Learning Opportunities

Welcome to our latest Safeguarding newsletter.
We aim to provide you with useful links, tips and the latest, relevant help and advice on issues we feel will be of importance to you.
If you would like any more information, please do not hesitate to contact the school

DANGERS OF HiPAL APP – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A recent study by the Co-Op Foundation found that 95% of children and young people admitted to occasionally feeling lonely. So it's easy to understand how networking apps like HiPal – with the tempting lure of massive amounts of 'exciting' new people to befriend and interact with online – has become hugely popular.

HiPal is a trending social media app which turns phones into walkie-talkies, allowing people to have voice conversations with friends or strangers. There are two account options: one for users aged under 12 and one for those aged 12 or above. The former has fewer features and limits interaction with strangers; enabling use of the walkie-talkie feature or photo sharing with friends and family only. The 12+ accounts offer more options, including adding strangers as friends, sharing photos and videos publicly, send private messages and holding voice chats with strangers as well as friends.

HiPal has attracted concerns around its use as a potential platform for sexting

In the National Online Safety guide below, you'll find tips on a number of potential risks such as contact with strangers, dangerous challenges and intrusive features.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

HiPAL

AGE RESTRICTION

12+
(with reduced functionality for under-12s)

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WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

HiPal's under-12 accounts don't allow direct connections with strangers (although children seeking more friends can share their 'Friend Code' on other platforms), but for older users, chatting with strangers seems to be the app's main appeal. The 'Public Square' shows nine online users (hitting 'refresh' replaces these with another nine), and clicking on someone's profile starts a conversation.

SEXTING AND SUGGESTIVE PICS

Almost immediately after our expert downloaded the app, strangers began to message privately – asking for provocative images or sharing explicit photos of themselves. Likewise, in the 'Explore' feed, many of the pictures and videos are innocent ... but some are far more salacious. There is always the risk of other users secretly saving a revealing photo and re-sharing it elsewhere.

NEED FOR VALIDATION

Some users – particularly girls – post photos on apps of this type hoping for positive reactions and comments to boost their self-esteem. Suggestive images tend to attract more flattering feedback, encouraging the user to post more frequently and with more explicit content. Conversely, receiving unkind comments about their picture can impact a young user's confidence and sense of self-worth.

NO AGE GATES OR MODERATION

Although users are given an initial choice of the under- or over-12 profile, there is no verification method to confirm someone's age; it is quite clear that the 'older' option offers a more complete experience on the app, but there seems to be no content moderation in place. Likewise, there is a reporting button for users to make a complaint but these reports do not appear to be followed up.

INTRUSIVE FEATURES

HiPal's walkie-talkie gimmick is no different from a normal phone call and seems rarely used; although it allows conversations to still be heard while a phone is locked, which could have awkward results. HiPal also offers 'Boom' messages: unmissable large-text notifications which are highly distracting and briefly take over the phone – users can't access other apps until the message fades.

LARGE GROUP CHATS

The app offers group chats with up to 100 people – both friends and unknown users. This not only means excessive 'Boom' messages taking over your child's device, but near-constant notification alerts and – most worryingly – the potential for walkie-talkie chatting and sharing photos with strangers outside parental supervision and apparently with no moderation from the platform itself.

Advice for Parents & Carers

EMPHASISE CAUTION

Remind your child of the dangers of connecting with strangers online. Some may be using the app innocently; others may have more sinister intentions. Encourage your child to consider what information they disclose in private messages and emphasise that they should inform a trusted adult if someone on the internet ever attempts to persuade them to meet in person.

TALK ABOUT SEXTING

It can be an awkward conversation (which young people are often reluctant to have), but it's vital to talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting. Discuss the legal implications of sharing explicit images, as well as the emotional impact. Make it clear your child should never feel pressured into sexting – and that they should tell a trusted adult if they receive any unwanted explicit images.

BUILD RESILIENCE

With HiPal's lack of moderation, it's imperative that children are prepared for comments they might receive after uploading an image. You can build their resilience and equip them to manage these situations by having them show you any comments they've received. Together, discuss how the nice ones made them feel – and what they could do if someone posted a comment that upset them.

AVOID OVER-SHARING

Young people should think carefully about what they share in their profile, bio and posts. Talk to your child about not disclosing personal details such as phone numbers, other social media accounts or images which could reveal where they live or go to school. It's essential for children to recognise that strangers can assemble a detailed profile of someone based on things they can find online.

CONSIDER MENTAL WELLBEING

Many users on HiPal publicly share photos that are intended to be alluring in the hope of gaining more likes, friends and positive feedback – boosting their self-esteem and making them feel more self-assured. When young people regularly engage with social media platforms, it's important that parents and carers keep in mind the potential impact such platforms can have on mental wellbeing.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

https://hipal.app/about/privacy.html

National Online Safety®
NOS
#WakeUpWednesday

Good to know – minimum age limits for popular apps

Facebook (minimum age 13) – lets users create their own profiles, share status updates, pictures, videos and chat with other users and also has a messenger app.

