

ICS Safeguarding Newsletter 20

New apps your children may be using (and why they matter)

One of the hardest parts of parenting in a digital world is that the app landscape changes constantly. Even if you feel confident about Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp or TikTok, children and teens often move quickly to newer platforms, especially ones that promise *'meet new friends'*, *'anonymous messages'*, or *random video chat*. These are the spaces where safeguarding risks can increase, because they may connect children with strangers, reduce accountability, or encourage secrecy.

Below are several recently trending apps and app-types that schools and online-safety organisations are flagging most often right now.

'Friend-making' and social discovery apps (high risk of contact with strangers)



Wizz

Wizz has become increasingly popular with young people and is often described as a swipe-based social discovery app - similar in feel to dating apps, even if it's not marketed that way. Concerns raised by child-safety organisations include contact with strangers and challenges with age assurance.

What to watch for at home

- A profile-style app with swiping
- New contacts your child can't identify in real life
- Pressure to share photos, social handles, or move chats to another platform

Anonymous messaging (high risk of bullying, harassment, and manipulation)



NGL (Not Gonna Lie)

Anonymous message apps can quickly become a channel for unkind messages, rumours, or pressure, because the sender feels 'hidden'. In 2024, the US Federal Trade Commission announced action against NGL over allegations including marketing to under-18s and deceptive practices.

What to watch for

- Sudden distress after checking messages
- A child saying 'everyone has it' because it's linked/ shared via other platforms
- Increased secrecy about their phone

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Random video chat apps (high risk of sexualised content and unsafe contact)



OmeTV

OmeTV pairs users with random strangers for live video chats. Australia's eSafety guide notes risks including exposure to inappropriate/sexualised behaviour and the fact that OmeTV does not verify users' ages.

Why this matters

Random video chat is one of the most common routes to:

- Exposure to sexualised content
- Grooming behaviours (requests to move to a 'private' chat elsewhere)
- Pressure to share images/information

AI companion / chatbot apps (emerging safeguarding concerns)



Character.AI

AI 'character chat' apps have surged in popularity with teens. In late 2025, *The Verge* reported that Character.AI moved to restrict under-18s from open-ended chats, following growing scrutiny and lawsuits about harmful interactions.

Separate reporting has also highlighted that some chatbots have engaged teens in inappropriate topics despite platform rules.

Why parents should be aware

AI chat can feel *intensely personal* to a child or teen. Watch for:

- Secrecy or strong emotional attachment to the app ('it understands me better than anyone')
- Sleep disruption (late-night chatting)
- Advice-seeking from bots about relationships, self-image, or mental wellbeing

'TikTok-adjacent' lifestyle apps (content and influencer pressures)



Lemon8

Lemon8 is a lifestyle content app often compared to a blend of Instagram and Pinterest. Common Sense Media rates it 18+ (their guidance is based on child development research and app features).

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Why this matters

Even when content seems 'aesthetic', risks include:

- Unhealthy comparison and body-image pressure
- Influencer marketing and hidden advertising
- Private messaging and external links depending on how children use it

A note on Yubo



You may have heard of Yubo in the past as a 'meet new people' app. The company announced it raised its minimum age to 18+ effective from 1 November 2025.

Even so, similar 'social discovery' apps continue to trend, so it's still worth watching for *any* app that centres on meeting strangers.

What parents can do this week (simple, practical steps)

1) Do a calm 'app audit'

Ask your child to show you:

- Their top 5 most-used apps
- Any app they use to chat (including inside games)
- Any app they use with people they don't know offline

Tip: younger children respond best to curiosity, not interrogation:

Show me what you like about it. Who do you talk to on it?

Agree family rules that match age and maturity

Primary:

- No apps that connect to strangers (including random chat/ video chat)
- Messaging only with known friends and family
- Devices used in shared spaces when possible

Secondary:

- If an app connects to strangers, it needs a parent conversation first
- No moving chats to 'secret' platforms

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- Never share location, school name, or identifiable uniform photos publicly

Teach the '3 red flags'

Help children of any age recognise:

1. **Secrecy:** 'Don't tell your parents'
2. **Urgency/ threats:** 'Do it now or else...'
3. **Moving platforms:** 'Add me on Telegram/ WhatsApp/ Instagram instead'

Make help-seeking easy

A strong safeguarding message for all ages:

'If something online worries you, you won't be in trouble for telling an adult'.

If you're worried

If you discover an app like Wizz/ OmeTV/ NGL on your child's device, don't panic. Start with a conversation, capture any concerning messages, and block/ report within the app.

If you believe a child may be at risk, please contact the school safeguarding team promptly (k.honey@ics.edu.jo)

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