

Online Safety 4 Schools

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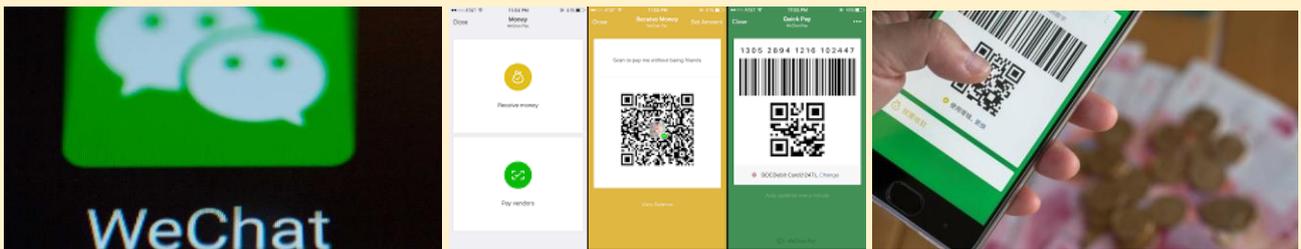
WeChat

Apple App Store Rating: 17+

Google Play Rating: Everyone

WeChat is a free messaging and calling app that allows its users to connect with family and friends across countries. It's the all-in-one communications app for free text (SMS/MMS), voice and video calls, moments, photo sharing, games, and more. Founded in 2012, WeChat is headquartered in Shenzhen, Guangdong, China.

But **WeChat** offers so much more than messaging, allowing its users to do everything from payments to the ability to book flights and hotels. **One key feature it has is called "mini-programs" which are apps within WeChat.** While **WeChat** started out as a messaging service, it has transformed into an app where you can do everything from payments to purchases, to donations, or even booking flights via QR Codes (Quick Response).



WeChat Messaging & Adding Contacts

- Although some parents might not have heard of WeChat, it is one of the top 50 most popular social media apps in the iTunes store with over 980 million monthly active users
- One of the primary uses of WeChat is messaging. Just like WhatsApp, you have a list of conversations that you're engaged in.
- Users can exchange contact details; each user has a unique QR code. Therefore, a user can quickly scan the QR Code to obtain all the details. Users can also use a phone number or ID to add a person and more menacingly users can search for people nearby, using the device GPS or location settings.
- Users can make voice calls, send text messages, have video conferences, and share photos, videos or their current location to others on the app
- In addition to those features, users can send broadcast messages that go out to a group of people
- WeChat offers free stickers and games with the option to purchase more
- Users can also post text, images, or videos to their "Moments" for all of their contacts (and WeChat users nearby) to see

Mini - Programs

- WeChat is also described as a "super app" because everything is integrated within one service.
- Instead of having one app for banking and another for ride-hailing, a lot of these are built directly into WeChat so that the app becomes a one-stop shop for its users.

WeChat in the News

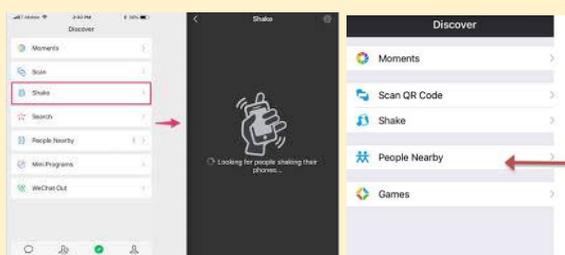
“An increasing number of teenagers and schoolchildren are using the mobile phone application WeChat for online gambling, as well as to connect with others looking for sexual hook-ups and for the buying and selling of drugs.”

Today

“The Indian Government blacklisted WeChat, together with another 41 apps, categorising them as spyware.” ABC Australia.

Why should parents/carers care?

- Whilst the age is 17+ this is only an electronic verification, so anyone under 17 can simply verify (lie) that they are 17+, there is no need to use a date of birth.
- WeChat encourages users to chat with strangers nearby or around the world, at random. This feature is incredibly dangerous for children and young adults.
- Users can connect their Facebook and Twitter accounts to the app which makes it easy to share posts from the app (even if the post was intended to remain private)
- By default, when a user posts to their “Moments”, anyone nearby can see their posts
- If a user doesn’t change their security settings, anyone using the app (anywhere in the world) can access the user’s information they’ve shared including photos, videos, and contacts.
- WeChat has a discover (uses) facility which allows all users to locate ‘strangers’ worldwide or ‘People Nearby’ using the device GPS (Location). The ‘Shake’ facility will find a user (stranger) and allow for messaging and video contact. Device GPS must be switched off whilst App is live to prevent unwanted requests.



What can parents/carers do?

- If your child or young adult has the WeChat app, have them delete it and discuss other ways they can connect with friends in a positive way.
- WeChat is NOT the new WhatsApp, despite comparisons being made, WeChat is not simply a ‘messaging’ service.
- **If using WeChat users must switch off the device GPS (Location Service)**
- Download WeChat before your child does, and decide if it is appropriate for your child to use, this will allow you to experience the ease of downloading, the ease of creating and using the App
- Stick to the age restriction of 17+, if possible, only allow children 17 and over to use WeChat, 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 Byte 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.