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Snapchat A guide for parents

As a parent, the world of Snapchat can be difficult and frustrating. Terms such as ‘Snap Maps’ and ‘left on delivered’ make absolutely no sense, and when you think you finally understand the app, something changes. ‘disappearing messages’ can create a false sense of security and issues for parents trying to monitor their child’s online activity.

Snapchat gives you the power to record and share live videos, locate friends on an engaging map, experience augmented reality (AR), and more. After launching in 2011, Snapchat has grown to become one of the top social media platforms in the world.

Most parents don’t know enough about it. In this guide, we will aim to give you enough information to know Snapchat well enough that you can empower your children to make more informed choices for a safer online experience when using Snapchat.

So, as a parent, here’s the big question: what can I do to keep my child safe?

Constantly checking or banning your child from Snapchat will not fix the problem but only make them want it more and find new ways of using it without you knowing.

The best thing to do is encourage open, honest conversation with your young person. Explain to them the risks and your concerns. Check their privacy controls and emphasize the importance of only sharing your location with close friends and family, and maybe consider turning off “location” altogether.

There is no ‘magical solution,’ and children will always be at some risk when online, but by allowing open communication, you can help you, and your child better navigate this challenging space.

So firstly....what do all these terms mean?

What is a Snap?

A Snap is a picture or video you send to one or more of your friends through the app. A video Snap can be 60 seconds long (known as a Long Snap).

Snapchat doesn’t hold onto any photo or video content; the platform deletes the “Snap” after the recipient has viewed the Snap.

What is a Bitmoji?

A Bitmoji is a cartoon avatar that represents you. Fully customizable in the Snapchat app, Bitmoji allows you to add personality to your profile and account, right down to outfits and hairstyles.

What is the Chat?

Chat is Snapchat's version of instant messenger for individual and group chats. Messages disappear after they're viewed.

What are Snapcodes?

Snapcodes are QR-style codes that you scan to add friends or access features and content on Snapchat. Each user is automatically assigned a Snapcode upon signing up.

What are Memories?

The photos are saved on Snapchat. Found by swiping up in the camera. These are Snaps and Stories that you can save for viewing later rather than allowing them to delete.

My Eyes Only?

The password-protected photos are saved here. Found in the same place as Memories. You will need the password and your child's consent to access these. They are often used to store intimate images.

What is a SnapMap?

SnapMap shows your location and the locations of all of your friends.

You can view Snaps submitted to the Snap Map from across the world. There are multiple settings for safety that we will explain further in this guide.

What is a heat zone?

This is where Snapchat stories are published and how they are displayed on the SnapMap if adequate privacy settings are not in place. The map's blue, yellow, orange, and red glowing spots indicate how many Snapchat stories are coming from that location.

What are Stories?

The posts users make and share. Found on the heat zones on the map or in the 'Stories' area on the camera's right. Stories stay on the app for 24 hours before being deleted.

If you'd like to save your Story, you can download them to your device's camera roll or save them to Memories.

What are Custom Stories?

Custom Stories allows you to create stories with other people from your friends' list.

What is SU: Swipe up?

Often used to get users to reply with information or start conversations from Stories. (e.g., 'Bored. Someone SU)

What is a Quick Add?

The section where most users can quickly add people by clicking 'Add'. This is found in the top right-hand corner with the person outline and plus sign.

What is Spotlight?

Short videos similar to TikToks. Found on the far right of the action bar

What does left on opened/read mean?

The person receiving the message has opened it but not replied

What does "left on delivered" mean?

The person receiving the message has not opened the message for an extended period of time

What is Ghosted?

When someone suddenly stops communicating with someone for no apparent reason.

What is a streak?

A Streak (Snapstreak) counts how many consecutive days you and a friend share Snaps. You'll see a flame emoji next to your friend's name, with a number indicating how many days you've kept the Streak going.

Streaks are a large part of Snapchat and the reason it appeals to a younger audience. Snap streaks are often seen as a competition and a measure of friendship.

A streak is shown using the 🔥 emoji with a number next to it. (e.g., 50 🔥 means you have a 50-day snap streak). The ⏳ means that your streak is going to end soon unless you and the other person send each other a snap. Snapchat streaks expire after 24 hours of no activity.

It's also popular to send a photo with either an 'S' or 'Streaks' written on it, to maintain current streaks or start new ones with different people.