Instagram (minimum age 13) – allows users to alter photos, upload them and share to other social networking sites. Photos and videos can be sent directly to specific users.

Snapchat (minimum age 13) – a photo-sharing app where users can send photos or videos to their friends. These will display on screen for up to ten seconds before being deleted, although it is possible to take screenshots of messages and download other apps designed to capture and save Snapchat content.

TikTok (minimum age 13) – TikTok users can make their own short videos on the mobile app and often like to have music accompany these. The users have creative control over the videos. Other TikTok users can 'react' to videos they see by filming their responses alongside the original video, or 'duet' by making a video alongside another video.

Twitter (minimum age 13) – a social network that lets users send and read 'Tweets': messages limited to 280 characters.

Tumblr (minimum age 16) – a social networking site where users can post blogs and follow other people's blogs. Some of the content on this site includes sexual and/or pornographic images.

WhatsApp (minimum age 16) – a free-of-charge, real-time messaging service. Users can share images and videos, take part in 'group chats' and share locations. As it's based on knowing the user's phone number, you can only message users if you already have this information.

YouTube (minimum age 16) – allows users to watch, create and comment on videos. The dislike button can create insecurities with content posted even if comments are turned off for the video.

"Hi Mum" SCAM ALERT

There has been an increase in a phishing scam, often known as 'Hi Mum'. The scam involves the impersonation of friends or family members and can be conducted through text message or an instant messaging service, such as WhatsApp.

Phishing is the use of 'real' or authentic looking messages or emails pretending to be someone else in order to gain access to your personal information and/or account details.

The 'end game' for the scammers is to access your banking and/or private information, which they can then use for their own financial gain.

3 Top Signs to Spot the "Hi Mum" Scam

Unknown Number	Instead of using a name, writing: 'It's me' or not stating who it is	Saying their phone is lost or broken

Social Media Benefits

Despite the risks, social media platforms can offer children and young people valuable opportunities to develop digital literacy skills and build a good digital footprint. Although social media can present some risks, it's important to understand what the benefits are to give your child the guidance they need to make the best out of their social media use.

Broaden connection and understanding of the world

Children can learn and appreciate different perspectives and worldviews to better understand the world around them and build up their knowledge on a range of topics.

Develop communication and technical skills

As social media is now a part of everyday life, it is important for children and young people to learn how to communicate online to prepare them for future opportunities in the workplace and support them in interacting with friends and family.

Removing boundaries to develop connections

For children who may not feel they can connect with others within their community, it can be a great way to connect with other people who share their ideas and interests.

A place to seek support

It can open up opportunities to offer support to friends and family that may be experiencing a particular issue. On the flip side for some young people, it can be a place where they can seek support if they are going through something that they cannot talk to those close to them about.

5 tips to help young people make the most of social media

Be a good role model   —

Role model the behaviour you'd like them to express on their social media. Children and young people tend to copy behaviours so it's important to reflect the same values you'd like them to adopt.

Stay socially engaged   —

Actively look for moments to discuss what they post, who they share with and how what they see on their social feed impacts them to offer support at the right time.

Talk about striking the right balance   —

Encourage them to form strong in-real-life relationships outside of social media to ensure they aren't overreliant on approval and opinions of social media users, which are purely online and could negatively impact them.

Promote social good   —

Look for ways that they can do good by using their social media following, whether it's promoting a cause that will benefit others or sharing something that will offer support and contribute positively to their digital footprint.

Equip them with the right tools   —

Ensure teens know how to make use of the social platforms' privacy settings to stay in control of who they share with and when and what appears on their account from others.

Safer Internet Day 2023 will take place on the 7th February 2023

Safer Internet Day is joined by organisations worldwide in approximately 170 countries in an effort to make the Internet a safe place for children & young people.

Whilst we believe that every day is a safer internet day here at Learning Opportunities, the official annual event to promote the safe, responsible and positive use of digital tech among children and young people will be based around the theme **"Want to talk about it? Making space for conversations about life online".**

Students will be engaging in a range of activities that are designed to put children and young people's voices at the forefront of the campaign, encouraging them to help shape the future of online safety support.

Our Safeguarding Team are always available to offer support and guidance on any safeguarding issues or concerns.

Our Safeguarding Team

Simon   **Kev**   **Cath**

Our School website features a Safeguarding area which includes links to our policies and our parents / carers & visitors Safeguarding leaflet
https://learningopps.org/safeguarding/

Please contact Simon Graydon (Designated Safeguarding Lead) if you have any Safeguarding / Child Protection concerns: simong@learningopps.org   01304 381906 / 07394 984289 / 01304 371527