What Parents & Carers Need to Know about Discord

Cyberbullying
Discord’s easy accessibility and connectivity, unfortunately, makes it an ideal place for cyberbullying to occur – especially as audio and video streams disappear once they’ve ended, meaning that bullying could take place without leaving any evidence. Closed groups can also be created, giving young people the opportunity to exclude their peers or send cruel messages without adult oversight.

Difficult to Moderate
Like many private communication apps, Discord’s real-time messaging can be difficult to control. The system enables content moderation through each individual server – so different groups can set their own rules for what’s acceptable, and some groups may not monitor for unsuitable content. Anything that happens in an audio or video stream is also virtually untraceable once the stream has concluded.

Inappropriate Content
Discord mainly hosts private groups, making it easier for unsuitable or explicit content to be shared on channels. Pornography, racism and inappropriate language can be found in such groups. Server owners are also required to add an adult content notice to channels where 18+ content is being shared – but this system is often ignored as the platform doesn’t always verify users’ ages when they sign up.

Advice for Parents & Carers

Review Safety Settings
Discord has a series of safety settings, enabling parents and guardians to set up rules within the app to keep their child safe, which can include blocking unsuitable content, setting age filters and blocking any messages or friend requests from servers members. This will minimise the chances of potential predators from outside the group contacting them.

Explain Age Filtering
While Discord requires users to be at least 13 to sign up, many servers now target older users and flag them as NSFW (not safe for work), which indicates they probably contain material that’s inappropriate for children. It can be easy to click through settings without properly reviewing them, so ensure your child understands why age filtering is important and that it’s there to protect them.

Screen Out Explicit Content
In the privacy and safety settings, Discord users are offered the ability to filter direct messages for inappropriate content setting that should be enabled if your child uses the platform. Discord automatically deletes any direct messages that are explicit, but the setting must be manually enabled for each user. If your child is not explicit on platform or is using a direct message, Discord will scan and (if necessary) delete it.

Monitor Online Activity
It’s wise to regularly review your child’s activity on Discord. This can include checking their safety settings to ensure they’re correctly enabled, talking about which servers they’ve joined and reviewing some of their friends and direct messages. In fact, it’s often been recognised that digital check-ins and follow-up frequently.

Discuss Good Online Behaviour
The anonymity offered by the internet often leads people to communicate more openly online and behave differently than they would at school or home. It’s crucial to bear in mind, though, that every internet user is still a real person. Talk to your child about the severe and lasting consequences that cyberbullying or exchanging inappropriate material online can have in the real world.

Have Candid Conversations
It can sometimes be awkward to discuss topics like grooming, pornography, racism or explicit content with your child – but it’s important to ensure they’re aware of the harms these things can pose. Talking openly about these subjects is a great way to help your child feel more comfortable about coming to you if they experience bullied or another online.

Meet Our Expert
Coral Cripps is a Canadian-born, London-based tech journalist at GameTank.com, a website specialising in all things Web, gaming and XR (extended reality). With a focus on brands and culture, she researches and writes about the ways that our current innovations – including the metaverse and Web 3.0 – are impacting people, places and things.

What is Discord?
Discord is a free app which allows users to communicate in real-time via text, video or voice chat. Available on desktop and mobile devices, it was originally designed to help gamers cooperate – but has evolved into a more general networking platform for a range of online communities, discussing topics like TV series, music, Web3 and more. Discord is organised around closed groups, referred to as ‘servers.’ To join a server, users must be invited or provided with a unique link. It’s a space for users to interact with friends, meet others with shared interests and collaborate privately online – but it’s also a place where young people can be exposed to risks if the right precautions aren’t taken.

Access to Predators
On many chat platforms, users can lie about their age or role-play with underage users – by initially chatting with a child on an age-appropriate channel, for example. While Discord has improved its safety settings, some users will still try to bypass them for malicious reasons.

Criminal Activity
Discord does have strict terms of Service and Community conduct, and is against users – but, sadly, not everyone adheres to them. Cybercrime, including grooming, hate speech, harassment, exploitative content, and extremist or violent material have all been found on Discord servers over the last two years. In 2020, Discord received almost 27,000 reports of illegal activity on the platform.