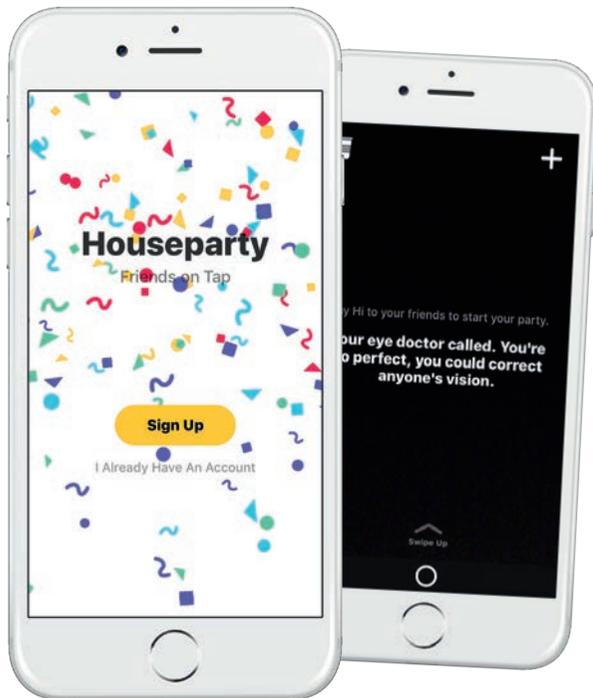


What is Houseparty?

Houseparty is billed as a group video chat app that will 'make you feel like you are actually hanging out with a group of friends'. Available for Android and iOS devices, Houseparty has been developed by the company behind the short-lived live-streaming app Meerkat and claims to have created a quarter of a billion friendships and 'hosted' half a billion parties since its launch. Friends (and friends of friends) can communicate with each other via live video and texts. The app is 'aimed' at anyone over the age of 13.

What does it look like?



Main Concerns for Parents

Houseparty



Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. There is a concern that group video chats can be used by a bully to involve more people in their attempts to make negative or hurtful comments to someone. Your child may also be sad or hurt if they are left out of group chats and feel socially excluded.

Strangers joining conversations

While you're in a conversation with other people on Houseparty, other connections from one of the in-chat members will also be able to join into that group chat - even if they are not connected or known to all the other users. In 2017, it was reported that strangers were entering group chats uninvited and performing lewd acts or marking sexually suggestive remarks to children.

Oversharing personal information

Children often do not understand the risks involved in giving out too much personal information. They may also be less protective of personal details, such as their address, during online conversations. During video conversations, their background may reveal information about where they live or go to school without realising.

Sexualised messages

Some people use video chat apps to have sexually explicit conversations with others. There's the danger that connections of your child's friends may include people with 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.

HOUSEPARTY: Tips for Parents



Understand how the app works

As well as individual chats, Houseparty lets users create rooms with multiple people - up to eight people at a time. Each time a person joins, the screen splits so that you can see everyone who is part of the conversation at once. You can add friends based on the phone numbers you have stored in your contacts or search for their usernames. Once you open the app, you can have as many rooms as you want and move from chat to chat by swiping across the screen.

Check your child's usage

Video chats are not recorded and can't be reviewed later which means unless you are sitting nearby during a call, you won't know what has been said to your child. However, the app can show you when your child last communicated with someone and whether he or she left the app recently.

Shake the phone

If your child runs into any technical issues with Houseparty or simply wants to make a suggestion, all they must do is shake their phone. A prompt will pop up, which allows a user to give the app immediate feedback.

Lock a room

Houseparty gives your child the option to lock their conversations. If a conversation has been locked, no one else can join it and everyone in it is notified. If a video chat session is not locked, a friend of someone with whom they are video chatting may join that current video chat session, with or without an invite and whether your child knows him or her. However, if a user that isn't a connection is about to join a video chat session your child is in, they'll receive a notice that such a participant is joining the session.

Educate children on respectful behaviour

Make your teen aware of what is respectful and show them how to speak up in a way that is honest and respectful. Explain to your child that they must not share anything or say anything during video chats that are likely to harass, upset, embarrass, alarm, inconvenience or annoy any person. Or share content that could endanger the safety or wellbeing of others.

Don't engage with strangers

All users have to do to chat someone on the app is click the waving hand emoji beside their name to let them know they are up for the chat. Remind your child that they should only chat to people they know trust and if anyone asks them to do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable then not to do it. 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.

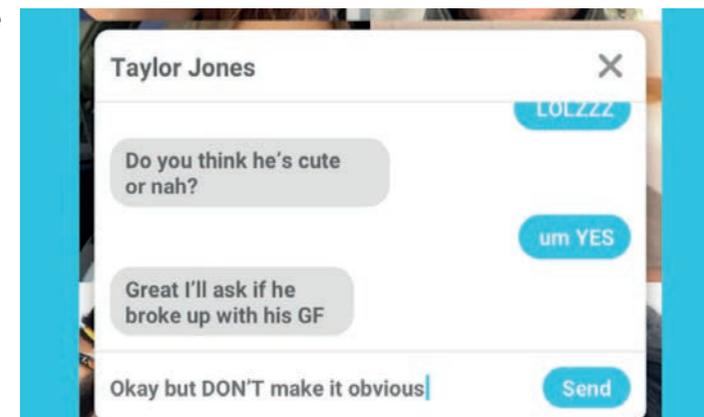


Remind not to overshare

Encourage your child not to share secrets with other people nor share personal information. Even if your child doesn't directly draw attention to their location or identity in their videos, clips which include landmarks of the area, or their school uniform, can allow the viewer to discover exactly where photos were taken when posted publicly online.

Be mindful of their privacy

Remind your child that when they take part in a video chat session, any other participant may be able to send a screenshot of the video chat to other users that identifies their name and permits those other users to add your child as a connection.



Use Houseparty Groups

Groups are permanent (video) chat rooms with guest lists, making them exclusive to the users on the list. This can help your child connect more directly with the friends they want to chat with, exactly when they want to chat with them. Another feature called 'Sneak into the House' lets a user open the app without sending a notification to friends - this can be useful if your child wants to avoid being contacted by many users.