



BUNKER HILL MIDDLE SCHOOL

372 PITMAN DOWNER ROAD
SEWELL, NJ 08080

856.881.7007
Fax 856.881.5414

"Bulldog...It's more than our mascot; it's our character"

Michael J. D'Ostilio
Principal

Gregory Muscelli, Ed.D.
Assistant Principal

April 24, 2023

Dear Bulldog Families,

I want to send this letter to you so you were aware of some changes to SnapChat that have those of us who care, teach, and guide middle schoolers highly concerned. As of April 20, 2023, Artificial Intelligence or AI is now included in all SnapChat accounts and unfortunately cannot be removed without a "Plus" subscription. What you'll see on your child's SnapChat there is an AI chatbot called "My AI". This bot can be renamed and given an avatar to look like a bonified person. Sadly, this fake AI chatbot can be chatted with 1:1 by your child. It can give suggestions, compose responses to questions, and generate content. It can be used in a lot of ways. However, as a school administrator this brings up some massive safety and online concerns for our Bulldogs who have SnapChat.

Since its launch on April 20, I am already aware of students who have gone to their My AI chatbot for advice because they feel their chatbot understands them more than some friends, teachers, parents, or counselors. They've also gone the AI chatbot for homework help. More concerning is the fact that the AI chatbot will at times request that the student share location services or even straight up ask the SnapChat users for their address. The app is designed to share local recommendations with people. The problem is that once an address or location is given to the chatbot, it can become part of the algorithm that provides that information to other users. The chatbot can even be added to group conversations where unsuspecting users think their responding to a person who is invested in them but it's the chatbot. SnapChat is trying to work this out, but everyone should be aware that the AI chatbot can also make suggestions that may not be age appropriate. Clearly there are a lot of hidden dangers with this new feature.

Our collective concern is that SnapChat is probably one of the most popular Apps among middle school students. This and TikTok comprise nearly 100% of all harassment, intimidation, and bullying claims and investigations that we deal with at school. Social media already has a hold on our children in middle school in some negative ways. This AI feature is next level. As students continue to use this feature, every parent should be aware of this. We will meet with our students this month to address the situation and responsible use of AI. Please help us reiterate that AI is not their friend. All conversations should be made with real people who genuinely care for them. Middle school is a rough time as it is. We're concerned that when times are tough, children will seek the support of AI rather than real support.

My concerns stems from the fact that many students have Snapchat but I'm not sure their parents or guardians are aware of this new feature. I also am concerned that students will go to their AI rather than report important instances in school or their lives. Lastly, we have seen the impact of social media in eighth grade especially recently, and I feel like this is a new level.

As students continue to use this feature, I feel like everyone should be aware of it. I think it would be really important to address this at the start and talk to students about responsible use of AI. Also to reiterate that AI is not their friend and if they have an issue they should talk to someone who cares about them.

For parents, you should be aware that SnapChat has a family help center. Parents and teens can opt into this so parents can see who their children are communicating with. Please consult the Family Help Center for more information.

[SnapChat Help Center for Family Center](#)

There is an article from *Parade Magazine* that makes this understandable for parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators as well.

[SnapChat Article from Parade Magazine](#)

Unfortunately, we are new to this as well but are here to support your children. If you have any questions for us, please reach out. Each level (elementary, middle, and high school) has a technology integration specialist that can support your questions. We can loop them in for any specific questions as well.

I'm sorry about the troubling information, but it's vital you know about that so you can help our middle school children navigate this social media world with true safety and respect.

Very Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike D'Ostilio". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" being the most prominent.

Mike D'Ostilio