

Online Safety 4 Schools

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Omegle

18+

(Option for 13+)



Introduction

Omegle is a website that pairs random strangers for live text or video chats. There is an option for adult (18+) content and a section for people ages 13+ with parent permission. Anyone can use the site and it is notorious for featuring pornography and inappropriate content on the chats. Omegle first launched in 2009 and remains as easy to use now as then. Users simply go to Omegle.com and then choose Text Chat or Video Chat (No Signing in) and the page states how many users are currently online. Depending on time of day this can be as many as 300,000 users. To end a chat, all users have to do is press 'New' key and a new chat begins. 90% of the new stranger chats begin with requesting personal information 'ASL' Age – Sex – Location, and if a user selects 'Text Chat' then Omegle encourages the user to use Video chat as well.

What parents need to know about Omegle

Free to Users

Omegle is a free online chat website that allows users to communicate with others without the need to register, supply an email address or create a profile so users remain anonymous allowing for unrestricted inappropriate behaviour. As a result, Omegle chat is extremely popular. As Omegle has no actual sign in or requirement for profile name or identification, the online text chat or video chat begins immediately. Like 99% of chat facilities and social media platforms, Omegle, simply has an electronic verification of age by usage. This means by using a user agrees to Terms and Conditions and verifies that they are either 18+ or 13+ with parental permission. This makes it very easy for users to access, use and start online engagement with strangers, parents must be aware of this platform, its popularity and ease of use to monitor or prevent usage.

Cyberbullying

Omegle does have cyberbullying problems, young users can be taunted for their looks, age and forced into doing acts on video chat. Being safe online is about behaving appropriately, which includes not engaging with strangers on any chat, social media or gaming platform. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these platforms require and encourage online interaction, engagement and messaging other users, and most children and young adults do not see a correlation between strangers in the street to strangers online. Furthermore, the reason users use these platforms is to engage with other users, they just don't see or understand the dangers and possible exploitation. The anonymity allows for all forms of exploitation, from Cyberbullying, to Sexual & Psychological Grooming to online extortion as a result of sharing too much information and images.

Video Chat

Omegle also has a video chat feature. The content in video chat rooms is not moderated by administrators and at any time of the day there are thousands of users online available to chat. Video chat is the preferred mode of Chat by most users, interestingly this seems to be the 'Omegle' preference as well, as selecting Text Chat seems to prompt Omegle software to incessantly keep encouraging the user to activate the Web Cam (Video Chat). Whilst the Text Chat has a degree of moderation controlled by Omegle, this is done through software and a

number of actual moderators, but with over a million users daily the physical moderation is pretty insignificant. The Omegle Software moderates, identifies and prevents certain words and sequence of words to try and prevent bullying and grooming. The software is limited to preventing unacceptable words, so again it is present by quite ineffective. Video Chat on the other hand is not moderated at all, allowing for taking, posting and viewing of illegal, unacceptable and inappropriate images. Omegle currently offers no function for reporting online abuse or inappropriate behaviour on its site. Instead, it offers the following advice: 'Use Omegle at your own peril. Disconnect if anyone makes you feel uncomfortable'.

Privacy

Omegle does not provide advice about how to protect your personal information. Omegle can be linked to a users Facebook account to match their interests and likes with other users, therefore Facebook settings (if used) must be adjusted to control what information is shared with Omegle. Young users are much easier to manipulate than adults and young users may reveal personal identifying information to a complete stranger, this requires adult involvement to keep safe. Sharing personal information, such as age, name, gender, location MUST not be shared, but also it is common for Omegle users to request being added to snapchat, Instagram, facebook or whats app accounts for further interaction, all this must be avoided to prevent sexual, psychological exploitation. 'True Friends don't ask personal questions'.

