



DIGITAL DRIVER'S ED
SNAPCHAT



**SCREEN
SANITY™**



SNAPCHAT

WHAT IS IT?

Snapchat is an app that allows users to exchange pictures, videos, and private chats—however, these “snaps” disappear after the receiver closes them, unless they are saved or screenshot.

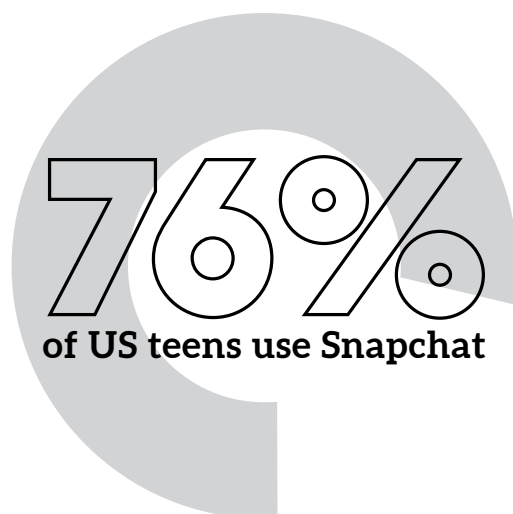
THE LINGO

STORIES Public photos or videos that disappear 24 hours after they are posted, and can be **viewed an unlimited number of times** within the 24 hours.

STREAKS Streaks and emojis next to user’s names indicate how strong two users’ “friendship” is. If one friend breaks a “streak,” it can be hurtful and **cause social fallout**.

SNAPMAPS Shares the current location of the user with whoever is approved to see the location. Can lead to feelings of **being left out**.

DISCOVER A section within the app where brands can post their own curated stories as well as original TV shows made specifically for Snapchat. **Contains access to sexual content.**



GOOD TO KNOW

Snaps don’t always disappear.

Users can also exchange private chat messages that can be saved. Pictures and videos can be screenshotted by the receiver.

Parental controls? Nope.

Snapchat’s privacy makes it easy for teens to send sexually explicit content to other users without anyone knowing, as well as be subject to sexual content in the Discover section.



RIDE. PRACTICE. DRIVE.

One of our [Screen Sanity Rules of Thumb](#) is “Ride. Practice. Drive.” Before you hand your child the keys to a car, they spend many years shadowing you in the backseat, followed by a learner’s permit—with you logging hours by their side, coaching them with ongoing support and assistance.

When it comes to Snapchat, conversations are the most powerful training tool you have.

1 RIDE. ARE THEY PREPPED AND READY FOR SNAPCHAT?

BEFORE YOU SAY YES TO SNAPCHAT...

Make sure you’ve covered these topics with your child:

- [Screen Sanity Rules of Thumb](#)
- Pornography
- Sexting
- Online safety + privacy
- Cyberbullying
- Comparison + Self Image
- Digital footprints are permanent

TEST DRIVE IT YOURSELF

Before you say yes, download the app yourself get familiar with it. Try snapping with a friend to learn more about what your child will experience.

INTERVIEW AN EXPERIENCED SNAPCHAT DRIVER.

It can be hard to prep your kid to Snapchat if you haven’t tried it yourself. And the truth is, Gen Z kids don’t simply accept an idea because it comes from an authority or because that’s the way it’s always been done. **Consider gathering info from teenagers or babysitters you trust.**

ASK THINGS LIKE...

- What do you like about Snapchat?
- What do you wish you had known before you downloaded it?
- Have you ever seen people doing unsafe things on Snapchat?
- What happens if a person’s Snapscore goes bad?
- How about when a Snapstreak gets broken?
- Have you ever seen friends feel left out through Snapmaps?

2

PRACTICE.

MENTOR YOUR CHILD DURING A LEARNER'S PERMIT SEASON

START WITH STRONG LIMITS, AND RELEASE THEM SLOWLY.

- Create device-free zones –like mealtimes + bedrooms overnight.
- Make it non-negotiable that passwords are shared with parents.
- Install a monitoring app like Bark, OurPact, or Qustodio as a limited safety net.
- Only allow a small number of friends and family at first.
- Set maps to “Ghost Mode” to keep your child’s location private.
- Try co-creating a story or video with your child, showing them how to avoid pitfalls like the Discover section and unwanted solicitations.
- In the beginning, discuss (and approve) all initial posts.
- Save all “Chat” messages by tapping the line of text once. Not available for photos.
- As you get going, make sure to log in occasionally to see what types of content they are posting.