What is SB: or Snap back?

Often used on streaks when the user wants the receiver to 'snap back' to create or continue a streak.

What are Lenses?

Lenses use AR (Augmented Reality). Snapchat Lenses allow you to add 3D special effects, objects, and characters to your photos or videos. These can be used when you are taking a snap.

What are Filters?

A Snapchat filter adds overlay and special effects to photos. Filters can be anything from making you face resemble a cute little puppy dog or change based on special events and time of day.

What are Geofilters?

Similar to Filters, Geofilters are unique to your location.

Best Friend List

What is the 'Best Friend list' and how does it work?

The people on your best friend list are the 8 people you talk to the most. The relationship between users is often represented with an emoji.

 - Super BFF- you and this person have been mutual #1 best friends for 2 months in a row

 - BFF- you and this person have been mutual #1 best friends for 2 weeks in a row

 - Besties- you and this person are mutual #1 best friends

 - Best Friend- they're on your best friends list but not #1

 - Mutual Bestie- your #1 best friend is also their #1 best friend

 - Mutual Best Friend- one of your best friends is also on their best friends list

 - It's your friend's birthday!!!

Badges/Charms

These are little icons based on you and your friend's relationship.

These will update and change.

These include things like 'Snap streak', 'In Touch', 'Star Sign Compatibility', 'Snap Legends/Masters', 'BFs', 'Friends Birthstone', 'Astrological Sign', 'It's Their Birthday', 'Half Birthday Twins', 'New Friends', and many, many more!

Group chats have things like 'Group Journalist', 'Most Verbose', 'Most Creative', awarded to certain members for sending the most chats, snaps, taking the most screenshots, saving things to the chat, etc.

So how do you use Snapchat – The basics

If you're familiar with other social media apps, Snapchat should come quickly to you. But just in case, we have written out how to access each screen, what they do, and how to use them.

Camera screen

The camera screen is the home screen. From here, you create your Snaps, send Snaps, and navigate to other areas of the app:

You swipe left for the Chat Screen.

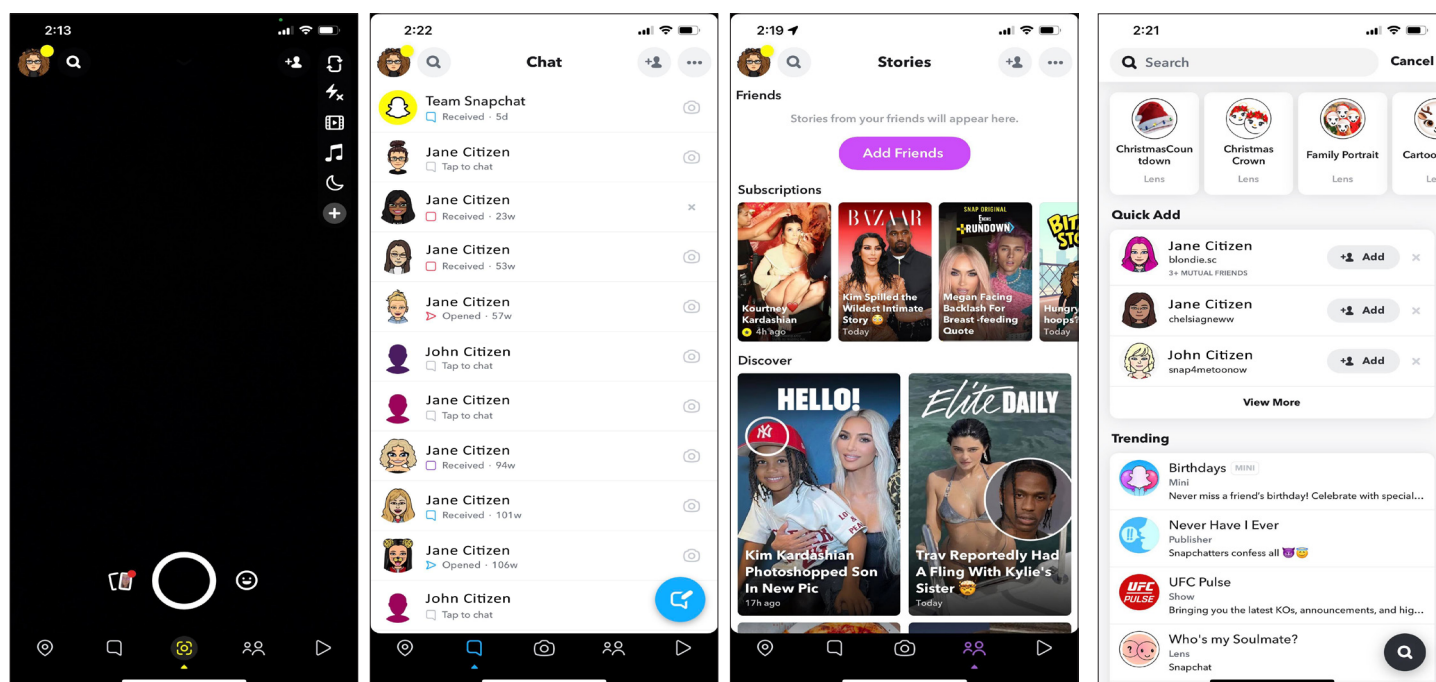
By swiping right, you will see the Stories Screen.

