



# Thurlstone Primary School

## SPOTLIGHT ON



EDITION 3

# SAFEGUARDING

What Is Chatbot?



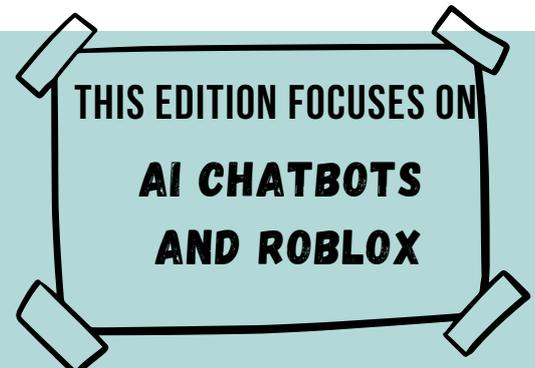
Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbots – such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini and others are becoming more common in everyday life. Children may encounter them at school, in games or even through websites and apps. While these tools can be useful and fun, it's important for parents to understand how they work, the potential risks and how to keep children safe.

AI chatbots are computer programmes that can hold a conversation with a person.

They can:

- answer questions (e.g. helping with homework or explaining a tricky topic).
- spark creativity (e.g. helping write a poem, story or quiz).
- support hobbies and interests (e.g. generating recipe ideas, sports facts or coding tips).
- provide entertainment (e.g. riddles, jokes or role-play style games).

Used wisely, chatbots can be a helpful tool for learning and fun.



**When conversations can become concerning**  
Although conversations may start out innocent, there are risks to be aware of:

- **Unpredictable responses:** chatbots sometimes give inaccurate, confusing or inappropriate information.
- **Role-play risks:** a child may ask the chatbot to pretend to be a friend, character or even a parent figure. This can blur the line between fantasy and reality.
- **Sensitive topics:** children may explore personal worries with a chatbot and the answers they receive might not always be supportive, accurate or safe.
- **Over-reliance:** a child might start turning to a chatbot for advice instead of trusted adults.

**KEY MESSAGE: AI CHATBOTS CAN BE A USEFUL TOOL, BUT THEY ARE NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR SAFE, SUPPORTIVE HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS. WITH GUIDANCE, SUPERVISION AND OPEN CONVERSATIONS, PARENTS CAN HELP CHILDREN EXPLORE THIS TECHNOLOGY IN A SAFE AND BALANCED WAY.**

**GROW TOGETHER: LEARN TOGETHER: FEEL LOVED.**

**YOUR CHILD SAFE WHEN USING AI CHATBOTS**

- TALK TOGETHER**  
Ask your child if they've used a chatbot and what for. Show interest in their curiosity.
- SET AGE-APPROPRIATE LIMITS**  
Many chatbots are designed for older users. For younger children, supervised use is best.
- USE CHILD-FRIENDLY VERSIONS**  
Some companies are developing age-appropriate AI tools with stricter safety filters.
- ENCOURAGE CRITICAL THINKING**  
Remind children that not everything the chatbot says is true. Check facts together.
- PRIORITISE PEOPLE OVER TECHNOLOGY**  
Reassure your child that if they are worried, upset or have questions, they should always talk to a trusted adult.



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## SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING



### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU SUSPECT A CHILD COULD BE AT RISK OF HARM?

If the child is in danger Call 999 or 0114 2202020

If your call is not urgent, you can do the following:

Contact Barnsley social care on 01226 772423. Their offices are open between Monday and Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Lots more information is available by visiting....

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-young-people-and-families/safeguarding-families-in-barnsley/safeguarding-children-in-barnsley/safeguarding-information-for-parents-and-carers/>

### WHAT IS ROBLOX?

**A GAMING PLATFORM – MILLIONS OF USER-MADE GAMES ('EXPERIENCES') TO EXPLORE, FROM OBSTACLE COURSES TO ROLE-PLAY ADVENTURES.**

**A SOCIAL SPACE – PLAYERS CAN CHAT, MAKE FRIENDS AND JOIN GROUPS, MAKING IT AS MUCH ABOUT SOCIALISING AS GAMING.**

**A CREATIVE TOOL – CHILDREN CAN DESIGN THEIR OWN GAMES AND CHARACTERS, SOMETIMES LEARNING CODING ALONG THE WAY.**

### WHY CHILDREN LOVE IT:

**ROBLOX SPARKS IMAGINATION, TEAMWORK, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING.**

**CHILDREN ENJOY PLAYING WITH FRIENDS, CREATING UNIQUE GAMES OR CHARACTERS, AND BEING PART OF A HUGE ONLINE COMMUNITY.**

**BUT BECAUSE IT CAN BE OPEN AND SOCIAL, RISKS INCLUDE STRANGERS CONTACTING CHILDREN, AGE INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT, AND THE GAMES BEING SO IMMERSIVE THAT SWITCHING OFF CAN BE HARD.**

**ROBLOX:**

**WHAT EVERY PARENT NEEDS TO KNOW! ROBLOX IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR ONLINE GAMING PLATFORMS FOR CHILDREN, WITH MILLIONS OF YOUNG PLAYERS LOGGING IN EVERY DAY. UNLIKE TRADITIONAL VIDEO GAMES, ROBLOX ISN'T JUST ONE SINGLE GAME – IT'S A WHOLE VIRTUAL UNIVERSE WHERE USERS CAN PLAY, CREATE AND SHARE GAMES WITH OTHERS AROUND THE WORLD. THIS MAKES IT EXCITING AND ENGAGING FOR CHILDREN, BUT IT ALSO INTRODUCES SOME IMPORTANT SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS THAT PARENTS NEED TO BE AWARE OF.**

The risks parents should know about online grooming:

Strangers can use the chat facility to befriend children with harmful intentions, often starting with friendly messages, gifts or in-game help before encouraging private chats elsewhere.

