

WhatsApp Safety Advice

We have been made aware that some students at JFS have fallen victim to a new WhatsApp hack. Please take the time to read the information below and share this with your child.

Please do discuss with your child that they must never send any personal or sensitive information in this way and if in doubt to check with a trusted adult. If there are any ongoing issues, please do contact the WhatsApp Help Centre.

How the hack works

When you install WhatsApp on a new phone, the platform asks for the phone number of the account, which you enter, and it then sends an SMS one-time code to that number. This verifies that you have the number in your possession. Once you enter the right code, the phone starts to receive WhatsApp messages for that account.

With this hack, the attacker uses an already hijacked account to contact a victim's friends. This doesn't have to be via a WhatsApp account—Facebook would work as well. In their message, the attacker tells the victim's friend they are having issues receiving a six-digit code, and so had it sent to their friend instead—and to please send it back to them (the attacker). That six-digit code is the WhatsApp verification code for the new victim—and by sending it to their friend they are really sending it to the attacker.

Once done, their own WhatsApp is now hijacked.

The usual intent of the attack is to use a hijacked WhatsApp account to ask for money, to claim an emergency or an account lock-up, and to ask friends to help out.

With WhatsApp, there is no risk that backed up messages can be hacked, but the attacker will see the groups you are in and the new messages you receive (as when you are added to a new group).

Prevention

A two-step verification needs to be set up. This is very simple, easy and takes less than a minute. In WhatsApp, go onto settings > account > Two step verification. It will ask you for a separate PIN (your choice) that is six digits (which must never be given to anyone) and your email address for back up.

WhatsApp will ask you for the PIN when you change phones and also every so often when you're using the app.

When you have two-step verification enabled, any attempt to verify your phone number on WhatsApp must be accompanied by the six-digit PIN that you created using this feature. Therefore, the hack will not work.

If you have been hacked

If you have been the victim of this hack, reinstall WhatsApp and ask for a fresh activation code. That will reset the app on your phone. It may take some time to work. Once you do restore your account, set up a PIN right away.

Safeguarding Team