You swipe up to get to the Memories Screen.

Swipe down for the Search Screen.

On the right side of the Camera Screen is a toolbar.

You can control camera settings, including the flash. You can switch between front or reverse camera, set the self-timer, adjust the focus, and add a grid to your camera screen for more accurate Snapping.



Chat feature

Snapchat allows you to connect with friends individually or have a group chat with several people. For individual chats, messages delete automatically once you leave the conversation, and group chat messages are deleted after 24 hours.

If you don't want a message to disappear, you can **save it by pressing hold**.

Other people in the Chat will see that you've saved it as the background of the message will turn grey.

IMPORTANT TIP – If you want to save a message to use as evidence, make sure that you use another device and take a photo of the screen so it doesn't notify the others that you have taken a screenshot.

How to chat with one friend

Tap their name on the Chat Screen, or tap the blue icon in the bottom right corner and select the friend you'd like to start chatting with.

How to start a group chat

Tap the blue icon in the bottom right corner, select the friends you'd like in your group chat, and then tap Chat.

Friends on Snapchat and how to add them

You can add people you know from your phone contacts, but Snapchat gets much more engaging when you extend beyond your contact list.

Most young people have connections on Snapchat that they do not know, which can cause some privacy issues if the SnapMap is not secured correctly, which we will discuss later in this guide. Here's how you add friends:

Add by Snapcode

To use Snapcode, open Snapchat, point the Snapchat camera over the other user's Snapcode, then tap Add Friend.

Add by Name

Tap the magnifying glass on the top left of the Chat Screen, and type in who you're looking for. Then, if they're using Snapchat (and have a public profile), you can add them as friends.

Quick Add

The feature suggests people you may want to connect with based on your mutual contacts and the contacts on your phone.

To use the Quick Add feature, open the Chat Screen, and a list of users will appear in the lower half. Tap the +Add button next to the user you want to add as a friend.

You may not see names suggested in Quick Add until you have started to build up your Snapchat network.

How to accept a friend request on Snapchat

When another user sends you a friend request on Snapchat, you must accept it before you are connected. To accept a friend request:

1. Open Snapchat and tap on the Profile circle on the top left of the screen
2. **Tap Added Me.**
3. Tap the + button next to your friend's username to accept their friend request

Profile screen

In the upper right corner of the camera screen is an icon with your Bitmoji (if you have one). Tap this to access your profile screen.

Stories screen

Swipe right to find your Stories, friends' Stories, and Stories from brands and creatives in the Discover section. To look at Stories, tap the screen, and the app will automatically move to the next Snap in the Story. When a Story ends, Snapchat will automatically move on to the next, much like Reels on Instagram and TikTok videos.

Snapchat Memories

Snapchat Memories allows you to save Snaps and Stories to view or even repost later. You can save any Snap to Memories by tapping the Save button. You can also choose to keep all Snaps to Memories by default.

Open the Snapchat app and swipe up or tap the small circle below the capture button to view your Memories.

