

Social Media Apps Every Parent Should Know About



Ask.fm (new logo)

This is one of the most popular social networking sites that is almost exclusively used by kids. It is a Q&A site where users can ask other users questions anonymously. The problem is that kids sometimes target one person and the questions get nasty. It is cyberbullying with no chance of ever getting caught. Ask.fm had been associated with nine documented cases of suicide in the U.S. and the U.K. through 2012. (Huffington Post)



Blindr

Blindr: A flirting app used to meet new people through GPS location services. You can send messages, photos, videos, rate the hotness of other users, etc.

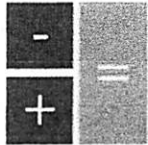
Problem: There are no authentication requirements, so sexual predators can contact minors, minors can meet up with adults. And again, the sexting. (forevermom.com)



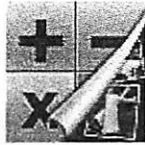
Burn Note

Like Snapchat, Burn Note is a messaging app that erases messages after a set period of time. Unlike Snapchat, this one is for text messages only, not photos or videos. Burn Note's display system shows just one word at a time, adding a sense of secrecy to the messages. Again, by promising a complete delete, kids could feel more comfortable revealing more than what they would do otherwise. And again, capturing a screenshot so that the message can be shared and lives forever, may be the app's Achilles' heel.

Even if your kid doesn't have the app and has no interest in reading super secret messages, she could unwittingly get involved: The app sends a Burn Note alert that she has a message waiting. Curiosity can kill the cat and an app like this could encourage cyberbullying when kids feel they can get away with things because there will be no record of it. (Huffington Post)



Calculator% android



Calculator% apple

A calculator icon posing as something it isn't. Sedgrid Lewis, online safety expert, notes that these apps look like a normal calculator app but when teens push a button within the app they can hide all inappropriate pictures. "It's a key way teens are hiding their nude pictures from their parents," said Lewis.

Lewis says the best way to solve this situation is for parents to add their teen to their iCloud account. That way, whenever a new app is downloaded by the teen, it will automatically download to the parent's phone as well.

Think it's not serious? Last fall, there was a headline-making case in a Colorado high school where teens used apps to hide a huge sexting ring from parents and school officials. (Huffington Post)



Cydia (Jailbreak Programs and Icon-Hiding Apps)

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). "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. (familyeducation.com)



kik

Kik Messenger: An instant messaging app with over 100 million users that allows users to exchange videos, pics and sketches. Users can also send YouTube videos and create memes and digital gifs.

Problem: Kids using the app for sexting and sending nude selfies through the app is common. The term "sext buddy" is being replaced with "Kik buddy." Kids use Reddit and other forum sites to place classified ads for sex by giving out their Kik usernames. Also, Kik does not offer any parental controls and there is no way of authenticating users, thus making it easy for sexual predators to use the app to interact with minors.

(forevermom.com)



Parents need to know that *Omegle* is an anonymous chat client with which users discuss anything they'd like. This can easily result in conversations that are filled with explicit sexual content, lewd language, and references to drugs, alcohol, and violence. Many users ask for personal data upfront, including location, age, and gender, something kids might supply (not realizing they don't have to). Adults wishing to chat anonymously may find use in this app, but kids should be kept far away. (commonsensemedia.org)



ooVoo

ooVoo is a free video, voice, and messaging app. On ooVoo, people can have group chats with up to 12 friends. They can video chat with friends on any Android or Apple mobile device as well as a laptop. Besides chatting, they can send each other photos, messages and exchange files.

Why do kids love it?

Teens mostly use ooVoo to hang out with friends or organize study groups. ooVoo makes it much easier to bring friends and classmate together who are all using different devices with different operating systems. The app is free to download and kids can even download it on to their laptop.

What are the concerns?

Search #ooVoo on Twitter or Instagram and you will see why parents need to talk to their kids about this messaging app. The NSFW (Not Safe for Work) crowd is also on ooVoo. If teens have ooVoo set for "Anyone" to contact them, they may find sexually explicit content coming their way. (kidsprivacy.net)



Snapchat

Snapchat is an app that allows users to send photos and videos that disappear from view within 10 seconds after they're received. It's rated ages 12+. 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. Check out connectsafely.org's "A Parents' Guide to Snapchat." (familyeducation.com)

Snapchat may not be the #1 app used for sexting but that's not to say it isn't the principal appeal_of the app for many: Users think their snaps will disappear and they are wrong. It's

actually pretty easy to recover a Snap, take a screenshot of it and share it with others -- and by others, we mean porn sites. No parent wants to find a photo of their teen daughter or son on sites like snapper party or sexting forum. (huffingtonpost)



Vaulty

Vaulty will not only store photos and videos away from parental spying eyes, but it also will snap a photo of anyone who tries to access the "vault" with the wrong password. Parents who find it on their teens' phones can conclude just one thing: Your kid is hiding things from you. (huffpost)



Vine

Parents need to know that *Vine* is a social media app that lets you post and watch looping six-second video clips. Many of the videos are harmless, but parents need to be aware that *Vine* is full of content that is inappropriate for children. With the most basic creative searching, kids can find nudity, sex, drug use, offensive language, and more. There are plenty of cute, fun videos, a lot of sophomoric potty humor, and some clever, creative, artistic clips. There's also a direct message option for videos you want to share with just one person (or a few people), not with the world. (commonsensemedia.org)



Voxer

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. 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. (familyeducation.com)



Whisper

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. 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.



YikYak

Yik Yak is the "Twitter meets Reddit" app. It allows users to post text-only "Yaks" of up to 200 characters that can be viewed by the 500 Yakkers who are closest to the person who wrote the Yak, as determined by GPS tracking. The issue is that these other users are regularly exposed to a barage of sexually explicit content, profanity and even personal attacks-- anonymously, of course. It's also the app du jour for sending a bomb threat to your school. Yes, that has happened.

Elizabeth Long, an Atlanta teenager who was encouraged on Yik Yak to try harder to kill herself after her attempted suicide failed, led a Change.org drive to shut the app down. She wrote, "With the shield of anonymity, users [of Yik Yak] have zero accountability for their posts, and can openly spread rumors, call classmates hurtful names, send threats, or even tell someone to kill themselves -- and all of these things are happening." (Huffington Post)