



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO Fostering Safer Online Practices on Snapchat & Beyond



Snap Inc.

INTRODUCTION



Letter from Michele Gay, Founder and Executive Director, Safe and Sound Schools

As a mother and founder of [Safe and Sound Schools](#), my life's mission is to help protect our schools and our children. Our organization was founded after the tragedy at Sandy Hook School on December 14, 2012, where my 7-year-old daughter, Josephine "Joey" Grace Gay, died along with 19 of her classmates and 6 educators.

Since founding Safe and Sound Schools, we have remained steadfast in our mission: to help communities protect every student, every school, every day.

Today, our mission extends beyond physical and psychological safety into the digital spaces where children and teens spend an increasing amount of time. Even our youngest learners are navigating online environments through school-issued devices like Chromebooks and iPads. Equipping them with strong digital citizenship skills and safe online habits has never been more important — especially on popular platforms like Snapchat, used by more than 20 million teens in the United States.

We know that navigating today's digital world can feel overwhelming — especially for busy parents. But here's the good news: you're not alone. Protecting our children's safety is a shared responsibility that involves all of us — parents, educators, administrators, law enforcement, and even our kids themselves.

That's why Safe and Sound Schools has partnered with Snap to create this resource. This guide offers practical tools and insights to help you support your teens as they navigate the online world safely and responsibly.

I hope you find this resource both helpful and empowering. By working together, we can give our children the knowledge and confidence they need to help make safe and sound choices — and protect their well-being in every space they occupy.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michele Gay".

Michele Gay
Founder and Executive Director
Safe and Sound Schools

Fostering Safer Online Practices: It's a Team Effort!

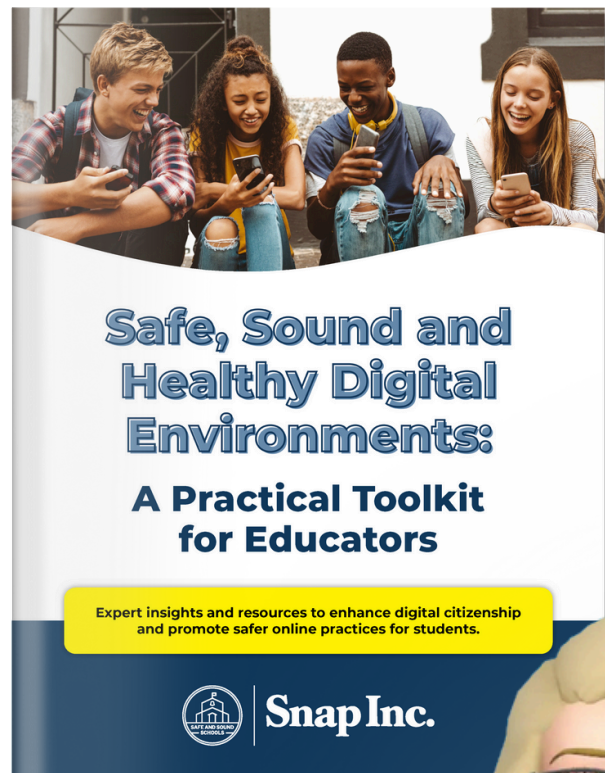
At Safe and Sound Schools, we often describe school safety and student well-being as the ultimate team sport — it truly takes all of us. In partnership with Snap, we're proud to provide resources that empower parents, caregivers, and educators to help foster safer online environments for children.

If you are reading this, it's clear that you are dedicated to these efforts. To extend this support, we encourage you to share this additional resource with educators in your community.

The data is undeniable: action is needed. From the latest Youth Behavioral Risk Survey by the Centers for Disease Control to Snap's yearly digital well-being research, the message is clear — we must work together to address current concerning trends and challenges.

Invite educators to join the team by exploring *Safe, Sound, and Healthy Digital Environments: A Practical Toolkit for Educators*. This comprehensive guide provides educators with the knowledge needed to support the safety and well-being of their students online, including specific information about Snapchat.

Scan the QR code to download and share this valuable resource today!



INTRODUCTION

Letter from James M. Murray, Chief Security Officer, Snap Inc.



Prior to joining Snap, I spent three decades in federal law enforcement, where protecting the most vulnerable was my greatest priority. It was during that time, while serving as Director of the U.S. Secret Service, that I first met Michele Gay and the Safe and Sound Schools team. From the very beginning, our shared commitment — both as professionals and as parents — to protecting young people and supporting communities forged a strong partnership.

