At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many apps which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about YUBO

AGE LIMIT 13+ Under-17s must have parental permission to create an account

Yubo is a social networking platform where users can chat and livestream with up to 10 friends at once. People can connect with others based on location, with a Tinder-style 'swiping' mechanism to accept or reject someone based on their profile pictures. The app has approximately 50 million users worldwide – but despite its popularity, Yubo has not been free from controversy. While the app claims to monitor inappropriate content, a newspaper investigation in early 2022 found young users being exposed to sexual harassment, racism, bullying and conversations with adult themes.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

FLIMSY AGE GATES

Yubo states it is only for over 13s, but there is no credible age-gate to prevent an even younger child joining the platform. An undercover journalist investigating dangerous content reported spending 10 days posing as a 15-year-old on the app without any age verification. This flaw, and the fact that it's impossible to verify a user's true identity on Yubo, raises serious concerns over potential grooming.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Yubo has experienced problems with inappropriate content being displayed to children and teens. Although the app's developers claim to monitor profiles and messages for adult-themed or unsuitable material, a *Sunday Times* investigation found young users being exposed to sexual harassment, racism and bullying, with many chats referencing self-harm, suicide and drug use.

LIVESTREAM RISKS

Due to Yubo's lax age verification, children are able to launch live video streams which strangers can then view and interact with via real-time text chat. Not only is the thought of strangers watching children's livestreams extremely worrying (they could also use these as a means to establish the child's location) but text chats might result in a young person disclosing personal information.

ON AIR

BULLYING POTENTIAL

Yubo users 'swipe' to accept or decline the chance to talk with each other. These decisions are entirely based on someone's profile picture, raising the potential for children to be left with low self-esteem if declined repeatedly. Negative feedback about their appearance can seriously damage a child's emotional wellbeing, causing a loss of confidence in how they look or how interesting they are.

EXTENSIVE ACCESS

Users of Yubo, no matter what their age, are required to grant access to their device's microphone and GPS. This means they are potentially revealing highly sensitive information, including their exact location. In addition, new users of the app are asked to provide personal details such as their name, date of birth and phone number, which – in the case of young people – represents a clear risk.

'GATEWAY' EFFECT

Yubo's swiping system (right for 'yes'; left for 'no') works much like Tinder and various other dating apps. This could lead to children exploring similarly designed apps that aren't intended for a young audience. Users can also link their Yubo account to social media such as Snapchat and Instagram, making it easier for a stranger to track them down on various platforms.

Advice for Parents & Carers

DISCOURAGE USE

We don't often advise totally avoiding an app, but due to the concerns that Yubo has generated of late (the February 2022 *Sunday Times* exposé and a recent abduction case in which the alleged perpetrator met a teenage girl through the app) and the fact that inappropriate content has been proved to be circulating on the platform, you may decide that the safest option is to dissuade your child from downloading it altogether.

DISCUSS IN ADVANCE

If your child is absolutely determined to join Yubo (perhaps their friends all use the platform, for instance), then it's essential to talk to them about the dangers of this type of app *before* they install it. It's vital they understand not to disclose personal information to people they don't know, for example, and that they're warned about the type of mature content they may be exposed to on the app.

STAY AWARE

It's important to stay attuned to how your child is using social media. If they only access Yubo in private, for example, you might reasonably question what they're potentially using it for. It's also important to watch for warning signs that they may be over-using the app: prioritising it over everyday routines like meals and homework, for instance, or showing signs of irritability and a lack of concentration.

ALTER THE SETTINGS

After the recent high-profile controversies surrounding the app, Yubo's developers have increased its security controls. Users can now choose to block profiles, screen out nudity in live streams and keep their location private. There's also an option to report inappropriate content, so make sure your child knows that they can now flag up anything they find disturbing via the app's Safety Centre.

Meet Our Expert

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