

A Guide to Apps All Parents Should Be Aware Of

Information obtained from FamilyEducation.com

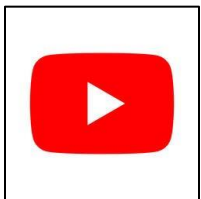
Updated: February 26, 2020



TikTok

Purpose: TikTok is an app for creating and sharing short videos. Users can create short music videos of 3 to 15 seconds and short looping videos of 3 to 60 seconds. It encourages users to express themselves creatively through video. Special effects can be added to the videos.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: Thirteen is the minimum age, but there isn't a real way to validate age so anyone can download the app. Also, parents express concern that there is a lot of inappropriate language in the videos so it's not appropriate for young children. Lastly, by default, all accounts are set to public so strangers can contact your children.



YouTube

Purpose: YouTube is a place to house and share your videos. You can control privacy settings. It's also a great resource for educational videos and entertainment.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: Inappropriate content has been sliced into both all-ages content and children's content. Also, comments on videos can be extremely inappropriate and hurtful. YouTube also has a known pedophile problem which is major cause for concern.



Tellonym

Purpose: This is an anonymous messenger app. It calls itself "the most honest place on the internet." This app is extremely popular in middle schools and high schools and it allows kids to ask and answer questions anonymously.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: It is a regular occurrence to see cyber bullying, violent threats, and sexual content. It also offers unmonitored access to the internet. The age restrictions are inconsistent ranging from 12 to 16, but this app is inappropriate for anyone younger than being in their late teens.



Bigo Live

Purpose: Bigo is a live streaming app. It is rated for teens 17 and up. Users can vlog about their lives, live stream video game play, and host their own shows.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: There is no age verification and users have to provide personal info like their age and location. This is a place where bullying, nudity, violence, and profanity is common.



IMVU

Purpose: This is a virtual world game like SIMS. Users interact with each other as avatars. IMVU stands for Instant Messaging Virtual Universe.

What Parents Should Worry: There is nudity and sexual encounters in areas that are for 18+, but there is sexual talk and behaviors in the regular area of IMVU as well. There is a Chat Now feature that randomly pairs users with other users and can lead to inappropriate pairings and interactions. All profiles are public, and there can be bullying and predators trying to get other users to share their phone numbers and to send pictures.



Houseparty

Purpose: Houseparty is a video chatting app that's pretty open. Friends can communicate with each other through live video and texts in chat groups.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: There's no screening and the video is live, so there's nothing to keep kids from inappropriate content. Users can send links via chat and even take screenshots. There's also nothing keeping friends of friends joining groups where they may only know one person.



Tinder

Purpose: Tinder's developers describe the app as "the fun way to connect with new and interesting people around you." But it's mainly used as a dating tool or an anonymous hook-up (read: one-night stand) locator by 20-somethings, college students, and even younger teens and tweens. (Yikes!)

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: The app is rated ages 17+ but Tinder's privacy policy allows teens as young as 13 to register (the app connects with Facebook – which is also technically for ages 13+ – to pull in photos for users' Tinder profiles). Tinder helps people find others in their geographic location and allows users to view each others' photos and start instant messaging once both people have "liked" one another. The geo-location features and anonymous nature of the app put kids at risk for catfishing, sexual harassment, stalking, and worse.



Ask.fm

Purpose: This app allows users to interact in a question-and-answer format – with friends, peers, and anonymous users alike.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: The app is rated ages 13+ and is most popular in Europe but is catching on in the U.S. Some kids have used the app for hurtful cyberbullying that has been linked to suicides.



Kik Messenger

Purpose: Kik is a mobile app that people can use to text with friends at high speed and with more of a "face-to-face feel" than regular texting (users' profile pictures appear in a little bubble next to their text, and they can quickly text photos, sketches, or even pre-designed greeting cards to individuals or groups).

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: The app is rated ages 17+, but there is no age verification so anyone can download it. Like some other instant messenger apps, Kik allows your teen to connect with others using just a username (rather than texting from her phone number). But it begs the question: Should teens be texting with people beyond their phone contacts? Reviews in the App Store and Google Play store reveal that many people use Kik to meet strangers for sexting. The app also been connected with cyberbullying. It's no surprise Kik has landed on some parents' "worst apps" lists.



Voxer

Purpose: This walkie-talkie PTT (push-to-talk) app allows users to quickly exchange short voice messages. They can have chats going on with multiple people at a time and just have to tap the play button to hear any messages they receive. Although it largely has an adult following, including some people who use it for their job, it's becoming popular among teens who enjoy its hybrid style of texting and talking.

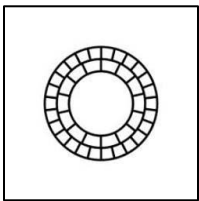
What Parents Should Be Aware Of: Hurtful messages from cyberbullies can be even more biting when they're spoken and can be played repeatedly. Surprisingly, the app is rated ages 4+ in the App Store.



