

# WhatsApp Security and Privacy Guide for Survivors of Tech Abuse

Compiled by Tech Safe BC



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This document is a guide of in-app safety strategies to combat common tech abuse that may be perpetrated by a current or former partner on WhatsApp. This may look like receiving harassing and threatening messages, having harmful or inappropriate images/videos made about you, or experiencing identity impersonation. It may also include monitoring or controlling behaviors, such as locking you out of your account or having your account accessed without consent.

By following this guide, you can learn how WhatsApp's security and privacy settings can support your safety. But remember, making changes to your account could increase risks to your safety if your current/former partner is notified or recognizes the changes. If you are concerned, consider consulting with a support worker at an anti-violence organization beforehand. Note that WhatsApp does not endorse nor sponsor this digital resource. All linked sources from the [WhatsApp Help Center](#) have instructions for Android, iOS, and/or using a website.

**If something in this guide is no longer up to date and/or difficult to understand, please reach out to [techsafe@bcsth.ca](mailto:techsafe@bcsth.ca) with your concerns. If you are having trouble with any of these safety steps, go to [WhatsApp's Safety and Security](#).**

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## Symbols and What They Mean in This Guide:



Course of action may be visible to your former or current partner.

You may want to consult with a staff of an [anti-violence program in your community](#) before removing your former or current partner's access.



Evidence documentation checkpoint. Take [screenshots](#), pictures with a different device, or [screen recordings](#) of your former or current partner's unauthorized access.

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## If You Suspect There is Unauthorized Access to Your Account



### Review Log-Ins

#### Safety Tip:




Be sure to take [screenshots/recordings](#) and documentation of the unauthorized log-ins. Before removing unauthorized access, consult with a support worker as it



could notify your former/current partner and potentially increase risk to violence.

If you suspect someone has logged in to your account without your consent, review your login history by checking devices that are linked to your account.

#### To review your login history

1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Linked devices**.
4. Review list of linked devices.


Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

## □ Changing the Phone Number Associated with Your Account

If your former/current partner knows the phone number associated with your account, they could potentially gain access to your account. If you would like to change the number, make sure it is a safe phone number that you can receive SMS text messages on.

Additionally, all those who have messaged you on your WhatsApp have the ability to view the new number associated with your account. Keep this in mind if one of those who have messaged you on your WhatsApp is your former/current partner.

### To change your phone number

1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Account**.
5. Tap **Change number**.
6. Continue following the instructions.

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

### Safety Tip:




If your former/current partner has access to the new or old phone number that is connected to your WhatsApp account, a text message could potentially be sent stating that your WhatsApp account has changed phone numbers. You may want to consult with a support worker as it could notify your former/current partner and potentially increase your risk to violence.

## □ Changing Passwords and Turning On Safety

### Notifications

There is no way to change your password as WhatsApp does not ask you to make one. Instead, when you attempt to login, it verifies your identity using other methods, such as scanning QR codes from devices you are already logged into or entering a pin sent via SMS. However, you can turn on safety notifications for devices that are logged into your WhatsApp and that you know are secure from your former or current partner's access.

#### To turn on security notifications

1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Account**.
5. Tap **Security notifications**.
6. Toggle on for 'Show security notifications on this device.'

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

## □ Account Recovery

There are limited ways to recover your account or have your account stolen. However, WhatsApp will often confirm logins by sending pins via SMS text messages. Instead, it is important to keep the device that has your phone number secure to prevent unauthorized logins.

# How to Secure Your Account from Your Former/Current Partner



If you currently have shared an account with your former or current partner, you can delete the account and/or create a new separate account. This would also include removing identifying information, such as your email address, your phone number, or your name on the account. Your former/current partner may realize immediately or quickly if you make these changes. If you are concerned that this will increase any risks to your safety, we recommend that you consult with a support worker at your transition home or a support organization beforehand.

## Turning On Two-Step Verification


Turning on Two-Step Verification, also called 2-Factor Authentication (2FA), can protect your account from future unauthorized logins, check this [resource](#) to understand why 2FA is important. On WhatsApp, 2FA is secured by inputting a code of your choice. Make sure this pin cannot be easily guessed by your current/former partner (such as birthdays or important dates). During this process, WhatsApp may also ask you to connect your email to your account, you may choose to decline or accept.

### Safety Tip:



Before enabling two-step verification, make sure the phone number connected to your account is secure by keeping your phone away from your current/former partner. If two-step verification is enabled on an account your current/former partner has access to, they will be notified of attempted logins through verification codes. If you choose to connect your email, make sure it is also a secure account as security concerns on your WhatsApp will also be notified through email.

### To turn on two-step verification


1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Account**.
5. Tap **Two-step verification**.
6. Tap **Turn on**.
7. Input your chosen PIN.
8. Continue following the instructions.

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

## To View or Stop Sharing Your Live Location in All Individual and Group Chats

WhatsApp can use your precise location in individual or group chats. You can disable WhatsApp's ability to track your precise location with the following steps. However, it is important to keep in mind the photos/videos you share in chats as it could reveal recognizable locations.

### To disable location tracking

1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Privacy**.
5. Scroll down and tap **Live location**.
6. Follow prompts to deny or disable location tracking.

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

### Safety Tip:



If there is unauthorized location sharing, be sure to take [screenshots](#) to document it. Before removing unauthorized access, consult with your support worker as it




could notify your former/current partner and potentially increase your risk to violence.

## Turning off The Function for Others to Know When You Were Last Seen and Online on WhatsApp

Turning off this feature hides when you are and last were active on your WhatsApp account to those who have messaged you before.

### To change who can view your last seen and online status


1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three-vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Privacy**.
5. Under the heading 'Who can see my personal info', tap **Last seen and online**.
6. Choose the option you'd like.

