Group Chats

Group chats have become an integral part of communication in today's digital age. They are an excellent way for several people to participate in an online conversation together, and they are most commonly used through messaging apps like WhatsApp, Instagram Messenger, Facebook Messenger, Facebook Messenger for Kids, and Discord. With the rise of social media, users are getting younger and younger, and the impact of group chats on young people is a growing concern. In this article, we will discuss the benefits and drawbacks of group chats, the risks associated with them, and some strategies to help young people navigate them safely.

Benefits of Group Chats

Group chats have many benefits. They allow people to communicate and collaborate in real-time, share important information with a large group, and stay connected with friends and family. Group chats are especially helpful for people who live in different parts of the world or who have busy schedules that make it difficult to meet in person. They can also be used for planning events, discussing projects, and sharing news and updates.

Drawbacks of Group Chats

While group chats have many benefits, they also have some drawbacks. One of the main drawbacks is that notifications can ping all hours of the day, and stacks of unread messages can build up quickly, making it difficult to catch up on important information. Additionally, important information can get lost in the stream of messages, making it challenging to keep track of everything.

Another drawback of group chats is that they can be both helpful and harmful. While they can be a great way to stay connected and share information, they can also be a breeding ground for drama, exclusion, cancel culture, and cyberbullying. These behaviors can be especially problematic for young people, who may not have the emotional resilience to handle the stress that comes with them.

Risks Associated with Group Chats

Group chats can be risky, especially for young people. One risk is that they can become a breeding ground for drama, exclusion, and cyberbullying. Young people can engage in nasty behaviour about another person in a group chat, then deliberately invite them into the chat to see those comments. The deliberate nature of this abuse makes it cyberbullying. Additionally, group chats can happen outside of school hours, making it difficult for schools to manage the behaviours of young people involved in the chat.

Furthermore, there are ways to share online content via screenshots, saving and forwarding to other people. This is when things can spiral and fast. Kids need to understand that they can be "guilty by association," even if they are not the ones saying the nasty stuff. This is a necessary part of growing up and young people need to learn how to put boundaries around their friendships.

Strategies to Help Young People Navigate Group Chats Safely

Despite the risks associated with group chats, there are strategies that parents can use to help young people navigate them safely. One of the most important things parents can do is to remain vigilant. While we have not been informed of any issues with kids under 13yrs using Facebook Messenger for kids because of the strict parental controls included group chats on other apps can also be where drama, nasty behaviours, exclusion, cancel culture, and bullying can thrive. Parents need to be aware of their children's online activities and monitor their device usage to help them stay safe.

Another important strategy is to teach young people how to leave a group chat that is not helpful or is harmful in any way. Fear of missing out (FOMO) is a significant factor in a tween/teen's life, so parents need to navigate around that as well. They need to teach their children the life skill of politely exiting a social situation that they feel uncomfortable in, online and off.

Parents can also help their children build some intellectual muscle by teaching them to be in charge and confident in their relationships. Their friends will understand that their refusal to engage at every moment has nothing to do with the state of their relationship. They will understand that this is the way they manage their time, their devices, and their priorities.

It is also important to keep group chats positive, helpful, and supportive. These are not places where people should complain about someone else, reveal intimate secrets, create drama, spread rumors, or gossip. Parents can educate their children on appropriate behavior in group chats and emphasize the importance of treating others with respect and kindness.

Parents should also make sure their children know that they should not feel compelled to respond straight away or be a part of every single interaction. It is okay to take a break from group chats and focus on other aspects of life. Additionally, parents should teach their children to be aware of the potential consequences of their online behavior. They should understand that what they say or do online can affect their reputation and digital footprint.

Parents should also consider implementing some technical strategies to help their children manage their group chat usage. For instance, they can remove access to the devices late at night to avoid interrupted sleep caused by the group chat notifications and beeps. They can also change the way chat notifications appear, make those pings silent and invisible quickly on both Android and iOS, or temporarily silence individual conversations to limit the number of pings from everyone in the chat.

Group chats can be a breeding ground for cyberbullying

The anonymity provided by the online environment can embolden bullies to engage in more aggressive and hurtful behavior. They may make derogatory comments, share hurtful memes or images, or exclude someone from the conversation. The constant notifications and pressure to respond quickly can also create a stressful and overwhelming environment for young people, leading to feelings of anxiety and depression.

Parents should talk to their children about the importance of treating others with respect and kindness online and

emphasise the consequences of their actions. Parents should encourage their children to speak up if they witness or experience cyberbullying and let them know that they will be supported.

When phones are left in bedrooms, they can be a distraction from sleep, leading to disrupted sleep patterns and fatigue. Additionally, when phones are present in the bedroom, children may be tempted to check their messages and respond to group chats late into the night, leading to a lack of restful sleep and increased stress levels if they receive a nasty message just as they are trying to go to sleep.