Snapchat +

Since the last update, Snapchat has added the feature 'Snapchat +.' After choosing your plan for either one month, six months, or one year, Snapchat gives the user unique features, including pinning one 'BFF' at the top of your best friends list, seeing who rewatched your Story, and the 'friend solar system.' The friend solar system shows you where you rank on your friends' best friends lists. You can find this through either the 'Friends' or 'Best Friends' badge or charm with a gold ring around it. 'Best Friends' means that you are both on each other's best friend lists, while 'Friends' means that you're on their best friend list but not yours. Tapping this badge shows you where you are in their 'Solar System.' For example, Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun, which means you're number one, Venus is second, Earth is third, etc. Many other exclusive friend badges/charms are available. This is a breeding ground for bullying and hurt feelings. In the free version of Snapchat, standard best friend lists are bad enough without having to see where you are on other people.

Another questionable feature is the 'Ghost Trail.' This feature allows Snapchat + users to see the general directions their friends have traveled in the last 24 hours, shown by a yellow line. Users can only see this if their friend has their location turned on, and they have the latest version of Snapchat. This has the risk of predators being able to see the place you are in or return to the most in 24 hours.

Snapchat + also gives users many choices in-app icons and a Snapchat + badge on their profile. They also can get extra friendship charms/badges.

Snapchat + is a complete waste of money and time, with few aesthetic benefits and safety problems. It can be detrimental to users' mental health, allowing the constant comparison to other people.

Security Features

The primary way to keep your child safe on Snapchat is your Privacy Controls.

If you go into Settings and scroll down to 'Privacy Controls,' you can secure your account. By changing 'Contact Me' and 'View My Story' to 'My Friends,' only people that have been added can contact your child and see their stories.

Changing 'See My Location' to 'Only Me' puts the account on 'Ghost Mode,' meaning no one can see their location.

You can also turn off your child's appearance in 'Quick Add' to stop people from being able to add them randomly.

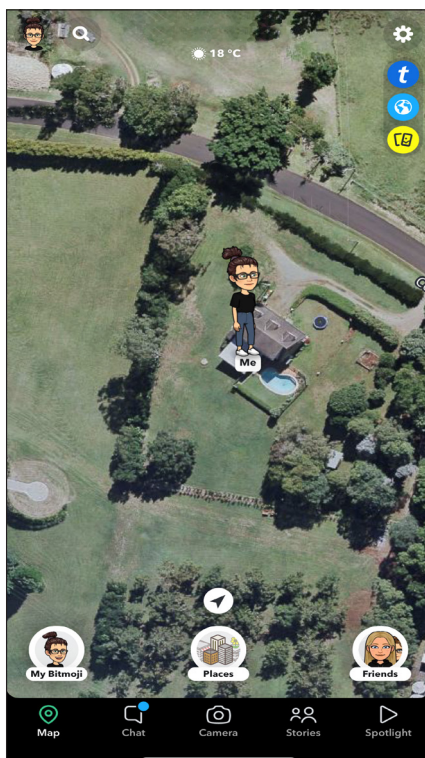
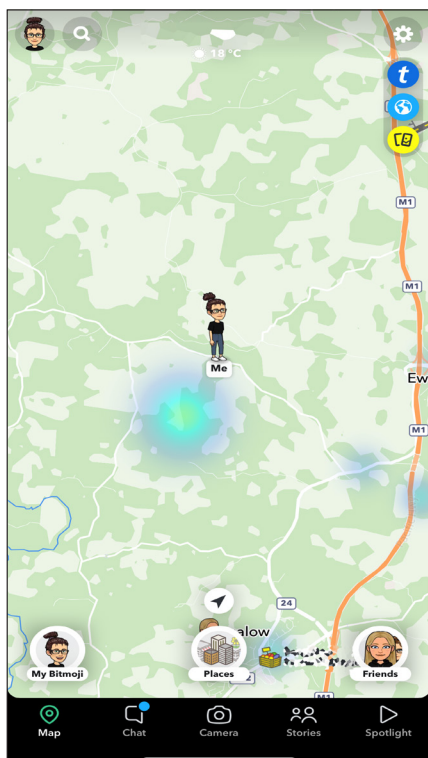
Teaching your child how to block, report, and remove a friend can help them manage who they talk to in case something goes wrong. By holding on to the person's name and tapping 'Manage Friendship,' you have the option to block, report, or remove.

It is recommended to take screenshots if your child is being bullied or sent inappropriate content for evidence, and these need to be taken using another device to prevent the person from being able to see that the messages were screenshot.

Make sure your child knows that even if they think their messages disappear, things can still be saved and screenshot.

