# Setting up a Neighbourhood Watch WhatsApp group

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WhatsApp is predominantly a mobile app, which lets you create a group using your phone or tablet and invite contacts to join it. All the group members can read, reply to and post messages to the group and only other group members can see them.  Messages can be text only, or can include photos, videos and GIFs.
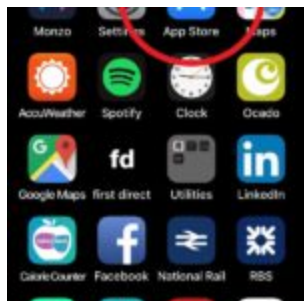
You can also use WhatsApp to write messages to individual contacts.

WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook, is an ideal tool for Neighbourhood Watch groups to communicate with each other.  It's instant, and because it's a mobile app you're more likely to notice new messages immediately. You can set notifications to pop up on your phone whenever a message is posted, to let you know there's something to read.  You can choose between a banner along the top of your screen whatever page you are on in your phone, a banner on the lock screen, or a banner in the notification centre. Or all three! You can also choose whether the notification appears briefly and then disappears or stays put until you click on it to read the new WhatsApp message.

Recently WhatsApp introduced a new 'Status' function which allows you to send messages that disappear from the thread after 24 hours. If for any reason you wish to use this function, you can read more about it here.

## 1. Getting started

First you need to find the WhatsApp app on your phone in the App Store (for iPhones) or Google Play (for other types of phones), or on the internet at www.whatsapp.com/dl.
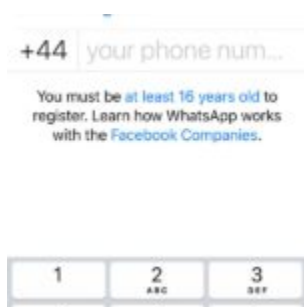


*(Click images once to enlarge)*

Search for WhatsApp and when you find it, click on **Get** in the top right corner. Eventually a **cloud symbol** will appear, click on this to install it on your phone:
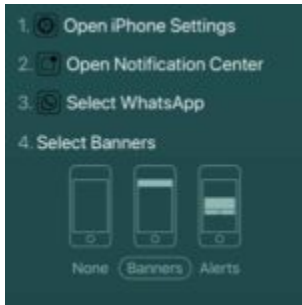


You will then get a Welcome page, where you should click **Agree & Continue**.

At the next page you will be asked to enter your mobile phone number. Enter this and click **Done**.



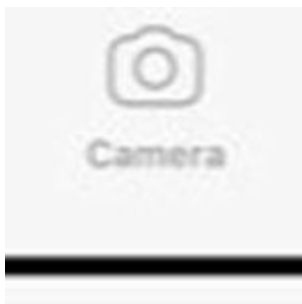Next, enter your name and add a profile picture if you wish. Click **Done** again.

The next page shows you how to set notifications of new messages, in the **Settings** function of your phone.
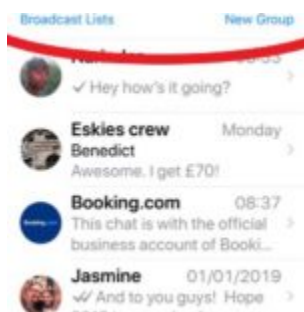
**Settings** is also where you connect with the contacts you already have stored in your phone, if they are also on WhatsApp. Turning this on just means that you can let your contacts know that you're on WhatsApp too, if you want to, and lets them get in touch with you, if they want to. It doesn't mean that all your contacts will become members of your Neighbourhood Watch WhatsApp group, but you won't be able to connect with those that you do want to join, unless you have enabled **Contacts**.



Once you come out of **Settings** and go back to the WhatsApp app, you should close that Turn on Notifications page by clicking the **X** in the top right, and you will be taken to your new WhatsApp account, where you will see five buttons along the bottom of the page:
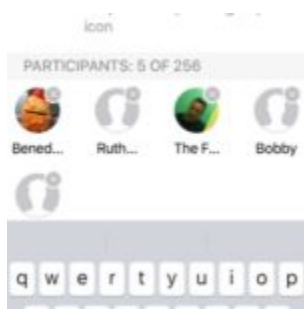


Click on the one called **Chats** and you will be given the options of **Broadcast Lists** and **New Group**.

Both of these let you send messages to multiple people at once, but the difference is similar to the difference between CC and BCC on an email. When you send a message to a WhatsApp Group, everybody who receives it can also see who else is in the Group and has received the same message, by clicking on the Group name at the top of the page. With a Broadcast list, the recipients are not aware of who else is in the list – just like using blind copy (BCC) in an email. As the whole point of Neighbourhood Watch is about getting to know your neighbours, we recommend using a Group Chat rather than a Broadcast List!

