



Omegle is a website that pairs random strangers for live text or video chats. It first launched in 2009 and its slogan is "Talk to strangers!" There is an option for adult (18+) content and a section for people aged 13+ with parental permission. Anyone can use the site. Users simply go to Omegle.com and then choose 'Text' or 'Video' chat and the page states how many users are currently online. Depending on the time of day this can be hundreds of thousands. Omegle markets itself as a great way to meet new friends however has been known to feature pornography and inappropriate content within chats, so it's important parents are aware of the risks associated with the site.



What parents need to know about

OMEGLE



NO AGE VERIFICATION MEASURES

Omegle is completely free to use and allows users to communicate with others without the need to register, supply an email address or create a profile. This means users can remain anonymous and it's hard to trust who your children are talking to. Furthermore, there are no age verification measures and other than agreeing to the terms and conditions, your child can easily start online engagement with strangers and potentially access more adult themed content.



RISK OF CYBERBULLYING

The anonymity of Omegle can increase the risk of cyberbullying on the site. Engaging in chat with strangers means that topics of conversation can lead almost anywhere including discussions about looks, body image or the sharing of other personal information. With the availability of video chat as well, this could lead to children being coerced or forced into carrying out activities online which could then be used against them.



UNMODERATED CHAT

Omegle encourages video chat as much as it can, prompting users during their text chat to activate their web cam. Whilst text chat has a degree of moderation, the content in Omegle's video chat rooms is not moderated by administrators and, at any time of the day, there can be thousands of users online. This means that your child could easily come across illegal, unacceptable or inappropriate images or media. Omegle currently offers no function for reporting online abuse or inappropriate behaviour on its site and instead only offers advice to 'please be careful'. It also advises to 'Use Omegle at your own peril. Disconnect if anyone makes you feel uncomfortable.'



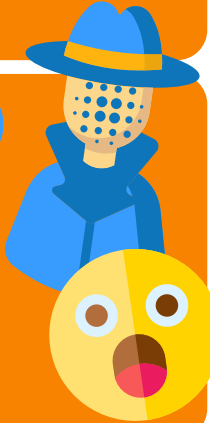
PRIVACY RISK VIA FACEBOOK

Omegle can be linked to a user's Facebook account to match their interests and likes with other users. This means that Omegle can access your child's basic Facebook information, and Facebook friends may potentially view Omegle activity. In addition, users can save the chat log and share the link without the other user's knowledge. It is not uncommon then for users to request being added to Snapchat, Instagram or WhatsApp for further interaction, moving the conversation into a more personal setting.



RISK OF EXPLOITATION

Omegle chat picks another user at random and there is very little way of verifying who your child may be chatting to. This can lead to a number of risks including catfishing (users pretending to be of similar age), identity theft (users eliciting information to commit fraud) and sexual/psychological grooming (users coercing others to act in a way or do something they wouldn't normally do).



ADULT THEMED CONTENT

Unfortunately, Omegle is infamous for its pornographic content and it is not uncommon for users to expose themselves or engage in sexual acts. If a user selects video chat, then the other user's webcam will automatically be switched on before the action 'end chat' can be selected. There is also no 'preview' in smaller thumbnail windows. As video chat is so easy to access, it means that unintentionally viewing more mature, inappropriate or even illegal images can't always be avoided.



Safety Tips For Parents



DISCUSS RISKS WITH YOUR CHILD

It is important to speak to your child about the dangers of Omegle. Guiding and educating young children is far more useful than ignoring the possibility of Omegle being accessed. Explain to your child that Omegle is not completely anonymous and that other users will and do use Omegle to exploit others. Try to emphasise the risk of speaking to strangers and that engaging online is no different to engaging offline.



PROTECT PERSONAL INFORMATION

Omegle does not provide advice about how to protect your personal information so it's important that children are aware of what they should and shouldn't share online and with whom. If they use Omegle, always advise against sharing any personal information such as their real name, age, phone number, address or any other personal identifiable information. This also includes details of their social media accounts or gaming ID's. You should also adjust your child's Facebook settings to control what information is shared with Omegle.



REPORT CONCERNS

If your child comes across any inappropriate content or something which upsets them on Omegle, then it's important that they are able to discuss it with you and that you provide them with the support they need. If you think the content is illegal, then it must be reported to the police.



DISCOURAGE VIDEO CHAT

Try to discourage your child from using video chat on Omegle. Not only is there no filters or moderation in place, but children may be coerced into sharing intimate images or videos of themselves, which is illegal if they are under 18 and may be used against them. Omegle text chat has a degree of moderation controlled by Omegle through software and several actual moderators. The software moderates, identifies and prevents certain words and sequences of words to try and prevent bullying and grooming however is still not a 100% failsafe.



