LIVE

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AGE RESTRICTION 13+

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WHAT IS HOUSEPARTY?

Houseparty is a live streaming app described as a face-to-face social network where people 'drop in' on each other to video chat, leave messages and hang out in groups. The app is available for iOS, Android, macOS and Google Chrome and has tens of millions of users worldwide. It's important to note that children under the age of 13 must have a parent's permission to access the services, however, no proof of age is required to create an account.

HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE USE IT?

Each time the app is opened, your child will be instantly connected to other users who are also on the app. Users can create group conversations of up to eight people at one time. Each time a person joins, the screen splits to show everyone who is part of the conversation. Your child can add contacts via phone numbers, search for their usernames, and share a link to their profile. They can have as many rooms as they want and move from chat to chat by swiping across the screen. Along with this functionality comes a few associated risks to be aware of...

What parents need to know about HOUSEPARTY

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"STRANGER DANGER"

Friends of friends can join conversations on the platform without the need to be connected or known to all the other users in the chat. Houseparty calls this feature 'Stranger Danger'. While it does alert users when individuals they may not know enter their chat room, it also suggests strangers might be a reason for 'party time'. There's also the danger of people attempting to deliberately mislead others by using false names or usernames.

SEXUALISED MESSAGES

People may use live streaming apps such as Houseparty to engage in inappropriate or illegal activities. There have been concerning reports directly linked to Houseparty, including one incident where two Mancunian children aged 11 and 12 were reportedly targeted by men exposing themselves back in 2017. Outside of their close friendship group, it's also important to note that friends of friends can also connect with your child via the app, which may include people with this intention.

CONTENT BEING SHARED

The 'facemail' feature lets users share moments from their Houseparty conversations by recording and sharing 15-second snippets of chats. They also have the option to save these moments to their gallery. For privacy purposes, every member of the group will see a notification if another member is recording - this could be a concern if your child shares something in the live chat they may later regret. Once recorded, they lose control over the video and how it is used. Screenshots of live streams and private messages can also be taken which could be shared widely and embarrass users.

CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying is when people use technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. Group chats can be used by bullies to make negative or hurtful comments which may cause offence or be harmful to others in the group. Exclusion from friendship groups within the platform may make your child feel sad and left out/socially excluded.

OVERSHARING PERSONAL INFORMATION

Children often don't understand the risks involved in giving out too much personal information in a live stream or within their profile. They may also be less protective of personal details during online conversations. One example of this within a live chat could be their background revealing information about where they live or go to school without realising.

IN-APP PURCHASES

By tapping on the dice icon your child can play a game called 'Heads Up!' where one person gives clues to describe someone or something and the other players guess. Three cards are included for free but additional decks cost real money. There's the potential for your child to get carried away playing the game while working up a small fortune.

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Top Tips for Parents

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NOS National Online Safety®
#WakeUpWednesday

TURN ON PRIVATE MODE

One additional tip is to use the app settings to turn on 'Private Mode' which automatically locks the room, instead of doing it manually. Parents with questions can always email us at hello@houseparty.com

Settings
Edit Profile
Permissions
Private Mode
Save Your Facemails

SAFER CONVERSATIONS

With live streaming being such a popular feature on apps, it is important that you are aware of the dangers associated with it in order to protect your child effectively. Have regular and honest conversations with your child about what apps they are using and how they are using them. It may be a good idea to have your child show you how they use Houseparty and how to navigate through the platform so you are aware of how it works.

CHECK COMMUNICATIONS

Also, it's important to be aware of who is on their friends list and who they are communicating with. Remind your child to not communicate with people they do not know and trust. If they experience something on the app that makes them feel uncomfortable then they should tell a trusted adult immediately. Remind your child that if they get an invite to join a Houseparty room from someone they don't recognise, then they should ignore the request.

'LOCK' ROOMS

In regards to communicating with users on the platform, we advise that your child uses the 'lock' feature to make their conversations private. This means that other users, especially strangers, can't join their conversations.

PROTECT THEIR PRIVACY

Your child may unknowingly give away personal information during a live stream, including their location. Talk to them about what constitutes 'personal information' and make sure they do not disclose anything to anyone during a live stream, even to their friends. Advise them to remove any items in their live stream (school uniform, street name, posters etc.) that could potentially expose their location or personal information. Check your child's privacy settings thoroughly. You have the option to opt out of certain uses and disclosures of personal information, such as turning off the app's location sharing option.

PROTECTING YOUR CHILD'S DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

As the videos are live, it may lead to the misconception that whatever happens in the video will disappear once the live stream ends. All content shared on the app can be recorded or screenshotted and shared to a wider community. It is important that your child knows that what they do now may affect their future opportunities. In addition to this, the video chats can't be reviewed later which means unless a parent or carer is sitting nearby during a call, they won't know what has been said. It's worth bearing in mind that parents can see when their child has last communicated with someone and for how long for under the 'We Time' feature.

REMOVE LINKS TO OTHER APPS

Users can link their account to both Facebook and Snapchat, or can simply share a link to their profile. We advise that your remove these links and remind your child not to publicly share access to their online profiles as there is the potential for strangers to get hold of your child's information or communicate with them.

BE PRESENT

A study conducted by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) found that 96% of streams showed a child on their own, often in their bedroom or bathroom. If your child is going to conduct a live stream, ask them if you could be present for it. This will give you a greater understanding of what your child is doing during their live streams and who they are streaming to.

REPORTING AND BLOCKING

If your child faces a problem while using the app they can report direct to the platform by shaking their phone. A prompt will pop up allowing you to report issues immediately by clicking on the 'report now' button. They also have the option to report and block users directly on the user's profile.