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

## To Edit Your WhatsApp Profile

The information on your WhatsApp profile is visible to everyone regardless of whether you or the stranger has you saved in their contacts. You can edit your profile so that those who do not have you saved in your account can view limited information about you.

## To edit your profile's privacy preferences


1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Privacy**.
5. Under the heading 'Who can see my personal info', tap all the sub-headings and edit the information to your preferences.

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

## To Edit Your Who Can See Information on Your WhatsApp Profile

The information on your WhatsApp profile is visible to everyone regardless of whether you or the stranger has you saved in their contacts.

### To change the settings of who can view specific parts of your profile


1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Privacy**.
5. Tap all the sub-headings that you'd like to limit your privacy in.

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

## Turning Off Read Receipts in Messages

Turning off this function prevents the sender from knowing whether you have viewed their messages. However, this also disables your ability to know if the sender has viewed your messages. Additionally, read receipts are always sent in group chats.

### To disable read receipts

1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Privacy**.
5. Toggle off for 'Read receipts.'

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

## Associate an Email to Your WhatsApp Account


Adding an email to your account gives WhatsApp another format of communication, other than your phone number to notify you of potential safety concerns to your account.

### Safety Tip:



If your former/current partner has access to the email that is connected to your WhatsApp account, all account safety concerns will be sent to the connected email account. Make sure the email you choose for this feature is secure. You may want to consult with a support worker as it could notify your former/current partner and potentially increase your risk to violence.

### To add an additional email address to your account


1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Account**.
5. Tap **Email address**.
6. Continue following the instructions.

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

## □ Reviewing Your Privacy Settings

This feature allows WhatsApp to guide you through the major safety features on your account. You can choose who can contact you and stop unwanted calls or messages, choose who can view your profile photo, who can see you online status and whether to allow read receipts or turn on Face ID/Touch ID to open WhatsApp on your device.

### To change your privacy preferences

1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Privacy**.
5. Scroll to the bottom and tap **Privacy checkup**.
6. Tap on all the headings and follow the prompts based on your privacy preferences.

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

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## If You're Receiving Harassing or Threatening Messages



## □ Control Who Can Message You and Add You to Group Chats

On WhatsApp, anyone can message you. You can choose to mute their messages under [Muting Chats](#).

## To change who has the ability to add you to group chats


1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
3. Tap **Settings**.
4. Tap **Privacy**.
5. Scroll down and tap **Groups**.
6. Choose the setting you'd like.

Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

## Muting Chats

On WhatsApp, anyone can message you. The mute message notification function allows you to mute chats if you are uncomfortable receiving messages from them and don't want to receive notifications that they are sending your messages. Note that you will still receive messages, but your device won't alert you when this feature is on.

## To mute chats

1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the bottom left corner of your screen, tap **Chats**.
3. Find the sender you'd like to mute messages from.
4. Long press on their name until their chat is selected, showing a green checkmark on their profile photo.
5. At the top of your screen, tap the **crossed-out bell icon**   
(the third symbol from the right).
6. Choose the duration you'd like to mute messages from this sender.
7. Tap **OK**.


Source: [WhatsApp Help Center](#)

## □ Blocking or Reporting Accounts

Blocking an account stops their ability to view your profile or message you. Keep in mind that blocking accounts removes their messages from your chat history. Therefore, remember to document evidence of harassment or inappropriate content through screenshots, pictures, or screen recordings. Blocking an account does not notify the owner. However, they may notice they have been blocked which could potentially increase any risks to your safety, we recommend that you consult with a support worker at your transition home or a support organization beforehand.

On WhatsApp, it will give you the option to Block or Block and Report the account. If you choose to Block and Report, this anonymously notifies WhatsApp to review the 5 most recent texts in the chat and to take action if it violates the app's guidelines.

### To block and/or report accounts

1. Open WhatsApp on your device.
2. On the bottom left corner of your screen, tap **Chats**.
3. Find the sender you'd like to mute messages from.
4. Long press on their name until their chat is selected, showing a green checkmark on their profile photo.
5. On the top right corner, tap **More Options** (three vertical dots). 
6. Tap **Block**.
7. Decide whether or not you'd like to report the last five messages to WhatsApp (checking or unchecking the box), then tap **Block**.

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# Disappearing Messages on WhatsApp



## What You Should Know

Disappearing messages are a WhatsApp setting that makes messages delete themselves after a set time.

Messages can disappear after:

- 24 hours
- 7 days
- 90 days

This only affects new messages, not old ones.

## How Disappearing Messages Can Support Safety

- Messages delete after a set time.
- This can reduce how much private information stays on your phone.
- Photos and videos usually won't save automatically.
- It may feel safer if others have access to your device.

## Important Limits to Know

Disappearing messages are not fully private. Someone can still:

- Take screenshots.
- Keep messages.
- Forward messages.

Messages may still show up in backups or replies.

## How This Feature Can Be Used to Cause Harm

A current or former partner may send:

- Harassing messages.
- Threats.
- Manipulative messages.

They may rely on messages disappearing to avoid responsibility.

## What You Can Do

- Take screenshots as soon as possible.
- Keep notes about what was said and how it affected you.
- Turn off disappearing messages in one-to-one chats.
- Back up or export chats before messages disappear.
- Block the person if it's safe to do so.
- Saved screenshots can help when talking to:
  - A support worker.
  - A lawyer.
  - Police or other services.

*If you are experiencing tech abuse, you are not alone. Find support in your community by connecting with a [BC Society of Transition Houses Member Program](#) or check out our other safety resources at [techsafebc.bcsth.ca](https://techsafebc.bcsth.ca).*