TRY OMEGLE YOURSELF

It's always an excellent idea to get a feel for the website or app your child is using so that you can see and understand the issues and risks for yourself. More importantly, it will also provide you with first-hand experience of the risks and dangers if/when you decide to speak to your child about Omegle and what they need to be aware of.



USE PARENTAL CONTROLS

Omegle is a website chat service. Children can only access the text chat on their phone and would need access to a PC or laptop to engage in video chat. If you have genuine concerns over Omegle and don't wish your child to access the site, you can add www.omegle.com to the list of banned websites and URL's. However, it's important to remember that Omegle can still be used via a web browser on an iPad, tablet, smart TV or gaming device and similar controls would need to be implemented on each of these devices separately.



Meet our expert

Jonathan Taylor is an online safety expert and former Covert Internet Investigator for the Metropolitan Police. He is a specialist in online grooming and exploitation and has worked extensively with both UK and international schools in delivering training and guidance around the latest online dangers, social media apps and platforms.



SOURCE: <http://www.omegle.com>

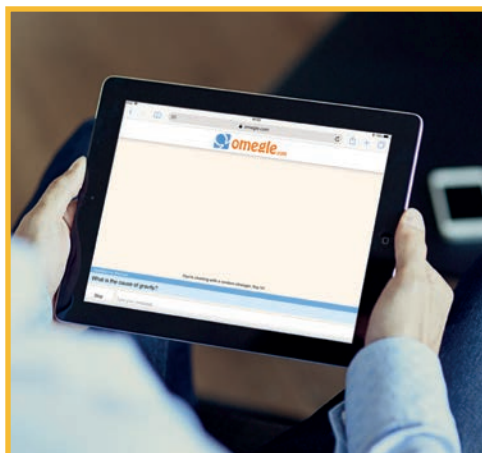
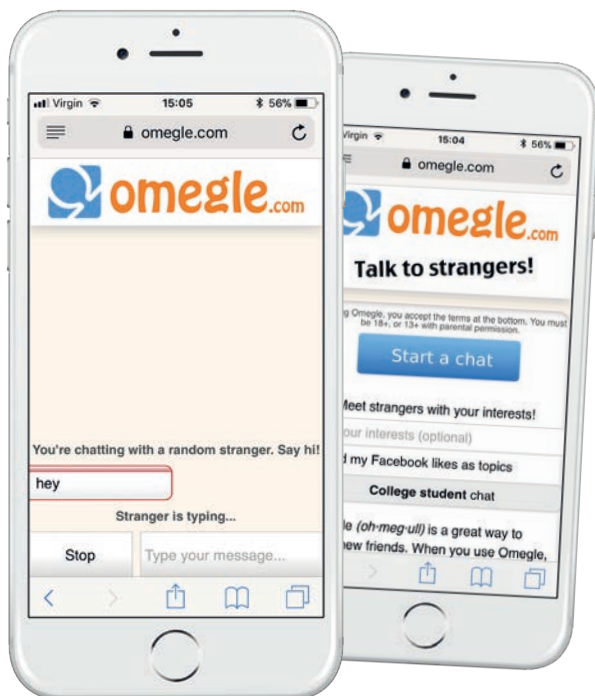
OMEGLE: A Parent's Guide



What is Omegle?

Omegle is a free online chat service which pairs random strangers into an online video call or text conversation, without the need to register or create an account. According to Omegle, the service is a great way to meet new friends while staying safe and anonymous, but openly admits that 'predators have been known to use Omegle'.

What does it look like?



Main Concerns for Parents



Omegle is not aimed at children

According to the terms and conditions of Omegle, children below the age of 13 years should not use the service but children between 13 and 18 years old can use the site if they ask for permission from their parent or guardian. This level of caution would suggest that Omegle isn't really a service that is suitable for children or young teenagers.

Sexually explicit content

Some people use Omegle so that they can enjoy sexually explicit conversations and share photographs or images with others in a live video call. There is the danger that some of the random people Omegle pairs your child with may have this intention. As well as the risk of seeing others take part in sexually explicit activities, these individuals may also ask your child to do similar things. It is illegal to make, possess, download, store and share sexual images, photos and videos of a person under the age of 18.

Predators target children on Omegle

For a website to openly state on its homepage to be careful because predators have been known to use its service is concerning. According to media reports, in 2017 a couple found their daughter talking to a random man via Omegle who asked the girl questions, such as whether her parents were strict, all while keeping his webcam covered. Predators will typically hide their identity in this way, pretending to be a different age or different person entirely. Due to Omegle's anonymity, events can be very hard to track.

