What Parents & Carers Need to Know about NGL

NGL (which stands for ‘Not Gonna Lie’) is an app through which users share a link to their Instagram story or Twitter account, inviting their followers to give anonymous feedback. The app includes some prewritten questions (such as ‘if you could change anything about me, what would it be?’), plus the option to ask followers to simply ‘send me anonymous messages’. All replies go into the user’s NGL inbox, with the sender remaining anonymous — although subscribers to the app can receive hints about who each message was from.

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS?**

**ANONYMITY AND OVERSHARING**

Anonymous messaging gives rise to the ‘online disinhibition effect’, which can make users feel detached from their words and actions in the digital world. This can make young people more likely to disclose personal information on the internet, as well as more likely to send ill-advised confessions or revealing their fears and insecurities.

**PROTECTION FOR BUlIES**

Having their identity hidden makes bullies feel safe from repercussions, so anonymous chat sites are a major avenue for cyberbullying. Not claims to use AI to filter out insulting terms, but our expert sent a range of such phrases (stating they were ‘bad’ and ‘ugly’, and becoming progressively more offensive) to a dummy account. All of these trial messages were delivered to the recipient’s inbox.

**COSTLY SUBSCRIPTIONS**

NGL offers a subscription where — for a fee — users can unlock hints about who’s been messaging them, including the sender’s approximate location and which device they used. Young people will naturally be extremely curious about who sent which message (especially if they have a lot of Instagram or Twitter followers) and may be unable to resist spending money to find out.

**IF YOU COULD CHANGE ANYTHING ABOUT ME, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

Bad hair day

Bad hair style

Dull teeth

Brood

Laziness

**Advice for Parents & Carers**

**DEALING WITH NEGATIVITY**

Blocking another user on NGL will prevent them from sending anonymous messages to your child in the short term — although a determined abuser could get around that obstacle simply by setting up a new Instagram account. If your child continually receives negative messages that upset them, it might be worth encouraging them to consider whether they really need to use the app at all.

**EXPLAIN ANONYMOUS Apps**

We understand that a conversation with your child about the risks of anonymous messaging may seem difficult to initiate (especially if you aren’t that comfortable with using social media yourself). It is vital, however, that young people understand that, for some people, having their identity obscured online can make them feel more powerful and less accountable for their actions.

**BLOCK IN-APP PURCHASES**

To avoid your child running up an eye-watering bill through an NGL subscription (or indeed any kind of costly in-app purchases), go into the settings on whatever devices they use to go online and disable the ability to make purchases or protect that function with a password. If those options aren’t available, it’s prudent to ensure there aren’t any payment methods linked to their account.

**THINK BEFORE SENDING**

Regardless of whether a messaging app is anonymous or not, it’s a good idea to regularly talk to your child about how it’s wise to think through what they’re sharing before they post it online. Emphasise that nothing is truly private once it’s online. If the post is something your child might hesitate to say to someone face-to-face, then it’s probably not the sort of thing they should be writing online either.

**QUESTIONABLE SUPPORT**

NGL does have a ‘report this message’ button for users to flag upsetting content. After sending a message, however, an automated reply arrives stating “… NGL is 100% anonymous and we have no way of knowing the identity of the user and would not be able to find out even if we tried.” This did not fill our expert with confidence that the app can address bad behaviour adequately.

**INFLATED ENGAGEMENT**

In June 2022, NGL had to revise its terms of service: informing users if a message was sent by the app’s developers or to genuine followers. It emerged that previously, NGL’s makers had attempted to boost engagement with the app (as well as enticing users to pay for subscriptions) by sending fake anonymous messages from bots. This update was rolled out very quietly by the team.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has designed 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 sharing behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

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