Inappropriate content: despite moderation, some games may include violence, scary themes or sexualised material.

Over-absorption: Roblox is designed to keep players hooked, which can impact sleep, schoolwork and family time.

In-game purchases: using 'Roblox,' children may feel pressured to spend on costumes, upgrades or items, leading to overspending.

**How parents can support their child playing Roblox**

**Play together**  
Sit with your child, explore Roblox together and ask them to show you their favourite games.

**Set parental controls**  
Use Roblox's safety settings to limit chat, control who can message or join games and manage spending.

**Talk about online friends**  
Remind them that online identities can be misleading. Encourage them to protect personal information and avoid shifting conversations to other apps.

**Agree limits**  
Set clear boundaries for screen time and in-game spending. Encourage breaks and a balance of activities.

**Open conversations**  
Let your child know they can always talk to you if someone or something makes them uncomfortable.

**GROW TOGETHER: LEARN TOGETHER: FEEL LOVED.**

# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about WHATSAPP

AGE RESTRICTION  
13+

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

WhatsApp is a free messaging service owned by Meta which allows users to send text and voice messages, make video calls, share multimedia – such as images, videos, documents and polls – and have group chats. WhatsApp messages are encrypted, meaning only the sender and the recipient can view what is sent. While this privacy may sound attractive on paper, this app comes with several associated risks that must be considered – especially for younger users.

### GROUP CHATS

Group chats let friends talk together but can pose problems for young users. They might feel excluded – like discovering events they weren't invited to. Hurtful comments can also escalate quickly, as more people join in, amplifying the impact through a wider audience.

### EVOLVING SCAMS

WhatsApp's popularity makes it attractive to scammers. Tactics include impersonating a child in an 'emergency' to request money, or triggering a login code, then pretending to be WhatsApp and asking for it – giving them access to private messages and personal data.

### CHANNELS

'Channels' let users follow topics anonymously, interacting only through polls or emoji reactions. However, fake channels can mimic real ones, spreading misinformation, hate speech, or phishing for personal data. WhatsApp may also collect and share channel-following info with third parties, raising privacy issues.

### DISAPPEARING MESSAGES

Disappearing messages help share sensitive info, but young people may wrongly assume they're fully private. Senders can opt for their message to vanish after 24 hours, 7 days, or 90 days – or for media, after one view. However, recipients can still save them by bookmarking or taking screenshots, reducing their privacy.

### FAKE NEWS

WhatsApp's simplicity makes sharing news quick – accurate or not. To help curb misinformation, messages forwarded over five times now show a 'Forwarded many times' label with a double arrow. This alerts users that the message isn't original and may be unreliable.

### CHAT LOCK

The new 'Chat lock' feature lets users store specific messages in a separate passcode- or biometrically-protected folder. While useful for privacy, it could be misused by younger users to hide conversations or content they know parents and educators might find inappropriate, including age-restricted material.

### VISIBLE LOCATION

WhatsApp's 'live location' feature helps friends meet up or parents check a child's route home. However, anyone in a child's group chats can track their location, potentially revealing their home address or regular travel patterns to strangers.

### AI INTEGRATION

Meta AI on WhatsApp poses risks to children, including exposure to misinformation, inappropriate content, and data privacy issues. AI responses may be inaccurate, and kids might share personal information unknowingly. It can also hinder critical thinking by offering ready-made answers.

## Advice for Parents & Educators

### EMPHASISE CAUTION

Encourage children to treat unexpected messages with caution. Get them to consider, for example, whether it sounds like something a friend or relative would really send them. Make sure they know never to share personal details over WhatsApp, and to be wary of clicking on any links in messages. Setting up two-step verification adds a further layer of protection to their WhatsApp account.

### ADJUST THE SETTINGS

It's wise to change a child's WhatsApp settings to specify which of their contacts can add them to group chats without needing approval. To do this, go to 'Privacy', then 'Groups'. You can give permission to 'My Contacts' or 'My Contacts Except...'. Additionally, if the child needs to use 'live location', emphasise that they should enable this function for only as long as they need – and then turn it off.

### THINK BEFORE SHARING

Help children understand why it's important to stop and think before posting or forwarding something on WhatsApp. It's easy – and all too common – for content sent to one user to then be shared more widely, and even publicly on social media. Encourage them to consider how an ill-judged message might damage their reputation or upset a friend who sent something to them in confidence.

### CHAT ABOUT PRIVACY

Have a conversation with youngsters about how they're using WhatsApp, emphasising that it's for their own safety. If you spot a 'Locked Chats' folder, you might want to talk about the sort of messages that are in there, who they're with and why they have been hidden. Also, if a young user has sent any 'view once' content, discuss their reasons for using this feature.

### Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian Government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



#WakeUpWednesday

The National College

Source: See full reference list on guide page at: <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/whatsapp-2025>