That spirit of collaboration continues today at Snap, where I lead our global safety and security efforts. At Snap, we take seriously our commitment to helping protect young people. We also know how challenging it can be for parents to keep up with the apps and services their teens use, which is why we've partnered with Safe and Sound Schools to create this guide.

My team and I have no greater priority than seeking to keep our Snapchat community safe — especially the young people who use our platform every day. We're proud to offer this guide as a practical resource to help families navigate the evolving challenges they face in the digital world.

Thank you for everything you do to help keep your teens safe, strong, and supported.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James M. Murray".

James M. Murray
Chief Security Officer
Snap Inc.



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UNDERSTANDING SNAPCHAT: WHAT PARENTS SHOULD TO KNOW

With more than 20 million teens in the U.S. using Snapchat, understanding this popular platform is key to understanding how many teens communicate with one another. By learning the basics of how Snapchat works, you can encourage responsible use and help teens maintain a safe online presence. You may even find yourself enjoying it with them by finding opportunities for family connection.

Let's get started!

1. WHAT IS SNAPCHAT?

Snapchat is a communication service designed for people aged 13 and up. It's popular with teenagers and adults alike, who primarily use it to chat with their close friends and family, one-on-one or in small groups.

You must be at least 13 years old to create a Snapchat account. If Snap determines that an account belongs to a person under 13, they will terminate the account.

2. THE MAIN FEATURES & FUNCTIONALITY OF SNAPCHAT

Snapchat was intentionally designed to be different from traditional social media. It was created to offer people a new, visual way to communicate, to share in the moment, and to help people feel together even when they are physically apart.

Snapchat opens to the Camera making it easy to take and share a Snap (a photo or video). It does not offer an unmoderated news feed where unvetted publishers or individuals have an opportunity to broadcast hate, misinformation, or violent content. These intentional design choices encourage authentic communication, interaction, and sharing that have become hallmarks of the platform.

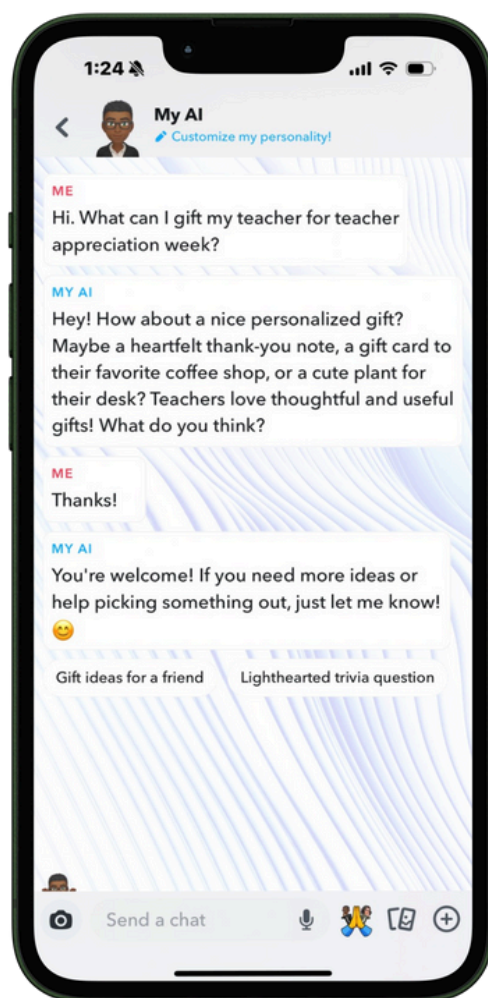
Here's a look at Snapchat's primary features:

1. Camera: An easy, visual way to share what's on your mind with the people who matter most to you, create Snaps, play with Lenses and augmented reality experiences, and more.

2. Chat: Chat is where users can connect with friends and family using text and pictures. Snaps and Chats (messages) delete by default, mirroring real-life conversations where what you say and do isn't recorded permanently and displayed for the world to see. This helps people feel more comfortable expressing themselves, the same way they would if they were hanging out in person.