Snapchat Snap Map

The “Snap Map”, is a feature within Snapchat that allows users to keep up to date with the locations of their friends, in addition to viewing Snaps and Stories. Snapchat recently updated their privacy policy and enable precise location that allows the map to track you movements to your precise (down to about 50cms) location.



Snap Map turns sharing your location into a visual experience.

There are a lot of elements that you can find on the map, so you may be initially confused as to what's what, how to navigate various features, and how to update your settings.

How to use Snap Map

Before you are able to use Snapchat Map and start exploring the world, you need to enable locations services.

If you have an iPhone, open up your settings and scroll to Privacy. Once there, tap the switch to turn on location services. Then, scroll to Snapchat and select “while using the app.”

This means that your location will only update when you're using Snapchat, so you don't have to worry about it updating in the background and draining your battery or using all your data.

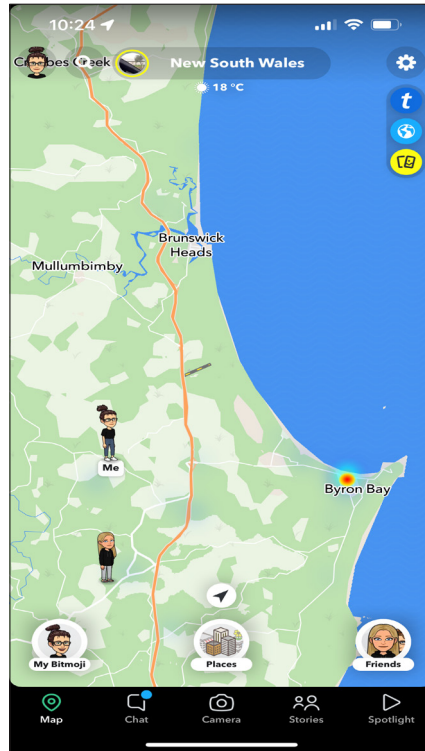
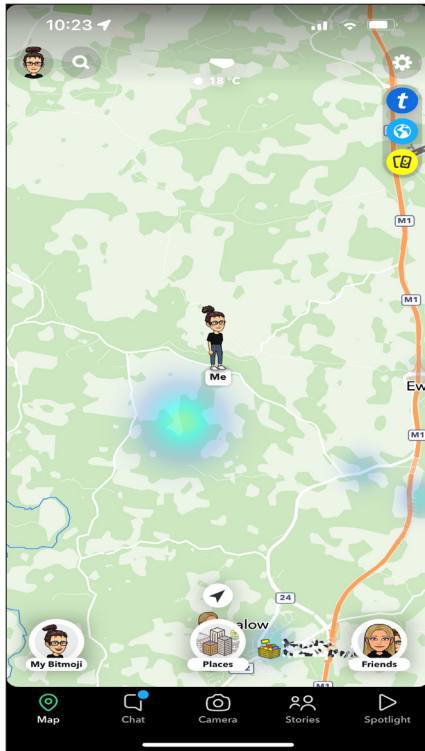
How to open Snap Map

From the camera screen tap on the map icon the bottom left corner.

Features

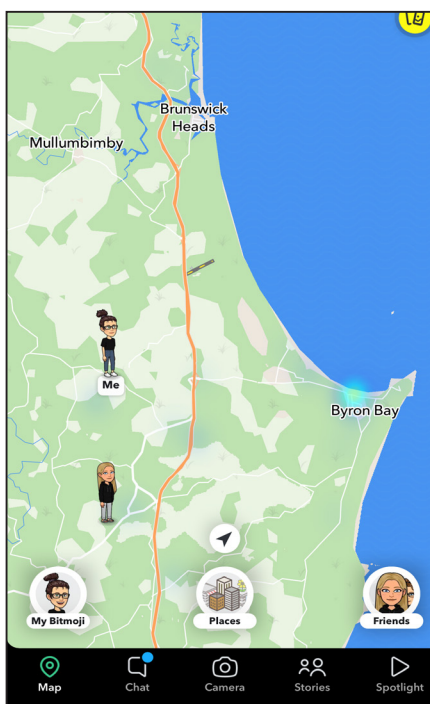
Whether you're in a highly populated city or a country town, you'll notice that Snap Map features a heat map that shows where the most Snaps are being taken (if you don't see this, zoom your view out to see more areas of the map).

