

A Parent/Carers Guide to WhatsApp



What is it?

WhatsApp is a messaging app that allows you to send messages for free, given you have an internet connection (either over Wi-Fi or via mobile data). It's available for iPhone, BlackBerry, Android, Windows Phone and Nokia. You can send normal text messages, audio clips, videos, photos; plus there is an enormous range of fun emoticons and symbols. It's incredibly popular worldwide, and has over 900 million users.

How much does it cost?

Previously, WhatsApp was free for the first year, and charged a subscription fee of 69p per year after that. **But, in January 2016, WhatsApp got rid of its subscription fee model and made it completely free for all users.** Their new revenue stream will involve organisations paying WhatsApp to reach customers through the app, but apparently not through third party ads, although they're a bit hazy on the details.

What they say: 'Simple. Personal. Real Time Messaging.'

What's the reality?: WhatsApp is really easy to setup as you don't need to add contacts or find friends – the app uses all of your existing phone contacts. It offers a good alternative to messaging people using traditional SMS.

What parents need to know

Minimum age restriction

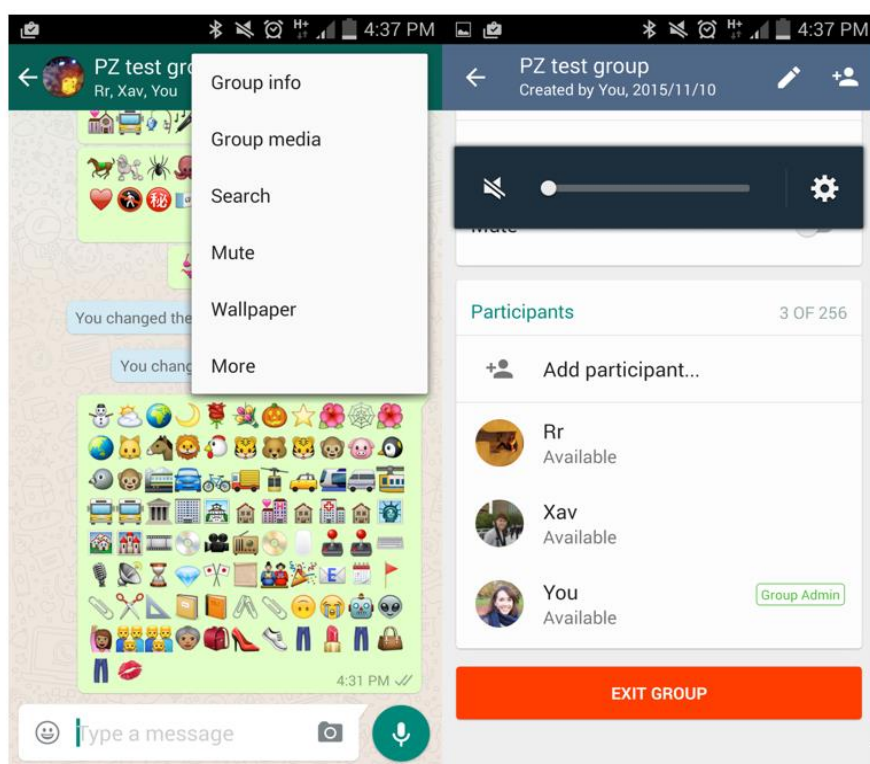
The minimum age of use for WhatsApp was previously 16 but it has now been changed to 13. Like many age restrictions on social media apps, some children may ignore this and sign up for WhatsApp when they're younger. It's up to you as a parent/carer to decide if you're comfortable with this or not. WhatsApp's main purpose is to send messages to friends - it isn't public in the same way that Twitter is, and people can only message friends who are already added on their phone. As long as your child(en) only has trusted people as contacts on their phone, it is a relatively safe social media app.

If this is the case, the only thing you'll need to make your child aware of the fact that can come into contact with strangers on group chats.

Group chats

The group chat function allows up to 256 people to chat in one conversation stream. Each group is set up by one person, known as the group admin who is the only person who can add or remove participants and change or add further group administrators. Anybody in the group, even if they're not one of your child's phone contacts, will be able to see messages they post and your child(ren) will be able to see theirs. Also, if they're added to a group with someone they've blocked, they'll be able to contact them.

Although your child might not be able to control if they're added to a group chat, they can always control their own participation within it – they can leave whenever they want to.



