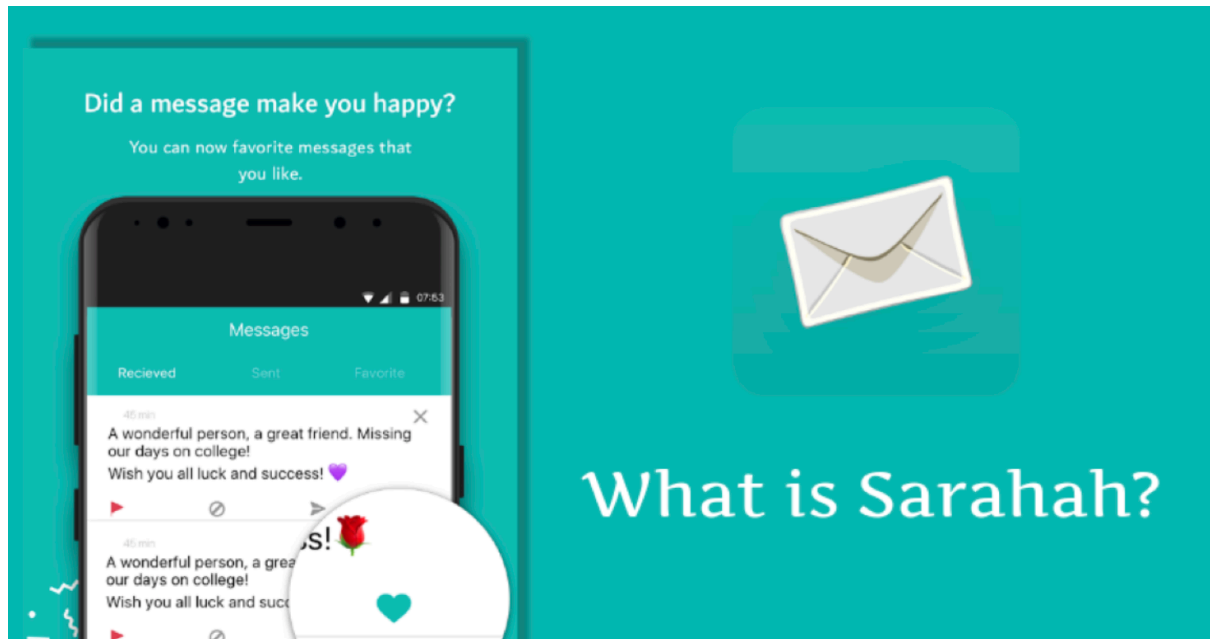


Parenting at the speed of light

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What is Sarahah?



That depends on your definition of constructive feedback.

It's definitely not for children. The app is free, with an age recommendation of 17+

Roughly meaning honesty in Arabic, Sarahah has - In less than a month, been downloaded over 300 million times. While many of these downloads have been in India and the Arab world, an English version of this app is now making its presence felt in Australian schools.

Initially meant to operate within a corporate environment, the popularity has led to its wholesale release to all, with any bugs being worked out post-release. It must be noted the app is still in development, with several features not yet functional. And with only three current staff members listed – the moderation of messages is not what it should be.

The premise is, to quote its developers:

“to help people self-develop by receiving constructive anonymous feedback.”

The key word here is anonymous- the app promises absolute secrecy for its members. Once registered you can send messages to anyone without revealing your identity.

This sends up all kinds of red flags. How could anyone think this was going to end well? The provision of unsolicited anonymous feedback, with a guarantee of secrecy, sounds like a license to bully and unsurprisingly this has begun to happen. And how secret is your identity really?

Let's break it down.

Constructive feedback - oh really?

In corporate speak, this may seem positive. Put this is the school yard, and constructive translates sometimes as downright nasty.

Users are reporting personal comments being made on appearances, abilities, personality and have experienced being insulted on a daily basis. An adult may have the ability to make a sensible choice, and delete this app back to the internet nether regions it belongs in but for a teen user? Many lack the maturity to deal with daily insults and lack the determination to delete the app, and then agonize of the comments received. Add a link to Snapchat and teens are racing to download it.

The app accesses the contact lists on your device, and lets you search for others who you may or may not know. Anonymous messages may be sent to complete strangers, and those you see on a regular basis.

Is it truly secret?

Given the ability of hackers today to delve into databases at will (think Ashley Madison), the absolute secrecy of the posters – advertised by the developers is almost a challenge. Such a guarantee is essentially impossible, and the ultimate reveal of identity that will doubtlessly come of all the messengers posting horrible things will prove devastating to many.

How does it work?

To register a person needs only provide a name, and a profile image – no phone numbers etc. are required.

There is an opt-out function to remove a profile picture or name from showing on the app. This is recommended as it hinders other users searching out an individual easily. No opting out, and registration details appear automatically (name and photo). There is also the opt-out function in the comments - this allows a user to eliminate comments being received

from random internet strangers. Links can then only be shared with specific individuals, though there is nothing stopping that link being shared onwards.

Once joined your profile like can be published on other social media platforms and you can ask (why?) for feedback about yourself. Absolutely anything may be posted, and it is.

Cyberbullying is rife.

You can report and block- just don't reply.

This is possible, but there are no indications provided about what action will be taken for accounts reported or users who have been blocked. Sowith no consequences listed or known, this app may remain a platform for bullying.

Below each message are four particular icons

Report – red flag Block- icon Reply Heart – for favourite comments

Should you “reply” to a messenger - you are actually sharing the comment with your other linked social media accounts Snapchat is one of the platforms Sarahah is linked to, giving users the ability to send screenshots of comments they have received. Either positive or negative. They can also be shared on Facebook, and Twitter, Messenger and Whatsapp.

Why this app is of concern.

When there is the likelihood of no repercussions, and anything can be said from the safety of a screen – people will be mean. And are. This app is unnecessary and merely opens another avenue for people to take their more unpleasant tendencies out for a walk. If your child is desperate to have it – ask them why? And remember the age recommendation of 17+ and enforce it. As given the level of unpleasantness on it, there is no real need, and your question might make them think.

In a review of the app on the Google app store, user Jordan Adams wrote:

"It was really cool at first because it was jokes with friends and stuff. Then someone sent my address, and I got really freaked out. Then people were sending me a bunch of perverted stuff. I would delete my account, but it won't let me".

Also on Google Play, parents, Paul and Olivia Parsons wrote:

Our daughter used it for a day and at first nice comments but slowly more mean comments started coming in ... the last one before she deleted it told her to kill herself".

<https://theconversation.com/popularity-of-latest-honesty-ap...>

Get rid of it or better still, don't let your kids get it in the first place.


Within the app, there is no way to delete your account. You may logout, but to remove it you must go to the website version of the app, and use the settings there to remove your account completely.

There is no way of determining who is sending hateful messages, and if necessary, of reporting them to police. The app in its terms and conditions, will not release the identity of a poster unless it is with their consent.

This app is used as a platform for toxic conversation and is already seeing victim-blaming in both reviews and other commentary. The idea that you can see what people really think of you is strangely attractive to teens, and some of the responses seen from other users place the blame squarely on those sign up for it in the first place, not on the toxic behaviours of some posters.

Technology doesn't bully, people do. This app is no longer available via iTunes or Googleplay but you can still register directly at the website.

The best offensive for this particular app is to delete it.



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