

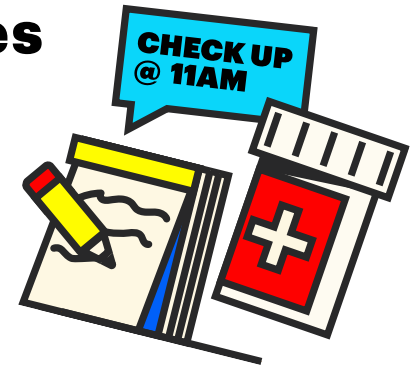


QUICK-GUIDE TO SNAPCHAT

The Dangers of Illicit Substances

Background on Snapchat

Snapchat is a place to connect and communicate with friends, but it's important to understand its functions and safety features. We recommend checking out Snapchat's [Parent Guide](#) and [Safety Center](#) for additional information on navigating the app, safety tips and wellness tools, how to report content on Snapchat, and more.



Buying and selling substances on online platforms

While many platforms, including Snapchat, prohibit the buying or selling of illegal or regulated drugs, people trying to sell drugs are always looking for ways around the rules. If teens are exposed to offers of substance sales in personal stories and in snaps from peers or other contacts, this can leave the misimpression that buying and using alcohol, other drugs or prescription medications is normal, easy and safe.

To reach their prospective customers online—including teens and young adults—people selling substances use search functions to identify potential customers, as well as hashtags, photos, and videos to promote products. Users interested in purchasing substances will then search for those keywords to try to find people selling those substances. Snapchat blocks slang and drug-related terms, which stops Snapchatters from getting search results for those terms.

The financial transactions themselves aren't usually made on the platform itself but through services like bitcoin, Venmo, PayPal, cash or credit cards. Deliveries are typically made off-platform—directly at home, at a nearby location such as a park, or sent through the mail.

People seeking to buy or sell substances also use slang and emojis when texting on their phones, or posting on social media to connect with customers. For instance, emojis asking if someone can supply drugs could include a picture of a plug (i.e., can you hook me up) and a snowflake (i.e., cocaine) or leaf (i.e., marijuana). "Do you have an addy? I'm not ready for my English exam" is a message asking for Adderall which is a controlled prescription drug used to treat ADHD.

Young people may assume that products are exactly as presented when, in reality, there is no way of knowing what

What you need to know to protect your teen

While there are many positive aspects to being online, there are downsides including the way alcohol and other drugs are promoted, with each platform presenting unique challenges. Family members, friends, influencers, and other contacts can glamorize drinking or the use of drugs, showing only the "upside" of substance use without showing the consequences. This can encourage risk-taking where a teen might not otherwise be tempted. Other users may be trying to sell drugs, using online platforms to identify and connect with potential buyers.



the products are made of. Not knowing what is in a product can have deadly consequences. Our country's drug supply is flooded with fentanyl, an opioid that is 100 times more powerful than morphine. The majority of recent overdose deaths in our country have been linked to fentanyl.

In addition to being laced in heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and MDMA, fentanyl can also be found in counterfeit prescription medications. These pills are made to look like Vicodin, Percocet, OxyContin, Xanax, Adderall and other common prescription medications. Taking any of these counterfeit products can lead to a fatal overdose.

What can parents and other caregivers do?

There are a number of actions you can take to help protect your teen including:

- Subscribing to apps that your teen uses so that you are familiar with how they work.
- Having conversations with your teens about how selling, buying or using any substance offered or sold online is unsafe and illegal. This is especially important as teens may think getting Adderall or Xanax from an online seller is just like getting medication from a legitimate pharmacy; but it might be a counterfeit pill or a pill laced with lethal amounts of fentanyl. Discuss the importance of taking medication only as prescribed for you by a licensed healthcare provider and obtained from your local pharmacy.
- The importance of knowing who your teen accepts as a contact and who they reach out to. Asking questions like, "Who makes for a good friend on Snapchat?" or "Why do you think some teens connect with total strangers?" can get the conversation going.
 - Comparing online relationships to in-person relationships can be beneficial. Ask questions like "Would you talk to this person at school?" and "Would you hang out in person?"
- The usage of privacy and security settings. For example, adjusting privacy settings to "my friends" in stead of "everyone" allows only approved contacts to see what they are sharing. Snaps that identify where you live (e.g., street sign, pictures of your house or apartment building) or other personal information (e.g., school logo or colors) can provide people with insights about your teen's life or allow them to approach them at or near their home. Emphasize the importance of not meeting up with people they don't know in real life.
- Encouraging your teen to tell you or another trusted adult (e.g., teacher, coach, counselor, relative, clergy) about anything concerning that they see online.
- Encouraging your teen to report on Snapchat any content that may be illegal or harmful. By pressing and holding on a snap or story, your teen can select the "report snap" button. All reports are anonymous, and cannot be traced back to your teen. Snap will review and take action on the reported content. You can find more information at Snapchat's [Safety Center](#).
- Letting your teen know that you will take a non-judgmental, health-and-safety approach to any concerning exchanges that occur over social media. Encourage them to share information with you so that you can help them navigate the situation.
- Plan to check in from time-to-time and ask repeatedly about this topic.

Other resources and tools that can help

Risk Assessment Tool

Answer a few questions about your teen or young adult to see if they are at risk for substance use problems.

Playbook for Parents of Teens

Find useful information about online platforms, mental health, and substance use in this easy-to-read guide with additional resources

Substance Use and Mental Health: Your Guide to Co-occurring Disorders

Learn how some teens and young adults cope with mental health problems by using substances and what to do if your loved one is self-medicating.

Common Sense Media:

Parents and caregivers can find great information about online platforms, whether it's navigating bullying, platform-specific challenges, screen time, and more.

Child Mind Institute:

CMI offers extensive information and resources on teen mental health, including ways to manage usage of online platforms in a way that's healthy and helps maintain general wellbeing.