Areas that are light blue or green are where Snaps are being taken. Areas that are yellow, orange, or red have an extensive amount of Snaps being taken. If you tap your screen on areas of the Snap Map that show one of these colours, you'll be able to see Snaps that people have taken and submitted to "Our Story."



Friends

If your friends on Snapchat have their location enabled, you'll see their Bitmoji on the Snap Map. If you aren't sure which Bitmoji is who, tap on them to be shown their name and when they were last active on Snapchat. A Bitmoji is your own personal emoji. Your Bitmoji represents you all around Snapchat. You can share your Bitmoji in Chat, change its outfits, and even bring it to life with 3D Bitmoji and Bitmoji Party!



Stories

Stories differ from Snaps as these are created around specific locations or events. This can be anything from a museum, sporting event, or popular monument.

Highlighted Event

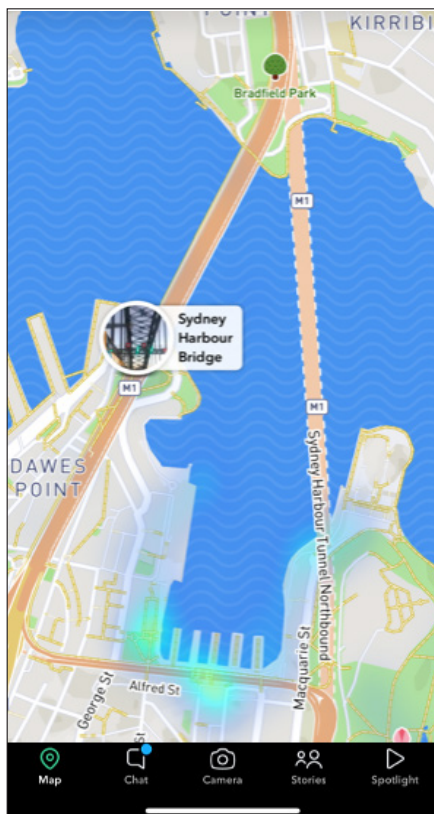
Snapchat features highlighted events all the time on the Snap Map. To find these events, either tap the specific event or compass icon directly above the “capture” button on the Snap Map screen.

Once you do, you’ll be taken to the event, where you can see a brief description and Stories that have taken place there.

Monuments

Depending on where you are, you may also see various monuments on the Snap Map.

Places such as The Sydney Opera House and The Harbour Bridge and others are all displayed with a unique icon. If you’re looking for more details about that monument, tap its icon to see additional information.

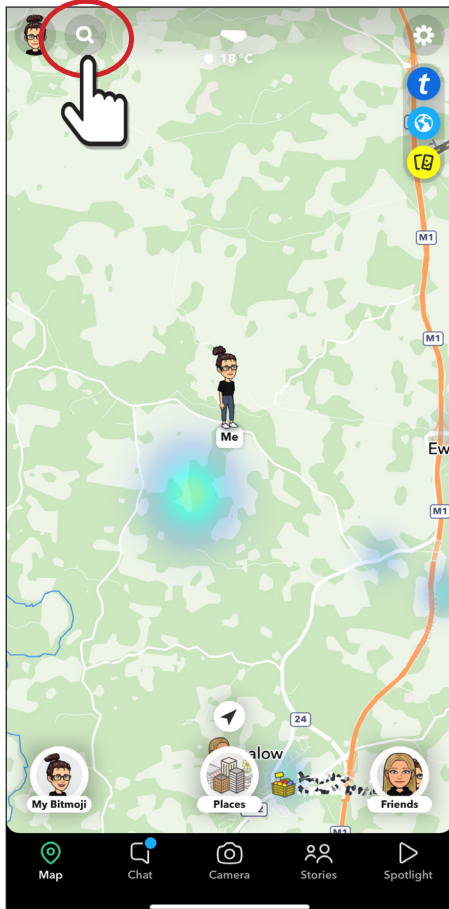


Sharing your location on Snap Map

The gear in the top right corner of the Snap Map. There, you can update exactly who does, or doesn't, see your location.

