AGE RESTRICTION 17+

LiveMe is a streaming video app that lets you watch live streams and broadcast your own live videos to anyone interested. The service, which claims to have amassed more than 60 million global users and streams around 300,000 hours of footage a day, is aimed at giving creators a 'platform to reach a wide audience and share their talents and passions directly with their fans'. Users can buy virtual coins and gifts and send these to broadcasters who create content 'they love', which can be redeemed for real money.

What parents need to know LiveMe

ONLINE PREDATORS

Law enforcement agencies have warned that LiveMe is placing children at risk from online predators. A sheriff in Texas even issued a warning that 'paedophiles have a virtual open window to your child's bedroom'. Live chat can be used by groomers to target young people who may be manipulated into sending sexual images and videos. LiveMe also has a chat feature, which allows users to speak to each other in private. In 2018, a 65-year-old in the UK was jailed for posing as a teenage boy to groom young girls on LiveMe, and offered virtual currency in exchange for teenagers exposing themselves.

INAPPROPRIATE & ADULT CONTENT

Live streaming apps can potentially expose young people to graphic and inappropriate content. Live.Me says it is 'explicitly intended to be used by individuals 17 years of age or older, and those under 18 should have their parents' permission to download and use the app', but there are no age verification checks. As soon as you open the app or website's homepage, you are greeted with scantily clad adult broadcasters posing suggestively with captions, such as 'Join me in bed', and some people even have inappropriate usernames. There is every chance your child will watch content that is not suitable for them or be encouraged to share similar content themselves.

ENCOURAGES CHILDREN TO SEEK FAME

LiveMe describes itself as for new stars and famous celebrities, and suggests that 'influencers' can make up to $20,000 to $30,000 (£14,000 to £21,000) in a week through broadcasting live about all types of things, from fashion, music and gaming to art and beauty. Those who use the site seek to gain 'likes' and 'electronic gifts' from others, as the more they receive, the higher their status within that online community. Glorification of fame for fame's sake can be a concern for parents.

SPENDING MONEY ON VIRTUAL GIFTS

Coins are the Live.Me currency. Viewers and broadcasters can buy coins and use them to purchase gifts or do coin drops to interact with one another. When viewers send gifts, they immediately earn the same number of diamonds. Once someone has made a certain level of diamonds, they can cash them out for real money or convert them back into coins. There is always the danger of children spending too much on in-app purchases without you knowing.

CYBERBULLYING

Users of LiveMe can send private messages, videos and public comments to their connections. Some people can use the anonymity of the internet to be abusive towards others or threaten, tease, upset or humiliate someone else. If your child broadcasts live, there is a very high risk of receiving hurtful comments on their video. Bullying videos can also be posted on live-streaming sites, which can leave children feeling worried or helpless. One British teen told The Sun newspaper that she had been mercilessly bullied and that trolls on the app told her to "go kill yourself", and her address was even shared on Twitter as a target for burglars.

PRIVACY & SECURITY CONCERNS

Many of the broadcasts by teens come from their bedrooms, often sharing peeks at sleepovers, hangouts and parties. Anyone can watch live broadcasts at the LiveMe website without even registering or logging into the service (although you can't interact with the user). By sharing too much information about their home life, your teenagers could unwittingly share their location and other identifying features with others. Last year, The Sunday Times also reported that a covert method of extracting the locations of users had been widely shared on the internet, exposing children's addresses to predators.

Top Tips for Parents

BROADCASTING TO STRANGERS

It is important for children to understand the risks of broadcasting live. Live-streaming services have limited privacy controls, so it is hard to know who is watching, and is difficult to prevent people accessing the stream. Explain to your child that it is possible for any video to be recorded and shared without the permission or knowledge of the person who made the video.

MONITOR WHAT YOUR CHILD IS WATCHING OR BROADCASTING

The only way to know what your child is watching or broadcasting on LiveMe is by regularly monitoring their usage. Chat to your child about what they like about LiveMe and what videos they enjoy watching. Ask them why they want to broadcast live and who they hope will see their videos – understanding their intention could guide you to suggest more appropriate services.

DON'T SHARE PERSONAL INFORMATION

Remind your child that they should never share personal information with people online, including their last name, home address, school name, or telephone number. If someone asks them for personal information, it does not mean they have to tell them anything.

REPORT INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

If someone has been acting inappropriately, you are encouraged to ask for help by emailing LiveMe@cmcm.com with the subject line 'ATTENTION: INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR' and send evidence, including a screenshot of their profile. You can also directly report inappropriate, offensive, and harmful content from inside the app using the Report option. However, it is worth remembering that it is not wise to screenshot and save inappropriate material.

BLOCKING PEOPLE

Explain to your child that if they notice inappropriate behaviour, bullying, or any other rule-breaking conduct on LiveMe, they can block a user from chatting on their broadcast and profile by tapping on their name, navigating to the profile page, and then choosing 'block'.

RESTRICT IN-APP PURCHASES

Stop your children from making in-app purchases by changing the app and device settings. For example, you can change the settings so a password is required to proceed with a transaction. Advise your child not to buy anything online without talking to you first.

LOCATION SHARING

Publishing live video can give away clues to your child's identity and location. Predators will search videos to identify information in the background that gives details about your child, such as street names or school uniforms. Explain to your child that they need to think carefully about where and when they broadcast live.

THINK BEFORE YOU BROADCAST

As with anything that is posted and shared with other people and online, remember that once it is up, it is hard to take back. Once videos are shared online, they become public. Videos can attract the attention of sex offenders or someone may threaten to share videos with others unless the child sends money or more videos.

BE RESPECTFUL OF OTHERS

Remind your child to always consider what they are about to comment on and to think about whether they would do that in the 'real world' or may regret posting at a later date. Encourage your child to think about the language they use online and to think carefully before commenting on content posted by someone else.

DISCUSS SEXTING

Although it is an awkward subject, it is important to explain to children that creating or sharing explicit images of a child is illegal. A young person is breaking the law if they take an explicit video of themselves or share a video of a child, even if it's shared between children of the same age.

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