



## **What is Kik Messenger?**

Kik Messenger is a free instant mobile messaging app which allows users to exchange messages online within the app using data or wifi, without having to pay text message fees. Kik Messenger is very similar to Whatsapp and Blackberry Messenger and is available on most mobile devices including iPhone, BlackBerry, Android, Windows Phone and Nokia. Kik users can create groups and send each other unlimited text, image, video and sketch (drawing) messages. The app also has an inbuilt web browser where users can search the internet, Youtube and other sites.

## **How much does it cost?**

Kik is free to download and use as it connects to a user's existing data plan or Wi-Fi to send and receive messages. There may be charges if the user is not connected to Wi-Fi or they have exceeded the data limit on their device.

## **Does Kik Messenger have any age restrictions?**

As part of its Terms of Service, the minimum age to register for a Kik account is 13 years old. At registration, Kik will ask the user to enter their date of birth, and if this specifies that they are under the age of 13 then the account will not be registered. However it's important to note that there is no requirement to prove date of birth and it's possible for users to enter any date into this field. If Kik obtains information that a user is under 13 it will deactivate their account and their personal information will be deleted. If a child under 13 has registered for an account, parents can request that their account is deactivated.

It is advised that users between the ages of 13 – 18 seek their parent or carers permission before creating a Kik account. An account can be deactivated if it is being used without permission.

If you decide to allow your child to use Kik, you may wish to make their use conditional on you having access to their account. You can agree a password for the account together so you can access the account at any time.

## Should I be concerned about Kik Messenger as a parent/carer?

Kik is very popular amongst young people and allows them to socialise with their friends. However there are concerns about Kik that parents/carers should be aware of. Some of these concerns are not unique to Kik and are applicable to many other social media platforms.

### Username on Kik

Kik uses usernames rather than phone numbers to identify its users. This means that personal information (such as phone numbers and email addresses) is not shared by Kik. However, when registering for an account, Kik will ask for the full name of the user and this appears alongside their chosen username. We would recommend that a nickname or non-identifiable name is used in addition to the username to increase security and privacy. To change this go to **Settings > Your account > Name >** and enter preferred details.

### Talking to unknown users

Only those who know the username of an account can send messages to that account. However, usernames can still be guessed by other users and then contact can be made. Kik recommend that users make their usernames hard to guess to prevent people they do not know messaging them. A combination of letters, numbers and symbols works best. It is important to talk to your child about not posting their username on other social networking sites which may be public.

### Group chat

Kik contains a group chat function. Group chats allow two or more users to interact in the same conversation and can be invite-only or public.

Group conversations usually take place between friends. Each group is set up by one contact who becomes the Group Admin. When a group is started it will be invite-only by default. This means that members can only join the group if a current member invites them, but this does not necessarily mean your child will

know others in the group. They will then be able to see messages from people they do not know and vice versa. Group Admins can also make their groups public, which means anyone is able to search for the group and join it.

