

DIGITAL THREAT REPORT

2018

SOCIAL MEDIA APPS PARENTS SHOULD BE AWARE OF

Houseparty



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



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. 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. [Learn more scary facts about the Tinder app.](#)

Ask.fm



This app allows users to interact in a question-and-answer format — with friends, peers, and anonymous users alike. 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**, including the death of 12-year-old Rebecca Sedwick of Florida. British schools have sent home letters calling for students to stop using ask.fm because of its use in several **cyberbullying** incidents there, and its loose regulation and lack of monitoring. In response to the uproar in the U.K., the site added a button where users can report abuse, but some parents feel it's too little, too late.

kik messenger



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). 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**. Rebecca Sedwick, the Florida bullying victim who killed herself, reportedly used Kik and Voxer in addition to ask.fm — receiving messages like "Go kill yourself" and "Why aren't you dead?" — without her mother even knowing about the apps. It's no surprise Kik has landed on some parents' "worst apps" lists.

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.

Snapchat



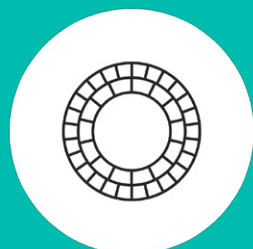
Snapchat is an app that allows users to send photos and videos that disappear from view within 10 seconds after they're received. It's rated ages 12+. Some kids are using the app to send racy pics because they believe the images can't be saved and circulated. But it turns out that Snapchat pics don't completely disappear from a device, and users can take a screenshot before an image vanishes in the app. "Disappearing photo" apps like Snapchat might embolden kids to send more explicit photos and texts than they would have before through traditional texting.

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VSCO



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

Vine



Vine is Twitter's mobile app that allows users to shoot and share short loops of video (6 seconds or less). It's rated 17+, but children and teens are still downloading it. As with any multimedia app, the content on Vine runs the gamut from naughty to nice. "With the most basic creative searching, kids can find nudity, sex, drug use, offensive language, hardcore sexuality, and more. While there are plenty of cute, fun videos, even adults might be shocked at some of the things they find.

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. A 12-year-old girl in Washington was reportedly raped by a 21-year-old man who met her on Whisper.

Tumblr



Many children and young teens are also active on this 17+ photo-sharing app. It can also be used for sharing videos and chatting. Tumblr gives teens easy access pornographic, violent, and inappropriate content. 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



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. 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



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. With Look, strangers can message kids pretty easily, and because there are no content filters, kids can come across inappropriate content. Users have reported cyber-bullying activity and have found it difficult to delete their accounts.

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Yik Yak



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.

Blendr



Blendr’s 300 million users meet new people through GPS location services. You can message, exchange photos and videos, and rate the “hotness” of other users (encouraging your kid to engage in superficial values at best). But since there are no authentication requirements, sexual predators can contact minors and minors can hook up with adults — and of course there is the sexting

Omegle



“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 [ASL], something kids might supply (not realizing they don’t have to).

Line



Line is an all-in-one mobile hub for chatting, sharing photos and videos; free texting and video calls too. But the devil is in the details. Things can get dicey with the hidden chat feature; users can decide how long their messages can last (two seconds or a week). But the biggest shock may come to your credit card: Your kid can rack up some hefty in-app charges on Line as well. While the app says that minors need their parents’ permission to use it, there is no monitoring to ensure this takes place.

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.

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.

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Calculator%



It looks 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."

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.

Audio Manager



Audio Manager, an app that has nothing to do with managing your teen's music files or controlling the volume on his smartphone and everything to do with him hiding things like nude photos from you. It's one of the top apps for hiding other apps.

When you press and hold the Audio Manager app, a lock screen is revealed — behind which users can hide messages, photos, videos, and other apps.

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