Talk to Strangers

Omegle's slogan is: "Talk to strangers!". Omegle chat picks another user at random and lets you have a one-on-one chat with each other. The whole issue of online interaction with strangers is to be avoided, unfortunately as the sole reason to use Omegle is to 'Talk to Strangers' makes this platform completely unacceptable to anyone Un 18. The risks are many, from Catfishing (users pretending to of similar age), Trolling (users deliberately being hurtful), Identity Theft (users using information to commit fraud), Sexual and Psychological Grooming (users coercing others to act in a way or do something they would not normally do)

Pornography

Unfortunately, Omegle is infamous for its live pornography or pornographic content, other users can be seen exposing themselves or engaging sexual acts, these Omegle users do not care who they connect with. As a very high percentage of Omegle do use Video chat to expose themselves the issues are all too familiar from unintentionally viewing illegal, unacceptable or inappropriate images. If a user selects video chat then the other users webcam will automatically be switched on before action to 'end chat' can be selected, there is no 'preview' in smaller thumbnail windows. Furthermore if a user is convinced to share intimate images or videos, then if they are under 18 they will be committing a criminal offence, also the video or image may be recorded and then shared or posted elsewhere on the internet, causing further issues of damage to the users 'Digital Tattoo', these images videos are on the internet forever.

Safety Tips & Awareness

Omegle states that users must be 18+ to use Omegle, and users Under 13 must not use Omegle without Parental permission – actually Children Un 18 SHOULD NOT USE OMEGLE it is completely inappropriate, allows for unacceptable behaviour and can ultimately lead to possible illegal activity. Omegle is not for users under 18 years, however sometimes blocking or preventing use sometimes does not work and can make some young users more curious, and perhaps use Omegle in secret. So to try to avoid unknown secretive usage, parents / carers must be aware of Omegles existence and users must be aware of the risks and issues and what action they can take to be safe.

Users Under 13 Must Not Use Omegle

Therefore, if Un 18's decide to use Omegle the following should be practiced

Users Over 13 but Un 18 must follow the following rules:

Top Ten Rules

1. Users must seek permission

From Parents or Trusted Adults

2. Users Must Not use Omegle alone

Not being alone allows for better judgement and prevents inappropriate behaviour and corroborates any report of illegal, unacceptable behaviour.

3. Users must never use their own name EVER

Users will be asked, but this is must be prevented.

4. Users Must Not Share Personal Information

True Friends Do Not Ask Personal Questions- Keep Secrets Safe

5. Users Must Not give profile/user details of other Social Media or Gaming Platforms*

This is 'personal information' and allows for strangers to discover more about you.

6. Users Must Not accept invitation to other Social Media Platforms*

Online Predators request online interaction on other platforms to exploit and have a complete unmonitored secret interaction and messaging service to groom their victim.

7. Users Must Not select Video Chat

Video Chat is not moderated and allows for illegal, unacceptable, inappropriate imagery.

8. Users Must Not share images

This is personal information and images / videos can be screenshot and used elsewhere to exploit and hurt.

9. Users Must Report any Illegal Unacceptable Inappropriate behaviour to Parents – Trusted Adults – Police

Reporting is a must; trusted adults must be consulted.

10. Users Un 18 must not screenshot any images or videos even for reporting – Tell an Adult

This prevents the possibility of the user committing criminal offences – telling an adult and reporting is the priority.

Platforms*- Facebook – Instagram – Snapchat – Whats App – We Chat – Fortnite – Tik Toc – Discord – Steam – Twitch – You Tube

Parents / Carers / Trusted Adults

Tip

Speaking and guiding young users is far more useful than ignoring the possibility of Omegle being accessed. So parents need to explain that Omegle is not completely anonymous, other users will and do use Omegle to exploit others. Young users are aware of stranger danger and sometimes young users do not perceive an issue with online interaction with other 'users' and do not see this as stranger danger. Young users must be reminded of keeping personal information to themselves and safe. Explain to young users that sharing their real names, age, phone number, or address with people they don't know is dangerous and can cause a lot of trouble.

Tip

If a young user is either going to use or is using Omegle, then adults must try Omegle for themselves, this allows for them to see and experience the issues for themselves. More importantly it allows parents / carers the reason why the Top Ten rules must be employed, if Omegle is to be allowed.

Tip

To prevent usage then monitoring a young users use of the internet has to be done, for a PC this will have to be through software and adding www.omegle.com to the list of banned websites and URL's. As the Omegle App can be used on mobile / cell phones via the App Store or the Play store then parents can use Family Sharing App on iOS devices and Family Google Link on Android devices to prevent the downloading of the App without permission. *(remember – Omegle can still be used via the website on a Mobile / Ipad / Tablet / Smart TV / Gaming Device)*

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