GROUPME: A Parent's Guide

What is GroupMe?

GroupMe is a mobile messaging app that's part of the Skype family owned by Microsoft. Available as a web client, as well as apps for iOS, Android, Windows Phone and Windows 10 Mobile, it is designed to let groups – such as families, co-workers and friends – host a group chat via Wi-Fi. Members can be added using their phone number, email address or QR code. Within the group, members can search and send images or videos, see shared web content and send text messages. There's also the option to send a private message to individual group members.

What does it look like?

Main Concerns for Parents

groupme AGE RESTRICTION 13+

Spam or scam messages
Unwanted messages from unauthorised third parties can include spam, hoax and phishing messages that try to deceive people into acting a certain way. In January 2018, some GroupMe users complained about receiving spam messages promoting diet pills while others say they received direct messages asking for bitcoin to help replace a stolen phone. It is possible for GroupMe users who have access to any phone number to contact others.

Sharing inappropriate content
There is a concern that children can receive or discover sexual or pornographic imagery through GIFs and videos, or encounter depictions of violence, self-harm, drug use and offensive language. In 2017, students at a US college admitted to sharing sexually explicit and racially offensive memes via group chats.

Cyberbullying
Cyberbullying can happen on GroupMe as with any other messaging app. Although sharing messages, images and videos is largely a fun experience for children, it can be used as a tool utilised to bully. According to a UK cyberbullying survey, 62% of young people have been sent nasty private messages via smartphone apps.

Sexting
Sexting - a mix of the words 'sex' and 'texting' - is when someone shares sexually explicit or sexually suggestive messages, photos, images or videos with others via their mobiles or online. It can also be known as sharing 'naked selfies' or 'sending nudes'. Sexting leaves young people vulnerable to blackmail, manipulation and threats.

Oversharing personal information
Messaging apps have many benefits, but they also make it easy to give too much information away. Peer pressure and the desire for attention can be reasons why some children feel the need to overshare, be it personal information, opinions or private photographs.

Remove someone from a group

If your child wants to remove someone from a group, they should click on 'Members', hover over the member they want to remove and click 'Remove' in the web version. In the app, tap on the person they want to remove, then select 'Remove from <group name>'. To remove multiple members at one time, select the three dots icon and tap 'Remove members', then select the members to remove and tap 'Remove'. When someone is removed from a group they will not be able to re-join the group unless someone invites them back in.

Leave a group

If your child is part of a group that makes them feel uncomfortable, show them how to leave. They can select the group they want to leave, tap the group's avatar in the top right corner or swipe left from the right side of the screen. In settings, they need to scroll to the bottom of the page and then tap 'Leave Group'. If they created the group, they will see the words 'End Group' – clicking this option will delete the group entirely.

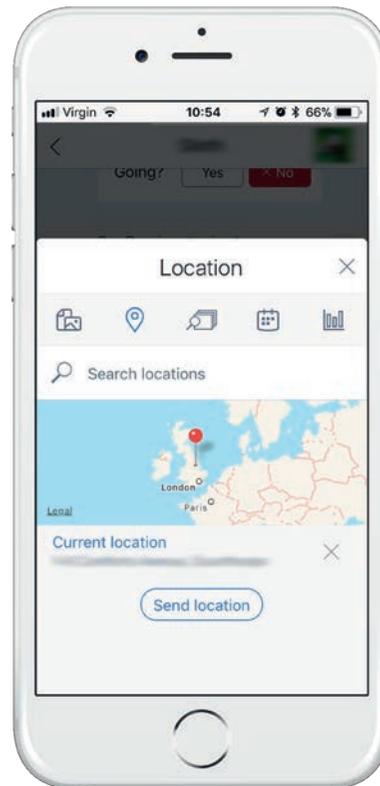## Don't share personal information

Remind your child that they should never share personal information with people online, including their last name, home address or school name. If someone asks them, it does not mean they have to tell them anything.

Be respectful of others

Remind your child to always consider what they are about to comment and to think about whether they would do that in the 'real world' or may regret posting at a later date. Encourage your child to think about the language they use online and to think carefully before commenting on content posted by someone else. Even if a message was intended to remain private it can still be shared by others.

Hide location

When opening the app, GroupMe requests access to the users location. This pop up is amongst consecutive requests which makes it easy to miss. We suggest that your child checks that their location is turned off in the phone and app settings to protect their privacy. it's important not to share their location with people they don't know.

Set usage limits

If you're concerned about the length of time your child spends on GroupMe, you could have a chat about setting a time limit on using messaging apps to connect with their friends. Or show your child how to turn off notifications so they don't feel compelled to reply when a new message arrives. If a phone's battery level is low, the device will automatically turn off notifications. In the app's settings there is the option to mute all notification or you can turn off notifications for particular groups only.

Cyberbullying awareness

Cyberbullying can happen on GroupMe as with any other messaging app. Make sure your child knows that if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable or embarrassed online then they can talk to you or another adult they trust can help. If your child sees someone else being bullied in group messaging, they need to consider that the person who is being subjected to that bullying may need help and support to get it stopped too.

Think about what they share

Your child needs to be aware that you can't delete images and messages in GroupMe once they are sent. Leaving a group doesn't delete messages or chats either. Although you can hide messages or clear chat history this only applies to their device – other people will still be able to see the chat. Remind your child that they need to consider that any images or messages they share cannot be taken back and could be shared by other users.

How to contact GroupMe

If your child encounters any problems using GroupMe, they can contact support via email at support@groupme.com. The following information needs to be included in a message:

- The group ID & group name
- The email address registered with
- The phone number registered with (include the country code).
- The exact purpose of the request

Discuss sexting

Although it is an awkward subject, it is important to explain to children that creating or sharing explicit images of a child is illegal. A young person is breaking the law if they take an explicit video of themselves or share a video of a child, even if it's shared between children of the same age. If a young person is found creating or sharing images, the police can choose to record that a crime has been committed although it is considered likely that taking formal action isn't in the public interest.

Sources: https://support.discordapp.com/hc/en-us
https://www.gizmodo.com.au/2017/03/discord-has-a-child-porn-problem/
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-4559008/Half-youngsters-experience-bullying-online-games.html