THE 'ADD EVERYONE' EXPLICIT WHATSAPP GROUP
Safeguarding Alert!

Recent concerns have emerged regarding a WhatsApp group known as 'Add Everyone.' Schools and regional police forces across the UK have warned that this group exposes children and young people to explicit and harmful material

Imagine a room filled with children and adults where images, videos and other information are displayed on a screen for all to see. You're probably picturing a concert, a cinema or some happy family occasion. But what if the adults in the room are those with ill intentions? What if these adults could interact with the children and encourage them to bring other young people to the room? In this room, the imagery on the screen is sexually explicit, violent, and illegal material that's highly inappropriate for children. Sadly this nightmarish scenario is reportedly happening on WhatsApp through the use of 'Add Everyone' group chats.
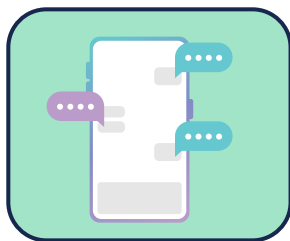
'Add Everyone' group chats can go by many names, but their purpose is often the same. These WhatsApp groups are spaces where children and young people are invited to join a chat that contains content such as sexual images, material promoting self-harm, sexual violence, racism and other inappropriate content. These chats may be created by adults seeking to connect with younger users or by young people themselves as a seemingly fun activity. However, as the name suggests, it is difficult to control who becomes a member of these groups, which means that access to children and young people can easily fall into the wrong hands. In some cases the group owners ask for children to add their contacts to the group, 'except their parents'

As WhatsApp has lowered its minimum age from 16 to 13 this year, the risk of young users encountering inappropriate content and adults may increase. However, reports indicate that these groups have targeted children as young as 9.

WHY WOULD A YOUNG PERSON WANT TO JOIN THE GROUP?
Children and young people might be drawn to such groups out of curiosity or a desire for social connection. The allure of being part of a larger community can overshadow the potential dangers. Unfortunately, these groups often exploit this curiosity, presenting harmful content and access to strangers as if it were normal or acceptable.

WHY WHATSAPP?
With 8 in 10 young people using WhatsApp by the time they have reached 16-17 years old, many potential victims are already on the platform. Additionally, WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption (E2EE) makes it particularly appealing for sharing inappropriate content. Whilst these groups can exist on any social platform, this encryption ensures that only the sender and recipient can read messages – neither WhatsApp itself nor the police can access them. This means that inappropriate content shared within groups can be difficult to monitor and is only seen by authorities if a device is seized during a police investigation.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?
Many of us routinely use WhatsApp to connect with our friends and families, which can build a false sense of security that this is a normal app where nothing can go wrong. However, all technology is influenced by the people who use or abuse it. These groups can present a number of risks to the children and young people who are invited to join such as....

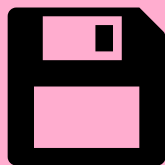|	
Inappropriate Content	Exposure to child sexual abuse material, adult pornography, or other 'lawful by awful' content. This exposure can be distressing and poses additional risks if a young person saves or downloads such content to their device or forwards it to others.
Sharing Personal Information	Young people are often encouraged to share their own or others' personal details. This may be done to gain access to more young users or to misuse a child's personal or private information for blackmail, extortion or manipulation
Access to Children	Joining these groups allows other users to view members' profile photos and contact numbers. This information can facilitate the contact and exploitation of young people by predators.

NEXT STEPS AND FURTHER ADVICE

ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION
Discussing online safety with young people doesn't have to feel like a chore. Approach the topic with curiosity and openness, and have regular conversations about what you hear in the news or what their friends are doing online. This can create a comfortable space for them to share, often making it easier for young people to open up about their own situations and enable you to encourage critical thinking.

SET PRIVACY SETTINGS
Work with your child to set privacy settings that ensure only their contacts can add them to groups and view their information. Remind them that friends can still add them to group chats, so discuss how to handle invitations they receive.

ADJUST AUTO-SAVING SETTINGS
WhatsApp can automatically save images to the user's camera roll unless adjusted in the settings. This could lead to young people unintentionally storing harmful or illegal images sent in group chats.

SCREENSHOT, REPORT AND BLOCK
If a young person is added to an inappropriate group chat, take a screenshot of the evidence* and report it directly to the platform. Encourage them to block any concerning users and speak to a trusted adult or an organisation like Child line on 0800 1111

NEVER SCREENSHOT AN INDECENT IMAGE OF A CHILD