RIDE IN THE PASSENGER SEAT

If you are ready to let your child try Snapchat, **plan to log some hours in the passenger seat, coaching them through the thrills and hazards of their new app.** You’ll also want to occasionally log in to their account to get a sense of what they’re posting.

TOPICS TO CHECK IN ON

- What’s the difference between privacy and secrecy? Where does accountability come in?
- How does Snapchat make you feel about your self-image? Is comparison a thief of joy?
- What influencers are you following? Do you trust them?
- What do you define as “inappropriate”?
- Have you ever felt or seen bullying on Snapchat?
- What are your personal values? How can you avoid posting things that go against your values?
- For you, would you say Snapchat is “time well spent”?

See more conversation topics on page 8

DON'T FREAK OUT WHEN YOUR TEEN ENCOUNTERS ROADBLOCKS OR EMERGENCIES

Did we mention to not freak out when your teen encounters roadblocks or emergencies? Let them know you are safe harbor; **they can tell you anything.**

3

DRIVE.

TRUST THEM TO MERGE CAUTIOUSLY + OFFER ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE



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ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

WHAT'S A SNAPCHAT "STORY"?

A set of photos or videos that [can be made public](#). The story is only viewable for 24 hours, but other users can view it an unlimited number of times during that window. (Recently, both [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) copied Snapchat by adding a story feature to their platforms.)

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "MY STORY" AND "OUR STORY"?

When a user wants to put a video or a picture in their "story," they have the option to place it as "My Story" or "Our Story." My Story is specific to a user and allows every one of the user's friends to see the video or picture. Our Story is specific to an area, so it's essentially the collective story being told by all the users in one location. A user can post a video or picture to an area's story (e.g. a concert, sporting arena, college campus, etc.; see Snap Maps below), which allows everyone in that area to see the video or picture.

WHAT'S A "SNAPSTREAK"?

[A record](#) of how many days in a row two users have Snapped (not chatted) each other. It's denoted by the fire emoji and a number, which indicates how long that streak has been going on. If an hourglass emoji appears next to the fire emoji, it means that the streak will expire unless both users Snap each other soon.

WHAT'S SNAPCASH?

Snapchat partnered with [Square](#) to give users a way to send each other money through the app. The terms of use require the user to be 18+ and have a credit/debit card or a checking account.

WHAT DO THE EMOJIS NEXT TO OTHER USERS' NAMES MEAN?

The emojis mark how often a user interacts with other users, creating a hierarchy of friendship. It's a private feature, meaning a user's friends can't see who that user's "best friend" is. Check out [Snapchat's official explanation](#) of all the different emojis and what they mean.

WHAT ARE SNAP MAPS?

Interactive maps that are automatically tagged with a location when a user uploads a picture. They share the current location of the user with whoever is approved to see the location. To access them, the first time a user opens the Snap Map (by pinching/zooming out of the camera screen), they are prompted to share their location with Snapchat. After accepting the prompt, the user is then asked to set their privacy setting. There are three levels: All My Friends (which allows anyone on a user's friend list to see their location), Select Friends (which allows the user to decide which friends can see their location), and Ghost Mode (which means no one but the user can see their location). A user can select one level, then easily and quickly select another at any point. It should be noted that, after negative feedback, Snapchat made it so that the user's location only updates while Snapchat is open. Adding to your Story will also add a marker on the map until that Story expires. There also is an explore feature where the user can click on any specific area in the world and see the stories specific to that area. For example, a person in Columbus, OH can choose to post a public story to that area and someone from Colorado Springs, CO can view it.

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ANY OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES?

The [Discover section](#) (accessed by swiping all the way to right) is a place where brands can post their own curated stories for users to view, as well as where [new original TV shows](#), made specifically for Snapchat, are found. As is true for traditional media outlets, the content in this section is full of ideas, some good and some bad, but it's much harder to monitor what users are viewing. Also, one's "[Snap score](#)" is a measurement of how often one interacts with others on the app.

WHAT IF I DON'T WANT MY TEEN TO SEE SPECIFIC STORIES?

By swiping left from the main screen, a user accesses the Discover page (see image). A user's friends' stories appear at the top of the page, underneath which are rows of stories from brands and celebrities, which are categorized as "For You." If a user decides he/she doesn't want to see content from a brand or a celebrity, he/she can simply tap and hold on that tile until a dialogue box (see image) appears, then select "Hide." (One can also tap and hold, then select "Subscribe" to be notified when that brand posts new stories.)

Clearly, Snapchat can't be modified enough to keep a user from finding or stumbling upon objectionable or age-inappropriate content. This may play into one's decision as to what age a child should be allowed to be on the platform, if at all.