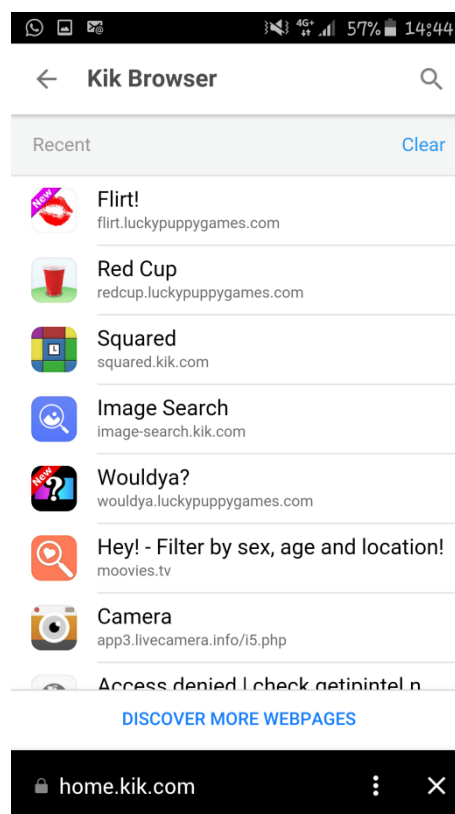
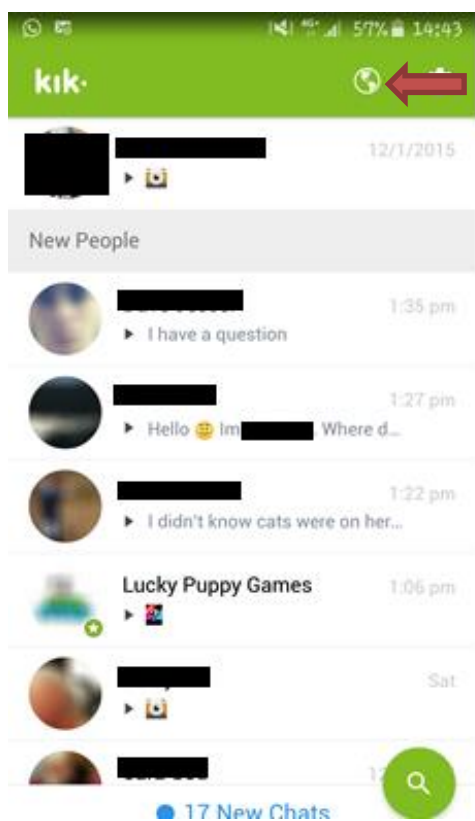
It's a good idea to advise your child that if they are in a group chat with someone they don't know and are uncomfortable with, they should exit the group and speak to you about it. Users can leave a group whenever they want to. If your child is the Admin of the group, they can remove or ban the unwanted user, or if they're not the Admin, they can ask the person who is to do this. Admins are the only user who can remove or ban members of the group.

Removing or banning someone from a group means they will no longer be able to send messages to the group. However, someone removed from a group can be re-added by any group member, whereas someone banned cannot re-join a group unless they are unbanned by the group admin.

### **Access to inbuilt apps**

The latest version of Kik Messenger has an inbuilt Kik browser so that users can search for new apps and chat rooms. By clicking on the 'globe' icon on the top right of the messaging inbox (see picture below) the Kik browser will open and a list of recommended apps will appear. These apps ("sub-apps") within Kik can bypass conventional parental controls or web filters around adult content and there are no settings within the app to disable this content or protect against it. Users therefore can access sub-apps that may include dating apps, rating apps (where you rate the appearance of other person online), nearby chat groups, truth or dare apps and flirting apps. Some of these sites host adult content or a "chat with a stranger" feature with a geolocation tag. If a user enters one of the sub-apps, other users within that app can then contact them directly on Kik even if they did not chat within and have exited the sub-app.

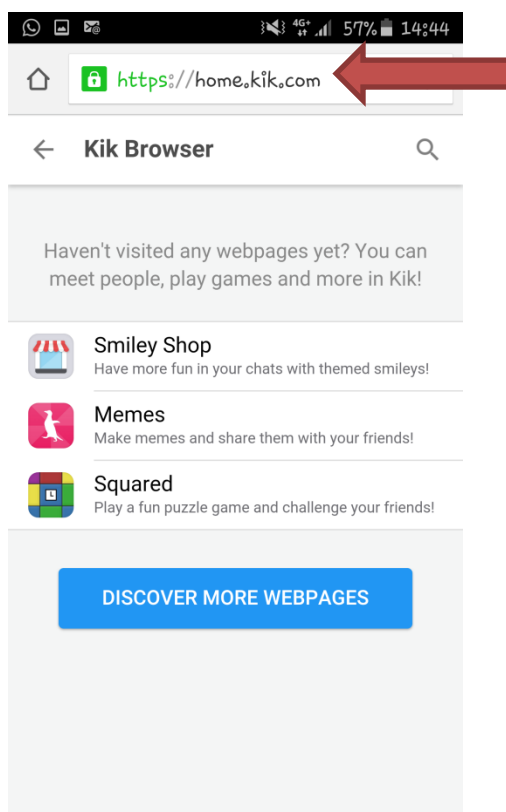
These sub-apps may not identify a user by their Kik username and instead can reveal the full name of a user through their Kik account details.



We would recommend having an open conversation with your child about any chat that they have with someone within Kik or within the sub-apps. There is lots of information on our Thinkuknow website about staying safe when chatting to people online.

### **Inbuilt web browsing**

Similarly, Kik Messenger has an inbuilt web browser so that users can browse the internet without leaving the app. This means they can browse the internet without restriction and could lead to them viewing inappropriate or adult content which could be restricted on a home computer.