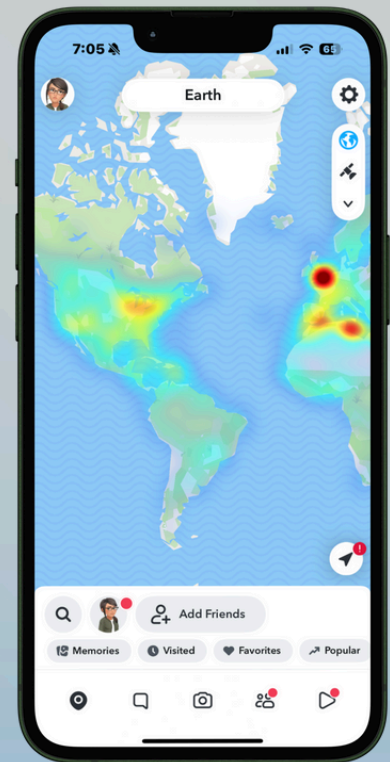
What is 'My AI'?

My AI is Snapchat's AI-powered conversational chatbot. My AI can answer a burning trivia question, offer advice on the perfect gift for a friend's birthday, help plan a hiking trip for a long weekend, or suggest what to make for dinner. Snap developed My AI to abide by their Community Guidelines and give age-appropriate responses. Parents have the option to restrict their teen from engaging with My AI in Family Center, Snap's in-app suite of parental tools.



3. Map: Snap Map is an interactive way for Snapchatters to share their favorite spots, discover new places, and see what their friends are up to. Location sharing on Snapchat is **off by default** for all users, and Snapchatters can **only** choose to share their location with people they're friends with on Snapchat. There is no option for Snapchatters to share their location with anyone they haven't chosen to accept as a friend, nor can anyone just "find" them on the Map (and there is no 'add nearby' feature').

4. Content: Snapchatters can learn about the world by watching Stories and Spotlight videos from friends, trusted media publishers, or verified Creators. Snap takes special precautions to limit the ability for unmoderated content to be shared widely and has extra protections in place to help make sure teens have an age-appropriate content experience. Snap also gives parents the ability to amp up content controls in Family Center.



3. COMMUNITY GUIDELINES

Snap's [Community Guidelines](#) are designed to help Snapchatters use its services safely and enjoyably. These rules prohibit illegal and potentially harmful content and behavior such as sexual exploitation, pornography, illicit drug activity, violence, self-harm, and misinformation. Extra moderation is applied to public surfaces of Snapchat to help prevent content violating these rules from spreading widely.

To enforce violations of these Community Guidelines, Snap uses proactive detection tools and reports from users, parents, law enforcement, and others. Their 24/7 global safety teams investigate these reports and take appropriate action, which can include warnings, content removal, account and device bans, and escalation to law enforcement.

Parents can report concerning accounts or content directly to Snap's safety teams through the app or [online](#) at Snap's Support Site. If you ever notice something troubling, don't hesitate to take action and encourage your teen and their friends to do the same.



Did You Know?

Even if you don't have a Snapchat account, you can still report an issue on behalf of yourself, your teen, or others. If your teenager is exposed to unwanted or potentially harmful contact or conduct on Snapchat and you would like to report it to Snap's safety teams, you can do so [here](#).

4. DOWNLOADING SNAPCHAT

"KNOW THE NEIGHBORHOOD"

One of the best ways to understand Snapchat and support your teen's appropriate use of the app is to try it out yourself. By exploring Snapchat, you can gain valuable insights into the digital space where your teen socializes. Understanding the features, trends, and ways your teenager interacts online can help you guide them more effectively and have open, informed conversations about their online behavior.

**Use the QR Code to
Download Snapchat Now!**



 Scan to Download



5. JOIN THE FAMILY CENTER!

Just as Snapchat was built to help people communicate with their friends in the same way they do in real life, Family Center – Snapchat’s set of in-app parental tools – reflects the dynamics of real-world relationships between parents and teens by providing parents with insight into who their teens are spending time with while still respecting teens’ privacy.

Specifically, parents, caregivers, and other trusted adults using Family Center can:

- See who their teen is communicating with on Snapchat, and who their teen’s friends are.
- Easily and confidentially report any concerns directly to Snap’s safety teams.
- See if and how recently their teen has been chatting with My AI, and restrict the ability for My AI to respond, if desired.
- See their teen’s declared age in the Snapchat app, to confirm their teen is benefitting from Snapchat’s extra protections for minors.
- Ask their teen to share their live location, view who else their teen is sharing their location with, and receive notifications when their teen arrives or departs from up to three places they designate, like home and school.

