

Online Safety 4 Schools

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Discord:

Parents - everything you need to know about the chat service

What is Discord?

Discord is a chat service specifically designed for gamers to connect with each other using either text, voice, or video chat. Unlike similar services such as Twitch, Discord is not designed to host live streams that audiences can tune into and watch, but rather focuses on invite-only, group-based communication. Users can access the service downloading the desktop application, using the browser version, or downloading the app for mobile or tablet. Discord is completely free to use and has around 14 million players accessing it every day, and a total of 150 million users signed up.

Are there any age restrictions?

According to Discord, the chat service is designed for teens and adults and says that users must be at least 13 years old to sign up. However, there is no verification method in place to enforce this other than having to verify your account through an email. It is stated in the terms and conditions that if you are under 13 you must have the consent of a parent or guardian.

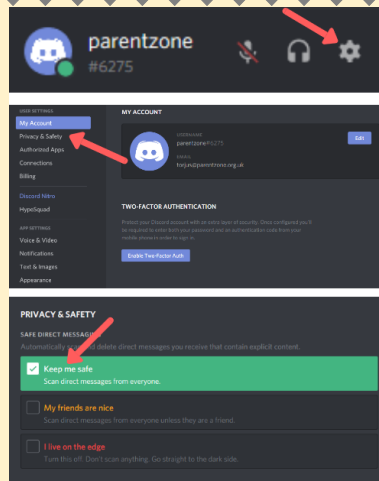
Does it have parental controls?

Discord does not offer any parental controls, as such, but has advanced privacy settings which allow the account holder to adjust pretty much the entire user experience. Since it emphasises that it is supposed to be invite-only which puts the user in charge of who they want to connect with or not, you can make your profile as private as you would like.

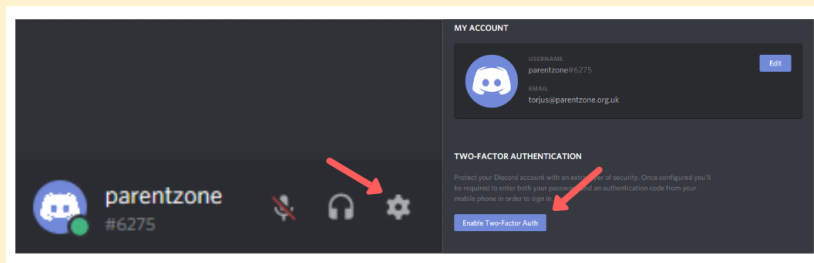
For example, you can adjust

- Who can direct message you and view your information?
- Who can add you to their friends list?
- Which servers you want to be a part of
- Which members of a group you want to communicate with
- What sort of safety features are available?

The chat service has an array of safety tools available to help protect your child from exposure to explicit content and abuse. For example, you can enable the programme to scan all incoming direct messages and delete all the explicit content it detects, be it text, images, or videos. You can do this by going to the 'User Settings' page, click on the 'Privacy & Safety' tab and then tick the box that says, 'Keep me safe'.



Discord also recommends that you add another layer of security to your account by activating two-factors authentication (2FA). This involves registering the devices you use and having to enter a code received either by email or text message in addition to your password. You can activate 2FA by going to 'User Settings', click on 'My Account' and then tick the box that says 'Enable Two-Factor Authentication'.



What else do parents need to be aware of?

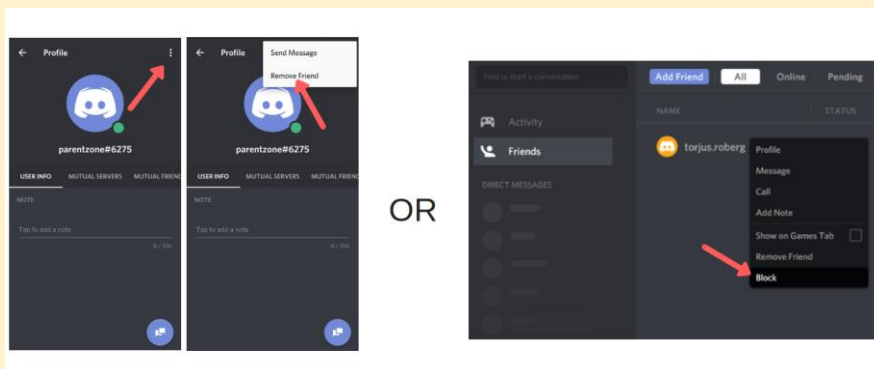
Although Discord does a good job of blocking out sexually explicit content, the most prominent risk to children using the service is bullying. There is a risk of children being targeted by some nasty comments in Gaming Chats if they, for example, perform badly in an online game. Although a text-based chat can be filtered, no such safeguards are in place in a video or voice chat.

A good way of ensuring that a situation like this does not arise is to make sure your child only takes part in groups where they know the other members and avoids groups with large member bases.

Are there any reporting tools?

Although it can be difficult to prevent bullying in voice and video chat, there are reporting tools in place if your child has been the victim of inappropriate behaviour.

You can block users by accessing the list of members in a group and clicking on the user you wish to block which will bring up their profile. In the app, click on the three-dot menu at the top of a user's page and click 'Remove friend'. In the browser, bring up your friends list and right-click on the user you wish to block and click 'Block'.



The Dark Side of Discord

Discord is a 'free' private gaming community that can be compared to unsupervised playgrounds, full of racist memes, vulgar chat, and bullying.

- The free service, accessible from mobile devices and computers, allows users to talk to friends or strangers in real-time via voice, text, or video chat
- Discord is a way for people to communicate while playing videogames, and with the popularity of "Fortnite" and other popular online multiplayer games, it has exploded.
- Discord says its biggest sector is gaming and that's where racial slurs, sexist comments, politically incorrect memes and game-shaming are prevalent.
- Anybody can create chat groups, called servers. You are technically supposed to be at least 13 to use the service, but Discord doesn't check age when you sign up.
- The official Discord servers for games such as "Fortnite" and "Call of Duty" are well-policed by the games' makers. But most conversation takes place in private, invite-only servers, according to Discord. These are 'Closed Groups'.
- Users can block unwanted messages and friend requests, restrict the people they allow into their server and turn on a filter to block explicit content in direct messages, but there's no stopping kids from wandering into servers where lewd chatter and content might appear.
- Having signed up for Discord to see it for myself. There was no prompt to enter my age or date of birth. It took only about 15 minutes to find pornography and far right political memes, without specifically searching for them. It was possible to enter invite-only servers without a prior invitation. Once there it was possible to access adult content by simply clicking a button saying I was at least 18.

What can parents/carers do?

- Sign up before your child does and decide if it is appropriate for your child to use, this will allow you to experience Discord.
- Stick to the age restriction of 13+, if possible, only allow children 13 and over to use Discord, the restriction is there for a reason so try and stick to it.
- Use Family Sharing on IOs devices and the Family Link App on Android devices to prevent your child downloading Discord without your knowledge. Family sharing can be accessed via the Apple device settings option and uses your apple id which then prevents the user of the other device from downloading new Apps. The Android App needs to be downloaded via Play Store and require each user to have a Gmail email, but once set up the user will be prevented from downloading Apps from the Play store without permission.

If a Parent/Carer decides to allow their Child to use Discord (NOT ADVISABLE)

- If you and your child decide to use Discord, then make sure you know and always know your child's profile name, password etc. This allows you to have control and allows for periodic checking of your child's servers and closed groups.
- Create the profile together and keep the log in details secret. Social Media, Gaming and App usage is not a right it is a privilege, so children (especially those under 13) should earn the right to spend time with their parents using Discord, stay in control and share the experience.