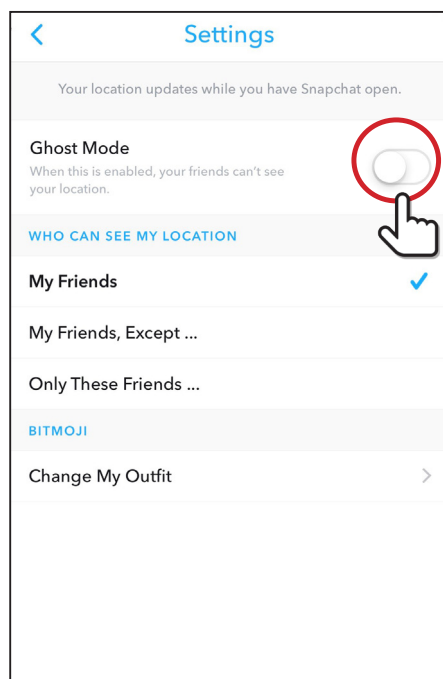
Search Bar

At the top of Snap Map is the Search bar. This comes in handy if you're looking for a specific friend, event, or monument.



Ghost Mode

Tap this on if you aren't interested in anyone knowing where you are or what you're doing on Snap Map. This mode will automatically enable if you haven't been active on Snapchat for more than two hours.



My Friends

Choose this option if you'd like all your friends on Snapchat to see your location details. Be aware that if you post a snap video to our story in this mode you may make that video snap public for everyone to see.

My Friends, Except

This option is great if you have a select two or three friends on Snapchat that you don't want knowing where you are. Just scroll through your friends list and choose who won't be able to see your location.

Only These Friends

When you choose this setting, you can scroll through your friend list and pick which friends are able to know where you are.

Top Safety Tips for Snap Chat

1. Abide by the age restrictions.

This app is unsuitable for any child still in Primary school. The age recommendations the app provides are 13+, and this app includes content inappropriate for children under 16+.

Check your child's phone. If they have downloaded this app without your consent request, they delete it.

If you believe to the contrary that this app is suitable for your younger child, consider supervising them closely while they use it. Be present when they open their Snaps.

2. Use the available settings to allow only messages from friends.

Only the accounts that have been added to your friend list can contact you through Snapchat. And this includes photo snaps, video, and text chats.

Settings – use Contact me under the Who can option and choose “My friends.”

3. Secure and protect the account.

Use strong passwords. A combination of upper and lowercase letters plus symbols will make it difficult for your account to be accessed by others. To add a level of security, use the option for two-factor identification. A verification code will be sent to your mobile to access your Snap account.

Change this password every school holiday and make sure they never share the password with anyone other than you (depending on their age).

4. Select who you wish to allow to view your stories

You may use your settings to allow your friends to see your stories. Some content you may wish to limit to a specific group of friends. You may do this by creating a custom group of friends to share your stories with.

Settings - Who Can – View My Stories – Everyone/My friends/Custom.

5. Block unwelcome individuals who try to add you to their accounts.

Keep your Snap friends limited to individuals you have met personally. If a stranger adds them to their account, consider blocking them, and this will ensure your content is only available to friends.

Go to the individual's profile by hitting their profile picture or emoji – tap the three dots at the top of the right-hand corner, and the drop-down menu will offer several choices, including reporting the account, blocking the account holder, or removing them as friends.

6. Pay attention to Screenshot Notifications. Not all content disappears.

Snapchat will notify you when someone takes a screenshot of your snaps.

This may be something you are uncomfortable with and may affect how you view that particular friend.

Notifications will arrive via the app and instant phone notifications if you have these enabled on your phone.

7. Do NOT share your user name freely.

It is common for teens to include additional social media addresses in biography information, and it is strongly recommended that any such communication be removed. This will limit the ability of strangers who come across your profile on other platforms to attempt to friend you on Snapchat and protect your privacy.

8. Do not share your Snap Q codes.

(This is a code that allows others to scan using a Snapchat camera that then automatically will enable them to be added as your friend) If you don't want a bunch of strangers adding you as a friend, don't publish this.

9. Move any private snaps that you have saved in Memories to My eyes only

You can save snaps that you have posted. Some of these you may wish to be private and not available for general consumption.

To do this:

1. Tap the check mark option in the top right corner of your memories.
2. Select the snaps you want to make private and tap the lock icon at the bottom of the screen.
3. Snapchat will walk you through the setup process for your My Eyes Only section.

10. Watch who you send things to and watch what you send.

You cannot unsend a Snap.

Please make sure you send it to the right person the first time, so get into the habit of double-checking who is on your recipient list. Some content is meant to be for specific individuals only.