Use the QR Code to Visit
the Family Center



 Scan to Download

TIPS & BEST PRACTICES FOR PARENTS

Staying informed about the digital platforms our teens use is key to helping them safely navigate today's online world. While keeping up with trends and new technology may feel overwhelming, it doesn't have to be. Start by asking yourself these questions:

Do I interact with my teens on their preferred platforms? If not, how can I create opportunities for more organic interaction?

How can I encourage my teen to "teach" me about their online communication tools?

How often should I check in to reinforce expectations for responsible use?

Knowing the digital "neighborhoods" where teens engage is crucial. From downloading Snapchat to exploring online gaming or asking your teen to teach you something new, showing genuine curiosity strengthens your understanding of their online world and fosters more meaningful conversations. You may even wind up having fun together!

Here are a few tips to get you started, including insights from a few experts in the space:



Talk Early and Often: Start conversations about online safety as early as possible. Be open, approachable, and non-judgmental to encourage your teen to share their concerns.



Listen Without Judgment: If your child discusses online experiences or challenges, respond with support and understanding rather than criticism.



Utilize Parental Controls: Take advantage of tools like Snapchat's "Family Center," which offer insight into online connections while respecting privacy. Learn how these tools work and involve your teen in conversations about why they're being used.



Set Boundaries or Create an Acceptable Use Policy: Work together to establish screen-free times, discuss what's appropriate to share online, and consider creating a family agreement on acceptable use. This can help establish clear expectations and promote responsible behavior.

"With great access comes great responsibility. Creating an Acceptable Use Policy for internet-connected devices might feel overwhelming or uncomfortable, but it doesn't have to be. Templates and resources are available to help busy parents craft a policy they can discuss and enforce with their child. The primary goal is to ensure safe online engagement, while also fostering open, judgment-free communication for any situation that may arise."



– **Antoinette King, CISSP, PSP, SICC**

Founder, Credo Cyber Consulting LLC and Author of The Digital Citizen's Guide to Cybersecurity: How to Stay Safe and Empowered Online



Consider the Concept of a "Digital Tattoo" Compared to a "Digital Footprint": Emphasize that while footprints may fade, tattoos are permanent or very difficult and painful to remove, with no guarantee they will disappear completely.



"We often hear the term 'digital footprint'. At Safer Schools Together, we encourage the use of 'digital tattoo' instead. This term better represents the permanence of the internet. Footprints disappear but tattoos are 'forever'. If not forever, trying to remove a tattoo is a long, difficult, and painful process with zero certainty that it will actually fully disappear."

– **Theresa Campbell**

Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Safer Schools Together



Emphasize Real-Life Impacts of Online Actions: Discuss how online behavior can affect relationships, opportunities, and personal safety.



Encourage Reporting: Address misconceptions about “snitching” by framing reporting as a responsible choice that helps to ensure safety and is usually confidential, as it is on Snapchat. Reassure that when seeing something of concern (bullying, threats, inappropriate sharing of photos, etc.) taking action is a responsible choice to help ensure everyone’s safety. Highlight options for anonymous reporting to reduce fears of retaliation.

“It’s only when everyone in the community, including our children, understands what’s acceptable, what’s not, and where and how to report concerns, that we can keep them safe and sound in any environment, including digital spaces.”



– **Michele Gay**, Founder and Executive Director, Safe and Sound Schools



TALKING TO YOUR TEEN ABOUT ONLINE SAFETY

How to Start the Conversation

Let your teen know you're there to support them, not to judge or punish. Create a safe, open environment where they feel comfortable discussing their online experiences. Use open-ended questions to encourage honest dialogue, and adjust the depth of conversation based on their age and understanding.

The goal is to empower your teen to think critically about their online interactions, self-reflect on their own digital behaviors, and adopt responsible habits.

By providing these conversation guides, we aim to support communication between parents, caregivers, and teens to help foster safe online habits and practices on Snapchat and beyond.



Questions to Ask

PERSONAL SAFETY

- How do you decide who to accept as a friend or connection?
- How do you decide what to share online?
- What steps do you take to help protect your personal information?
- What are your best practices for safe social media use and other online platforms?