Chats on Omegle can be recorded

Although calls can't be directly saved on Omegle, people can and do use third-party devices and software to record their conversations. As such, even if your child thinks they can do things on Omegle without it being tracked or with no consequences, this is far from the case.

Omegle stores conversations

Although Omegle guarantees anonymity, it can store conversations after they have ended. An internet researcher found that each chat log is saved in Omegle's server after they exit a conversation with someone. Words to this effect may be stated in the company's privacy for those who read it, which means Omegle's promise of anonymity may not be as private as everyone thinks.

Adult Chat

By clicking on the adult chat option, you are taken to an external adult pornography website. While it asks people to confirm that they are 18 when they click on this button, there is no way for Omegle to check for sure whether the individual really is 18 or over. As such, your child could be accessing porn at the click of a button through Omegle.

OMEGLE: Tips for Parents

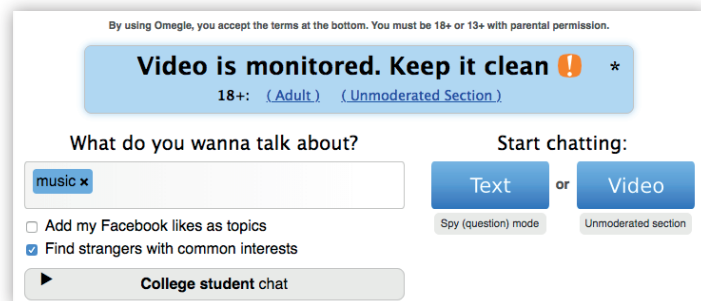


Monitor your child closely

Despite the fact that many teenagers use Omegle, it will feature content that simply isn't designed or appropriate for this age group. If you allow your child to use Omegle, it probably isn't wise to allow them to use it alone. Perhaps sit down and use the service together – that way you can protect them from any potential dangers and react quicker to uncomfortable situations.

Make sure your child only uses the 'moderated' chat

When your child uses the 'moderated' chat option, messages will advise that the 'video is monitored, keep it clean' while on other sections, 'unmonitored' and 'adult', warnings state that potential sexual content may appear instead. The moderated section exists to try and lower the possibility of viewing sexual or inappropriate content but while it's probably safer than the other chat modes things may slip through.



Be mindful

Encourage your children to think critically about the things they see online. Chat about any messages where there is any uncertainty that someone is telling the truth.

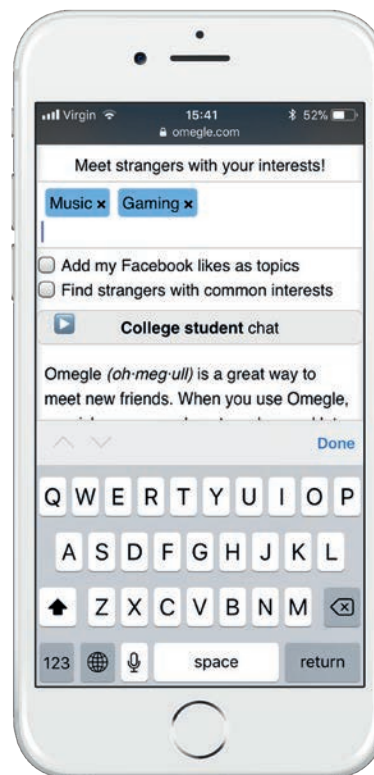
Talk to your child about the risks

The following topics are good conversation starters to sit down and have with your child:

- Video calls and messages aren't as private as you think and can easily be recorded or stored
- The dangers and illegality of sexting underage
- What to do when they see inappropriate content on Omegle
- Why it's important not to go on the 'adult chat' or 'unmoderated chat'

Don't give out personal information

It is important that children don't give away personal details, such as their full name, age, address, or phone number to strangers.



Be mindful

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Learn how to identify bots or 'trolls'

Bots leave automated messages and are often instant replies that don't relate to the conversation topic. People who use rude or inappropriate language straightaway or type weird messages before you have introduced yourself are quite often internet trolls who want to cause mischief.

Enter relevant interests

Providing genuine interests when starting a chat can increase the chances of your child being paired with someone they have something in common with rather than a bot.

Be ready to disconnect

If your child feels uncomfortable during a conversation, reassure them that they can exit a chat. To do this, they can simply disconnect from the session and exit the service or start a conversation with another user.

Be safe

Your child should never agree to meet up with someone they only know online. No matter how friendly they might seem or how well they think they know them, they are still a stranger.

Find an alternative service

Talking to random strangers is always going to be potentially dangerous. There are other online chat services available where it is clear who you are talking to and they are who they say they are.