Snapchat

Purpose: Snapchat is an app that allows users to send photos and videos that disappear after they're received. It's rated ages 12+. The filters and special effects allow users to alter pictures.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: Some kids are using the app to send racy pics because they believe the images can't be saved and circulated. But it turns out that Snapchat pics don't completely disappear from a device, and users can take a screenshot before an image vanishes in the app. And while recent studies revealed that "sexting" (sending sexual messages and images, usually via text message) is not as popular as parents had feared, "disappearing photo" apps like Snapchat might embolden kids to send more explicit photos and texts than they would have before through traditional texting.



VSCO

Purpose: VSCO is a photo creation app that gives users the tools to shoot, edit and post images to a profile, kind of like Instagram.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: You should know that you have to manually turn on privacy settings and limit location sharing. There are also in-app purchases for more serious photo editing tools that could cost you some serious money if your kid decides to download them.



Whisper

Purpose: This 17+ app's motto is: "Share Secrets, Express Yourself, Meet New People." It has a similar feel to the now-defunct PostSecret app, which was discontinued shortly after its release because it filled up with abusive content.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: Whisper lets users set up anonymous accounts to make their messages or confessions overlap an image or graphic (similar to e-postcards), which other users can then "like," share, or comment on. While it allows for creative expression, it can also take overly personal content viral. The app also shows a user's location. Although the app is geared toward older teens and adults, younger children are finding their way to it.



Tumblr

Purpose: Many children and young teens are also active on this 17+ photo-sharing app. It can also be used for sharing videos and chatting.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: Common Sense Media says Tumblr is "too raunchy for tykes" because users can easily access pornographic, violent, and inappropriate content. Common Sense also notes that users need to jump through hoops to set up privacy settings – and until then, all of a user's photo and content is public for all to see. Mental health experts say that Tumblr can be damaging to adolescents' mental health because it tends to glorify self-harm and eating disorders.



Instagram

Purpose: This hugely popular photo-sharing site is owned by Facebook, so you may be more familiar with it than with other photo-sharing apps. Users can add cool filters or create collages of their photos and share them across Facebook and other social media platforms.

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: The app is rated 13+ and may be slightly tamer than Tumblr, but users can still find mature or inappropriate content and comments throughout the app (there is a way to flag inappropriate content for review). "Trolls" – or people making vicious, usually anonymous comments – are common. A user can change the settings to block their location or certain followers, but many users are casual about their settings, connecting with people they don't know well or at all.



Look

Purpose: Look is a free video messaging app. Users can send video (of course), text, emojis and gifs. They can also draw on and use filters on their videos.

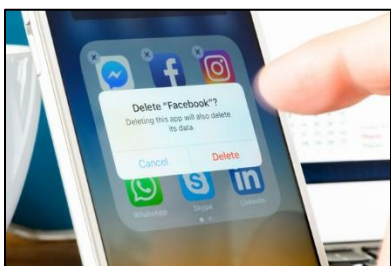
What Parents Should Be Aware Of: With Look, strangers can message kids pretty easily, and because there are no content filters, kids can come across inappropriate content. Users have reported cyberbullying activity and have found it difficult to delete their accounts.



Jailbreak Programs and Icon-Hiding Apps

Purpose: These aren't social media apps – and they're confusing – but you should still know about them (especially if you have a tech-savvy teen or have had to take away your child's mobile phone privileges because of abuse).

What Parents Should Be Aware Of: "Jailbreaking" an iPhone or "rooting" an Android phone basically means hacking your own device to lift restrictions on allowable applications – meaning, the user can then download third-party apps not sold in the App Store or Google Play store (read: sometimes sketchy apps). It's hard to say how many teens have jailbroken their mobile device, but instructions on how to do it are readily available on the Internet. Cydia is a popular application for jailbroken phones, and it's a gateway to other apps called Poof and SBSettings – which are icon-hiding apps. These apps are supposedly intended to help users clear the clutter from their screens, but some young people are using them to hide questionable apps and violent games from their parents. Be aware of what the Cydia app icons look like so you know if you're getting a complete picture of your teen's app use.



What About Facebook and Twitter?

Do all these new social media apps mean that Facebook and Twitter are in decline? A 2013 survey by Pew Internet found that U.S. teens have "waning enthusiasm" for Facebook – in part because their parents and other adults have taken over the domain and because their peers engage in too much "drama" on the site. But Facebook still remains the top social media site among U.S. teens, who say that their peers continue to stay on the site so they don't miss anything happening there. Your child may keep a profile on Facebook but be much more active on newer platforms. Meanwhile, Twitter use is rising among teens. The 2013 Pew survey found that 24 percent of online teens are on Twitter, up from 16 percent in 2011. Twitter is more popular among African American teens than Hispanic and white teens.