

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

OMETV

OmeTV is another app which encourages users to 'make friends from all around the world'. People can search profiles by age and gender and send direct messages or photos. However, the app is primarily used for video calls. When using this feature, users are connected at random, although only their country of origin is shared. People can then either choose to move on to the next chat or can stay in that call for as long as they wish.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

STRANGER DANGER

While young people generally know not to share personal information with strangers, the safety of their home and the distance offered by technology can make them feel more relaxed and uninhibited. Combined with the fact that OmeTV provides a webchat function – and anonymity – it can be an easy way for groomers to gather information, ask to connect on other social media platforms, or potentially request intimate images.

EXPLICIT CONTENT

Unfortunately, there are a lot of users who use OmeTV's webcam feature to expose themselves. While users can swipe to the next call quickly, it's not something that can be filtered out completely – so young people could easily be exposed to highly inappropriate images.

REPORTING DIFFICULTIES

When video calling, the other person's username is often hidden and therefore they can't be blocked or reported. There is a 'Report Abuse' tab at the bottom of the video, but the speed with which calls can swipe past can make it difficult to use this system. There's also little evidence to suggest that offenders are dealt with appropriately (through warnings or account termination, for example).

AGE VERIFICATION

17+

Although the site states that users must be 18 or over, there's no way to verify this, and it's easy to use an existing Facebook account to log in, or for users to set up a fake account. To access OmeTV, users simply need to press a button confirming they're an adult, which means it's likely many users will claim to be much older than they are.

VIDEO RECORDING



When young people are chatting live on a webcam, they could be coaxed by others into doing things they don't feel comfortable doing, or persuaded that no harm can come from it. What they don't know is whether the other user is recording them. These videos could then be used to embarrass or blackmail them, or they could be kept by a potential online predator.

LIMITED PARENTAL CONTROLS



OmeTV has very limited parental controls. There is a 'safe mode', but this is of little practical use given that explicit content isn't filtered out. While the site lists several rules and regulations, there are few apparent ways to enforce them or restrict what users can see or do.

Advice for Parents & Carers

FOLLOW AGE GUIDELINES

OmeTV has an age recommendation of 18 and over, which suggests the developers are aware that it may facilitate adult content. It's important to adhere to the age guidelines and try to restrict access to the app for younger users. If you find it on an under-18's device, talk to them about the potential risks and explain why they probably shouldn't be using it.



DISCUSS THE DANGERS

Maintain communication with your child about online safety and empower them to protect themselves. Simply deleting an app from their device impacts their independence and can cause resentment. Instead, highlight news reports of predators exposing themselves to children on the internet, and discuss what they should do if asked for explicit images.



DISCOURAGE CHATS WITH STRANGERS

Remind your child of the dangers of talking to strangers online. The anonymity OmeTV offers, plus its webchat function, makes it an attractive place for groomers to network and create inappropriate content. Explain that your child may see something which upsets them – and that it's a crime for anyone to expose themselves to a young person online.



ENABLE PARENTAL CONTROLS

Regardless of how responsible your child may be, it's essential to use parental controls on their device. It's easy for young people to get lured in by others, feeling they've built up a trusting friendship and being coaxed into doing things they wouldn't normally do. Ensure in-app purchases aren't enabled on their device, and emphasise that they can always talk to you about anything online that worries them.



Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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