

Dear Parents

I would like to alert you to a dangerous website that has become popular amongst children.

As parents and teachers, we are always telling our children not to talk to strangers, but there is a new website called Omegle that encourages strangers to chat. While you're supposed to be 13 years or older with parental permission to log on, children are flocking to the site on their own.

Omegle is a free online chatting service, that is accessed through the website rather than an app. It's popularity has spiked over the past four months, due to more people being at home and looking to meet others during the coronavirus pandemic.

Omegle randomly selects other users on the site for one-on-one online chats. You can choose to chat by text or video. If you choose to add your interests, Omegle will try to pair you with someone who has similar interests. If not, you could meet anyone.

Chats are anonymous unless you reveal your identity. When a chat starts, people are just identified as "you" and "stranger." You can stop a chat any time you feel uncomfortable by clicking the "Stop" button and either exiting the site or starting a new chat with someone else.

There is also an Omegle adult site that is just that — very adult-like with non-subtle sexual undertones. There is no age verification to enter; the user simply clicks the "OK" button to confirm they are over 18, and they are allowed in.

Users may not realise that Omegle is also collecting information. According to Cyberwise, the user's IP address, the time the chat started, their computer's ID tag, and everything that the user discloses is archived on the website's servers for about four months. Users can also choose to save chat logs. And, as with Snapchat, it's easy for anyone to grab a screenshot or screen recording of what you're saying or doing in the video chat.

Omegle is very transparent when it comes to dangers on the site. It clearly states, "Predators have been known to use Omegle, so please be careful." This indicates their awareness of who may be going on their site.

As you can appreciate, we are very concerned about the potential dangers of this site and we ask that you carefully monitor the websites that your children are accessing and if possible, block the website at home.

We have also attached a parent's guide about Omegle.

Kind regards

Angela Brown, Senior School Deputy Head, Pastoral and Jacky Shackel, Head of Prep School