However, we highly recommend that we parents approach the app and our children's desires to use it as an opportunity for conversation and mentorship, rather than simply writing it off as dangerous and inappropriate and telling our kids to never speak of it. Ultimately, our goal as parents should be to train our children to choose to walk away from content that hurts them (rather than making that decision for them).

That is more easily accomplished by helping them see why content is harmful and allowing them to ask questions and be honest, not by issuing an executive order or saying "Because I said so." (See below.)

WHY DO MY TEENS USE IT SO OFTEN?!

Snapchat is very private, and largely the appeal is that whatever is sent doesn't have to be permanently out there for anyone to see ([although this is never actually the case](#)). In addition, the communication style is quick and easy, meaning you can visually share an experience with someone across the globe with a push of a button, rather than spending time finding the perfect angle for a photo and highly editing it before posting, as is the norm on Instagram these days. In addition, there is [pressure to be "cool" amongst friends](#) by having a high Snap score, so more interaction with the app equals a higher score, which sadly translates to higher social worth. And of course, features like the Snapstreak seem to have been created simply to make the app more addictive and increase time spent on it.

WHO CAN SEE MY CHILD'S SNAPS?

As with Facebook, users must "add" one another on the app to be connected—meaning each user has control of who can see their snaps and who can chat with them. However, there are other [privacy settings](#) that can be changed to ensure that only certain people can send a user snaps or view their story.

CAN I SEE WHO MY CHILD IS FRIENDS WITH?

If you can't log directly into his/her account, no. A user's "best friends" used to be public, but in keeping with its roots, [Snapchat made that information private in 2015](#). The privacy/secretcy is part of the appeal of the app for younger generations.

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WHAT ARE THE DANGERS?

Sexting has always been the main concern. Porn performers are easy to find on Snapchat. On Instagram, they advertise their Snap name, where with a simple click, you're taken to Snapchat and subscribe to their account. The app also comes with many picture filters that can completely alter someone's appearance, for better or for worse, meaning a user never has to show his/her real appearance. This is not a new concept, but when it comes to issues of self-image and peer validation, it needs to be addressed. Keep in mind also the residual dangers of a user's choice of friends: Anyone who uses the app to sexually attract other people, slander someone else's name, or even simply portray vulgar content can always have their privacy settings open, so that anyone—**friend or not**—can view their Story. The app can be used by predators to groom and lure users into sex trafficking. Finally, the Discover section is full of ideas from brands that could be influencing your child. **Buzzfeed, Comedy Central, Cosmopolitan**, and many other brands may be subversively teaching your child how to view the world.

IS IT BAD TO ASK TO BE FRIENDS WITH MY CHILD?

There's something to be said for learning to speak your child's language and communicate with him/her in a way he/she understands. So for some kids, connecting with them on Snapchat could be the only way you can reach them or the way they prefer to communicate with you. However, younger generations are all about authenticity, so using the app without understanding its nuances and etiquette could actually bother your teens more than help you reach them. And being connected with your child on Snapchat doesn't mean you can see everything he/she does, so consider doing so carefully. If you're concerned about inappropriate behavior or relationships, a better

approach might be temporarily revoking app privileges and having conversations with them about your concerns until trust is restored.

CAN I ACCESS MY CHILD'S ACCOUNT? SHOULD I?

By having the username and password, an account can be accessed via the app or **by computer** (with some difficulty, though; the platform is designed for mobile, so snapchat.com doesn't offer much in the way of account use and access). Be careful—even if you ask your child to remove his/her account, there are **many ways to hide it** on a phone. As for whether we should access our children's accounts, absolutely. Especially when dealing with minors, we parents are directly responsible for our children's social media actions, whether we have prepared and monitored them or not. The decision to let a child access social media does not begin and end with the creation of an account. Our children need help understanding how their reputation, habits, and interactions all have great consequences.

AT WHAT AGE SHOULD I LET MY CHILD USE IT?

Each child's capacity to handle the responsibilities of online interaction grows differently, depending on their journey. A good place to start would be asking them questions like: "What is the number one reason you want a Snapchat?" "Would you be comfortable letting me view what you snap to other people?" or even "Can we be friends on Snapchat?" Back and forth conversation is always a great first step in determining if a child is ready for social media. Allow your child the opportunity to slowly build trust and be responsible while still making it clear that there will be consequences for poor decisions. Ultimately, social media is an earned privilege, not a right.

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ARE THERE PARENTAL CONTROLS? HOW DO I USE THEM?