HANDLING UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATIONS

- Have you ever come across online content that stands out as potentially disturbing or problematic?
- How did that make you feel? What did you do?
- Have you or your friends experienced negative interactions online? How did you handle them, and if not me, who did you turn to for support?

PEER PRESSURE AND ONLINE BEHAVIOR

- How do you handle peer pressure when it comes to social media?
- What are some online behaviors that you think could be harmful or unsafe?
- How do you ensure your online behavior is respectful and responsible?

REPORTING AND SUPPORTING OTHERS

- What resources or tools do you use to report issues online?
- Why do you think it's important to report online problems?
- How do you support friends who might be struggling with unwanted interactions or cyberbullying?





Prompts to Use

Encourage your teen to reflect on their online experiences with these conversation starters:

- My favorite place to “hang out” online is _____.
- Social media makes me feel _____.
- When I encounter a problem online or on social media, I _____.
- I think it’s important to report online issues because _____.
- Something I want to improve about my online behavior is _____.

RESPONDING TO ONLINE ISSUES

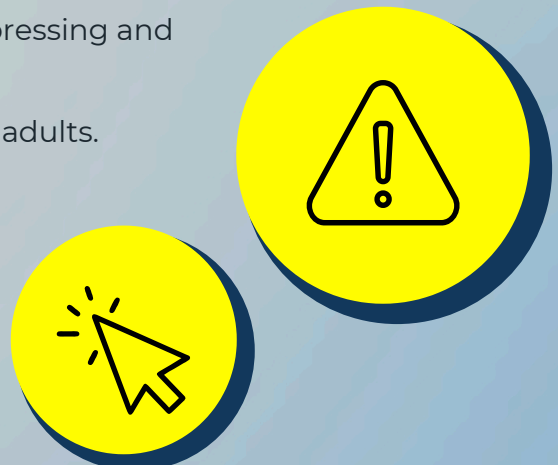
When to Report and Where to Get Help

Parents play a crucial role in helping teens navigate the digital world safely. As covered above, encouraging open conversations about online experiences is paramount, and should always include the importance of reporting potentially harmful behavior—like bullying, harassment, or concerning content. This empowers teens to help protect themselves and others. When teens feel supported and know that reporting is a positive step, they are more likely to speak up, helping to foster a safer and more respectful online environment for everyone.

Here are a few resources to bookmark for when additional help is needed, as well as contact information for organizations specializing in online safety and mental health support.

If your teen encounters threatening content, or is the target of or witnesses bullying or unwanted contact on Snapchat, encourage them to take action:

- Report the content or account to Snapchat by pressing and holding on the content in the app.
- Seek support from school counselors or trusted adults.
- Consult these Snapchat resources for parents:
 - [Family Center](#)
 - [Snapchat Family Safety Hub](#)
 - [Safety Checklist for Parents](#)





National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Does Your Teen Need Help Taking Down Sensitive Content?

Take It Down is a free and anonymous service provided by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). It helps individuals stop the online spreading of nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit images or videos taken when they were under 18. This resource is essential for students, parents, and caregivers to be aware of.



[Visit the Website](#)

STOP NCII (for 18+)

StopNCII.org is a free tool designed to support adult victims of the production and distribution of Non-Consensual Intimate Imagery (NCII).

The tool works by generating a “hash” of an intimate image(s)/video(s). Image hashing is the process of using an algorithm to assign a unique hash value to an image. Identical copies of the photo or video all have the exact same hash value. For this reason, it is sometimes referred to as a ‘digital fingerprint’. StopNCII.org collects and shares a database of hashes with participating companies, including Snap, so they can help detect and remove duplicate imagery from being shared online. [Learn more about the tool and participating companies.](#)



[Visit the Website](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We invite you to check out these additional resources from leading subject matter experts and other trusted organizations to help foster safe online environments in all digital spaces:

- [Common Sense Education](#)
- [Digital4Good](#)
- [The Digital Citizen's Guide to Cybersecurity](#)
- [What They Don't Teach Teens](#)

CONCLUSION

Navigating the digital world as a parent can be challenging, but with the right tools and open communication, we can support our teens in making safer, healthier choices online. Remember, you don't have to do this alone. Reach out to [Safe and Sound Schools](#) or use Snapchat's resources if you need help or have concerns.

Together, we can work to foster a safer digital environment for all of our teens every day.



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