If the content is intimate, be advised that child abuse laws about intimate images will apply in your state, both for the individual who is sending the photo and for any individual who shares an image when the person involved is underage.

Threats and demands for nude photos are viewed very poorly in all states.

11. Learn how to delete stories

While you cannot unsend snaps, you can delete stories you post if you have regret.

Go to Stories – tap on your Story, swipe up, and tap the trash can. You cannot do this in bulk and must do it one at a time.

12. Use Ghost Mode on the Snap Map and obscure your location.

This allows users to see where they are geographically and is very specific to latitude and longitude. Enabling Ghost Mode removes a user from this map and stops revealing their location.

13. Our Story can be a problem.

Our Story allows users to contribute to a global public feed, and it will enable users nearby to communicate whether they know each other.

Adjust location sharing settings on an individual's device and within the app. The risk that personal information is accidentally shared globally and possibly put on the world SnapMap is real.

The most attractive feature of Snapchat is the disappearing message. What must be made clear to your child is that these Snaps can be a screenshot or recorded.

Users can get false confidence from assuming a post is not permanent.

This feature often means that the level of bullying on this app can be high.

14. Discover is full of dubious content.

Content highlighted in this section is attention-grabbing and often could best be described as click-bait. Sexual content is high on this list, a problem for parents who have to allow a younger user to use this app.

The recorded age of the user modifies this by Snapchat, but the ease at which a user may change their age is notable. A regular check of the birth date your child is claiming may not go astray to limit the amount of adult content they may view.

15. Beware of Add ons

There is a multitude of "add on" apps that link to Snapchat. Your children can connect to strangers through these apps. This is where it is essential to understand that it is all about the collective total of their social media presence.

By connecting to a stranger through an add on to Snapchat, they are giving that person access to their SnapMap and, if it is not secured – access to their precise location at any time.

We always advise that you never ask your child about these apps specifically (the quickest way to get them to go and download them); instead, just be aware of what they look like and maybe ask more general questions about what social media they use to connect with their friends.

So here are the most popular ones.

Yubo



Yubo calls itself a platform to chat and live stream with friends.

In the iOS App Store, it is rated for users 17+ and on Google Play, it is marked 'T' (Teen).

Your child can register on Yubo with an active mobile phone number.

Mimics adult social media & dating apps like Tinder with a swipe function to connect you with the friends you didn't know you had in group chats. It has been called out for being a dating app for teens.

Yubo may be ground for sexual predators.
Users need to provide access to microphone and GPS.

Users of the app can swipe right to say 'yes' and left for 'no', exactly as on Tinder and other dating apps. On Yubo, if both parties say 'yes', they are matched and can then chat and follow each other on Snapchat or Instagram.

Users can also host live video streams or chats which are open for viewing. So strangers and friends alike can view such streamed events!

It's important to remember that most children will want to join Yubo for the same reason they want to join any other social network, from Instagram to Snapchat: curiosity, a desire to fit in, and FOMO.

And while Yubo presents some more obvious dangers than other social networks, the app developers have reacted to popular outrage and parental concern by implementing some safety nets:

- o Auto blocking of people with images that are obviously not of teenagers
 - o Blocking of users with fake profiles, by the team of human moderators
 - o Easy flagging of profile and content
 - o Option to keep location private
 - o Investigation and suspension of underage profiles (no indication of policy on overage profiles)
 - o Auto blocking of nude and semi-nude images
 - o Development of an algorithm to screen for nudity in live streams, shutting down the feed and blocking the user for a time
- Ensure that your children know they can report any distressing or concerning content to you or another trusted adult.

Sendit



Sendit allows anonymous feedback.

End of story. No app that allows anonymous feedback is healthy. Now, there are some teens who might benefit

from sharing about their own lives anonymously in a forum due to some struggle or embarrassment.

But, that's different than social-media-driven requests for others to tell me anonymous things without repercussions. Body shaming and "rating is rife on this app.

3 ways to keep tabs on an app like Sendit:

1. Talk to your kids about your expectations about what types of apps are allowable.
2. If you want to allow kids to pick apps but with permission – Set up Family Sharing (iPhone) or Family Link (Android).
3. If you want to prevent access to app stores altogether – Turn off the App Store in Screen Time (iPhone) or use an App Lock (Android).