Please note: you must get permission from the person **before** adding them to a WhatsApp group – adding them makes their phone number immediately visible to all members of the group.
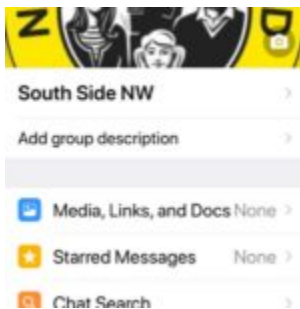
So, click on **New Group**. You will see a list of your contacts that are also using WhatsApp and you can choose which ones to add to your group. Once you've added everyone you want to invite (up to a maximum of 256 people), click **Next**. On the next page, add your **Group Subject** (name of your Group) and an optional icon or image – maybe a Neighbourhood Watch logo. Click **Create**.
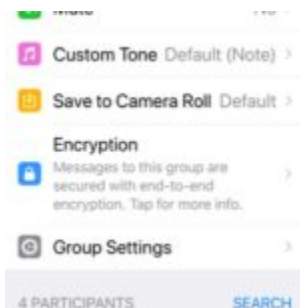


Next, you'll be taken to your new Group page, where you can post messages to the group. You might want to post a Welcome message to let everyone know the group is operational.

Click on the **top bar with the name and logo**, and you can see all your Group Info:



You can add a group description and scroll down to add more members.  Below that is a list of all current members.  By clicking on a name, you have the option to call them, send them a private message, make them a Group administrator, or remove them from the Group.
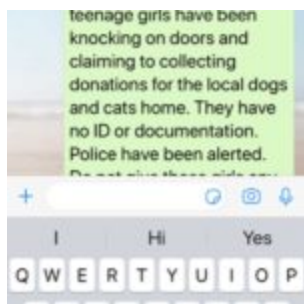


On the same page, under **Group Settings**, you can set who can send messages to the Group (all members, or only administrators), and who is able to edit the name, logo and description.  This page also allows you to add and remove other administrators.



### 2.  How it works

Now you're ready to go!  You can use your WhatsApp group to share information about anything relevant to your Group; local events, new neighbours arriving, crimes being solved, or just things going on in your vicinity. For example:
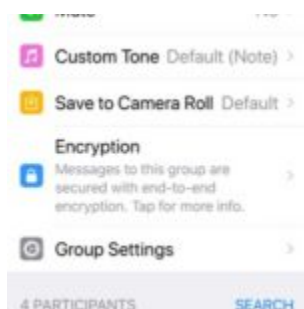


Then, members of your group can post their own messages, responding and adding to the information:



### 3.  Inviting Members

If you want to invite someone to join the group who is not saved in your phone's contacts list, click on the **top bar** to open Group Info, then scroll down to Invite to Group via Link. This lets you share the link with anyone who has WhatsApp installed on their phone, provided you know their email address or phone number.



Encourage members to use the Reply function when responding to a post, so as to keep topics grouped together tidily.  Click and hold the message you want to respond to and choose **Reply** from the dropdown menu.

## 4. Setting Guidelines

As with Facebook, you might want to set some community guidelines for use of the Group and post these early on. You can find some inspiration for these here. It's good practice every so often to post these to the Group, along with a reminder about the Reply function, and names of the group admins in case people have questions about the Group.

You might also want to consider creating a recognised post type for certain types of information.  For example, to warn group members about suspicious activity happening in the neighbourhood, you could start each post with a specific image or emoji, so that members learn to look out for those types of posts, especially if your group becomes particularly popular and active.

You can even schedule a time to have a discussion about a particular topic.  Let everyone know that you'll be starting off a chat about, say, whether to hold a Big Lunch this coming June, at 8pm on Wednesday.  It's like having a meeting, but online!

## 5. Removing members

You must be a group admin to remove participants from an existing Group Chat. To remove participants:

1. Open the **Group Chat**.
2. Tap on the Group **name** at the top to open Group Info screen.
3. Go to the **people** tab .
4. Press and hold on a participant's name > Tap **Remove** (**name**) > **Yes**.

**Restrict Group** function allows admins to send messages to the group and while all members can see them, only admins can respond to them.

## 6. *Monitoring and Evaluation*

There's no function within WhatsApp itself to let you monitor and analyse your group's usage and engagement, but you can export the data and there are third-party tools who will analyse it for you for free and present it back to you in an easy-to-understand format, such as infographics.  This gives you intelligence such as:

– Who posts the most messages
– Who posts the most photos
– Which day of the week is most popular for posting
– Who most likes to have the last word!

To do this, open up your Group chat and click on the **name bar** at the top to open Group Info. Scroll down and click on **Export Chat**.  You'll then be presented with options for saving or sending the data.  If you want to send it to a data visualization service such as WhatsAnalyzer or ChatVisualizer, open your email app and type in the relevant email

address – you can find these on their websites at https://whatsanalyzer.informatik.uni-wuerzburg.de/ or https://chatvisualizer.com/.  They will send you back a visualisation of the data within a few minutes.

On WhatsAnalyzer, private data is not stored, as chats are anonymised immediately – only you will be told which person is User 1, User 2 and so on.

On ChatVisualizer, people's names are included on the graphics, so be sure to only send the link to your report on their website to members of the chat. Everyone who has access to the URL could be able to see the whole content of your conversation.


### 7. *Further help and support*

To learn more about using WhatsApp and to answer any questions we haven't answered here, click here, or you can contact Neighbourhood Watch Network.