In terms of password-protected settings, no. It's possible to set up a user's privacy settings [in a more secure way](#) (see images), but if a child has access to his/her account, then he/she can change these settings at any point. Currently, there's no way to block content from brands, but it's possible to block other users. More reasons to talk to our kids about the risks of using the app and considering making them wait until a certain age before they can use it. Always remember to explain why you're implementing the limits and strongly emphasize that it's because you want what's best for them (not because you're a jerk who hates them).

HOW DO I DELETE AN APP OR AN ACCOUNT?

Here are instructions for [deleting an app](#) (Android), as well as instructions for [deleting the whole account](#). But please be aware! Simply deleting the app from your child's device or deleting his/her account doesn't mean that he/she won't find ways to access it later. Many parents have mentioned that their teens simply login from a friend's phone or give their friends their login info so that their friends can use their account and keep streaks going. Or they will simply use a friend's phone to create a new account, though they will lose their scores and streaks and have to start all over again, which could do more harm than good for their relationship with you. Having a conversation with them about why you think they're using it inappropriately or how it's harming them could be much more beneficial than simply reacting out of anger or fear and making them delete their account.

MY CHILD IS SEXTING! NOW WHAT?!

First, wait 24 hours to address the issue. It can be a shock to discover your child doing something inappropriate or that you never thought he/she would do, but taking the time to calm down and think rationally about the situation is worth it. Once you've done that, you must address it by talking about it. Start by asking questions and understanding his/her perspective and motivations. From there, show your child why such dishonors and disrespects others, and harms him/her. Often, teens engage in such behavior because of pressure to be like everyone else, to be "cool," or to keep guys interested in them. Usually they haven't taken the time to consider other outcomes of their behavior, so widening their perspective can help them see the action very differently. And finally, allow your teen to experience the consequences of his/her actions. Examples: Have him/her apologize to those impacted by the behavior, including other teens' parents. Revoke social media privileges until trust has been reestablished. Don't allow devices into bedrooms or behind closed doors.

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MORE CONVERSATION STARTERS

IMAGE

How does Snapchat make you feel compared to Instagram? Is there more or less pressure to look a certain way? Why? How do the filters change the way you look at yourself? Do you think it matters if you conform to a certain way of looking in your posts? What happens if you don't?

POPULARITY

Why do you think the app created Snapcores? Does it make you want to use the app more in order to increase your score? How do you feel when someone else you know has a higher score than you do? How do you feel when someone posts something at an event that you weren't invited to? Do you think it matters that one's worth or value can be tied to their Snapscore? Do you think it would affect you positively or negatively to be part of that?

SAFETY

Do you know who can see your location if you add to your Snapmap or to an area's Story? Why do you think it could be dangerous? Has someone you don't know ever connected with you on the app? Do you know that sexual predators use the app to find and groom people for sex-trafficking? How would you spot someone who's doing that? What would you do if it happened to you?

IDEAS

Why do you think brands/celebrities spend so much time creating Shows and Stories that feel like a friend made them? Does it make you trust them more or less? Why do you think they use the images/videos they use? What do you think they are trying to accomplish by being on the app? What do you do if you come across something that is inappropriate? What do you define as "inappropriate"? Could a brand/person be teaching you something through their posts without you realizing it? Do you think that could have happened to you already? Are you ok with being influenced like that?

BULLYING

Is it possible to bully others through the app? How? Have you ever been bullied? Have you ever bullied? Do you think you've ever unintentionally hurt someone else's feeling through your Snaps? Is there a way to use the app that is more inclusive everyone?

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FINAL THOUGHTS

Snapchat is a fun, powerful social media platform. As with any similar platform, there are many risks involved with allowing your child to be on it. But it's not inherently evil, and with the right guidance and wisdom from you, it can be a fun platform through which your child can connect with friends. Yet accountability is paramount in our tech-based world, and as the parent, you can establish good boundaries and practices that better protect your children. We highly encourage implementing a social media contract in your home, like [this one](#) or [this one](#). And for any boundaries you implement, help your children see that those boundaries are motivated by helping your children flourish and live their best life.

This parent guide is licensed and distributed with permission by Axis. For more in-depth, faith-based parenting resources on this topic, visit [Axis.org](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Smartphone Sanity](#)

by David Eaton, Jeremiah Callihan and the Axis Team with Sarah Miles

[Parents' Ultimate Guide to Snapchat](#)

Common Sense Media

[Using Snapchat's Privacy Settings](#)

InternetMatters.org

[A Snapchat Guide for Parents](#)

Tom's Guide