## Sharing inappropriate content

It is important to be aware that as with other instant messaging applications, text, images and videos can be shared between users. There have been reports of unsolicited suggestive or sexualised images being shared by users over the network, as well as 'porn-bots'- fake profiles that send hyperlinks to pornographic websites. As with all social media, caution is advised over the privacy settings around your child's messaging account and their access to unknown users across the network (see below for how to set privacy settings). In addition, it is worth reminding children about their own digital footprint, particularly the content (photos, videos and messages) they choose to share via Kik messenger. Once shared, it can be copied, re-shared and posted anywhere online.

## How do privacy settings work on Kik?

Kik has a feature known as **Address Book Matching**. If this is turned on, Kik will search for accounts which match an email address or phone number already stored in the users address book on their smartphone. If there is a match, Kik will message both users to notify them.

### Turning off Address Book Matching

This means that only those your child chooses to share their username with will be able to message them.

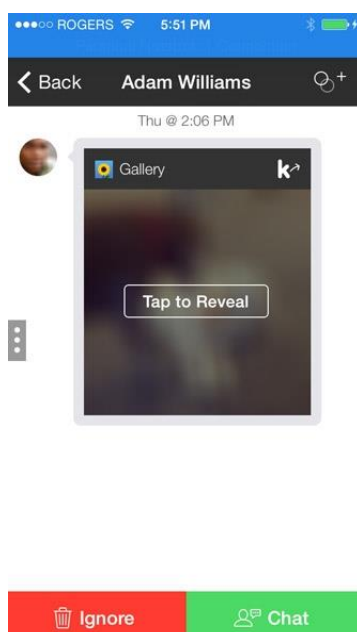
For Ipad, Iphone, Android:

**Settings > Chat Settings > Address Book Matching > slide or untick box to off**

For Windows Phone 7, Symbian or Blackberry:

**Settings > Privacy > Address Book Matching > No Thanks**

The latest version of Kik has a new feature known as **New People** which blurs any content or message sent by a New Person until the user chooses to reveal the content or chat to the person.



**New People** separates any message a user receives from a person they have not spoken to before. If your child receives a message from a person they have not spoken to before a **New Chat** button will appear. The user can click on the New Chat button, select the chat and decide whether to **ignore** or **chat** to that person. Unless they choose to **chat** or **reveal the content** from that person, all content received will be blurred. If they select ignore, they will then have the option to **Delete, Block, or Report as Spam.**

The **Block** feature allows a user to block all contact with another user, without revealing to the other user that they have been blocked. All content from the other user will be hidden and all previous chats deleted. The blocked user's name will no longer appear in your child's list of contacts. However previous chats with this person will still appear in the blocked persons app.

To block someone go to:

**Settings > Chat Settings** (iphone or Android) or **Privacy** (Windows Phone 7, Symbian, Blackberry) > **Block List** > Tap **+** > select the person you want to block > tap **Block** to confirm

If you are entered into a group chat with a blocked person, messages from the blocked person will appear as **\*\*\*blocked message\*\*\***

### To delete

In order to deactivate a Kik Messenger account you will need your child's username and access to the email address used to register the account with. As always, it's a good idea to speak to your child about the reasons why you feel it isn't appropriate for them to have an account, and involve them in the process of deleting it. You should also encourage them to let you know if they are worried about anything when using social media.

Go into the app to:

**Settings > Your Account > Reset Account**

Then, on your web browser go to the Kik deactivation webpage (<https://ws.kik.com/deactivate>) and enter in your child's email address. An email will sent to this email address with a link to fully disable the account.

If you would like to deactivate your teen's Kik account but aren't able to get access to your teen's email account, you can submit a deactivation request to Kik by emailing [support@kik.com](mailto:support@kik.com) with the subject line 'Parent Inquiry'. A member of the Kik Support Team will send you a deactivation request form, which can be returned to Kik for processing. Kik will not automatically deactivate an account but decide on a case by case basis.

### **Reporting abuse**

If you have any concerns about grooming, sexual abuse or exploitation on Kik Messenger or on any online app or site, report to the National Crime Agency's CEOP Command ([www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre](http://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre)).

Further advice and support for parents and carers is available on [www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents).