of each device, individuals could easily impersonate your child and send messages or view content which could embarrass them or violate their privacy.



FORWARDING YOUR MESSAGES

Unless chats are secret, every message that your child posts on Telegram can be forwarded on to other chats, groups or channels. These forwarded messages also share a link to your child's profile and give the recipient the ability to contact your child despite not knowing who they are. This again raises the possibility of your child speaking with complete strangers.



ACCESS TO ILLEGAL CONTENT AND PORNOGRAPHY

One of the unique features of Telegram is the ability for users to create their own content. This could be in the way of sticker sets, bots or channels, all of which can be made publicly available to everyone. As this content is user generated, some of it may be adult themed, sexual in nature or illegal and can be easily accessed by users before any attempt is made to remove it. Indeed, Telegram has previously been labelled as the messaging service of choice for terrorists and was removed from the app store temporarily in 2018 for hosting child pornography.



TELEGRAM GROUPS AND CYBERBULLYING * # " @ % \$

Telegram groups can have up to 200,000 members each and can be restricted to just friends and family or can be made public for anybody around the world to join. The admin(s) of the group retain the majority of control and have the option to set group permissions, including disabling others members ability to post messages. Whilst this could be used to help regulate and block people posting inappropriate content, it could also be abused by others if a child is being bullied or has been subject to offensive material in a group chat and is prevented from replying.



Top Tips For Parents

1 ACTIVATE PRIVACY CONTROLS



There are a number of privacy controls within Telegram that can help make your child's experience of the app safer. This includes restricting who can see your child's mobile number, profile photo and when they were last seen online. There are three options - everybody, my contacts and nobody. Limiting your child's visibility to just close family and friends can ensure they are less likely to be contacted by strangers.

2 TALK ABOUT SHARING DATA



As with many messaging services, children can be tricked or manipulated into sharing personal information with others, including sexual images or videos. Once distributed, there is often no control over who this can be sent to. Speaking to your child about protecting their personal data and educating them on the dangers of sharing images and videos with strangers will help them to spot potential dangers and alert you to any possible misuse.

3 SET UP A PASSCODE FOR CHATS



Telegram can be used on any device, including PC's, laptops and tablets. Unless your child logs out of Telegram after each session, if the device is lost or stolen, somebody else may be able to access their account. In order to protect your child's privacy, parents can set up a passcode for chats within the Privacy and Security setting which can be used to lock chats after your child finishes using the app.



4 BLOCK ABUSIVE USERS



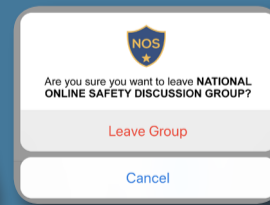
If your child is receiving harmful or abusive messages from certain users, then they can block them. This means those users will be unable to message your child, add them to groups, see their profile pictures or know when they are online or were last seen online. Users can be added to a 'blocked' list via the Privacy and Security tab.



5 LEAVE GROUPS



If your child is part of a group or channel which is making them feel uncomfortable or within which they are receiving nasty messages, then they can leave that group by clicking on the group name and selecting the option to leave.



6 DELETE MESSAGES



On occasions your child may send a message to the wrong group or realise they have made a mistake shortly after sending. Telegram offers the opportunity to delete messages in private and group chats by simply holding down on the message and confirming delete. In one-on-one chats, users can clear the entire chat history for both ends, leaving no trace of the conversation. It should be noted however that screenshots could have been taken.

7 REPORT ILLEGAL CONTENT



Whilst Telegram does not act on content within group or private chats, any publicly available sticker sets, bots or channels which are believed to be illegal or inappropriate can be reported to Telegram. This can be done via email or by using the report button within the app itself.



Meet our expert

Pete Badh is a writer with over 10+ years in research and analysis. Working within a specialist area for West Yorkshire Police, Pete has contributed work which has been pivotal in successfully winning high profile cases in court as well as writing as a subject matter expert for industry handbooks.



SOURCES:
<https://www.telegram.org>