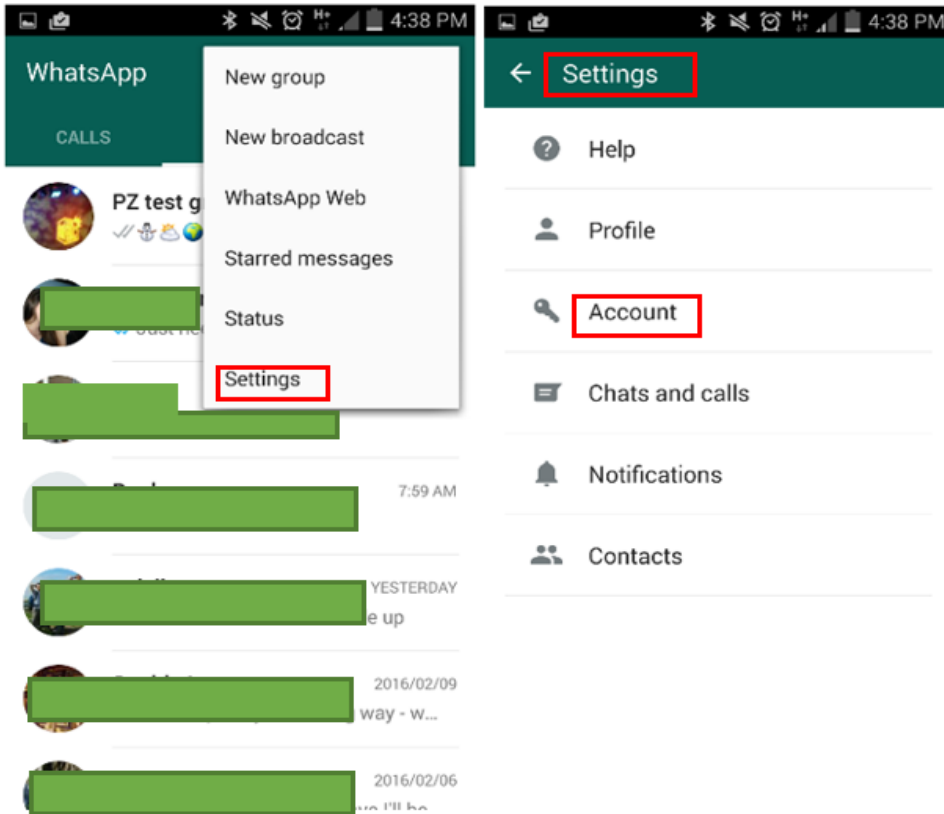
To do this, when on the group's page, tap the 3 dots in the top right (or the name of the group at the top of the screen on an iPhone), then tap Group info, then EXIT GROUP in the red box at the bottom of the screen (or scroll down to Exit Group on an iPhone). exit group advice.PNG

It's a good idea to talk to your child about group chats, stating the risks and showing them how to exit a group if they're invited to one that has people in it that they don't know.

Privacy settings and blocking

The app has a default privacy setting which allows anyone else on WhatsApp to view the user's profile photo, status, and when they last used the app.

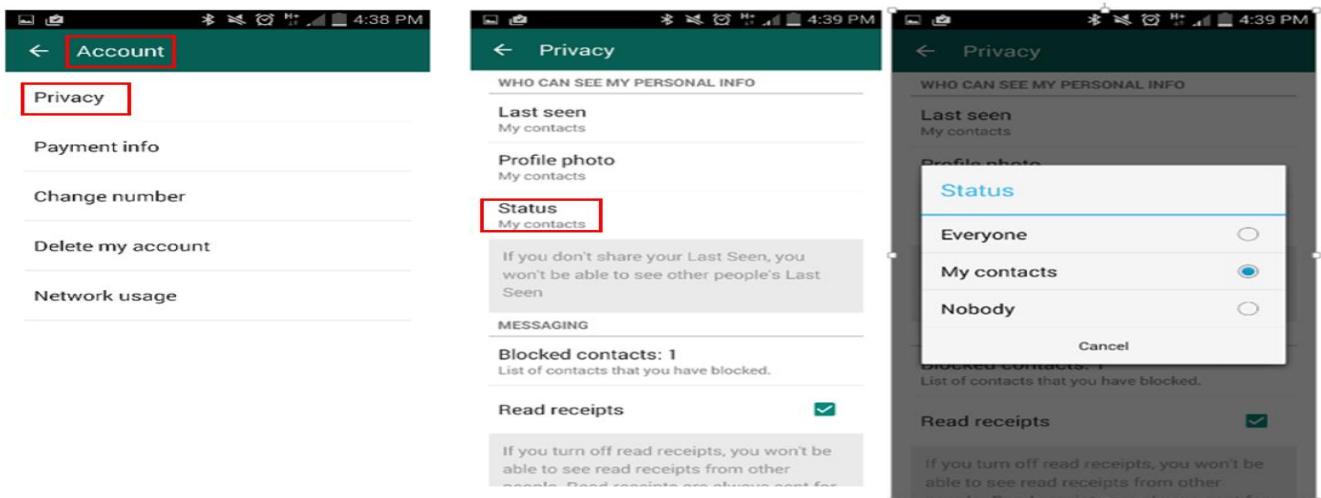
It's easy to change this setting to specify that the WhatsApp profile is only seen by 'My contacts' or 'Nobody' making the app feel a lot safer for younger users.



To do this, click on the WhatsApp icon on your phone's home screen, then tap the 3 dots on the top right then tap Settings > Account > Privacy > Status.

part 1.PNG

part 2 final final!.PNG



In this area, you can also manage any blocked contacts.

Reporting any concerns

There is no direct way to report a user, or specific abuse, other than to block them from sending you further messages. To block a contact, when the conversation is open, click on the 3 dots on the top right, tap 'More', then 'Block'.

Blocked contacts won't be able to see your profile information, and they won't be able to contact you. To permanently delete a contact from WhatsApp, you'll need to delete them from the contacts on your phone.

The pros

Fun, private (mostly), easy to use and find out how to change privacy settings and block any contacts.

The cons

There is quite a high minimum age restriction, given the relative safety of the app, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram all have a minimum age of 13. It's possible to be invited to a group chat with people you don't know, although it is easy to leave if you need to.

Our verdict

Fun, handy and simple app. It is also easy to locate privacy settings, find out how to leave groups, and to block contacts. If WhatsApp had a proper reporting structure then it would be get 5 stars!