Jennifer knew something was different one day when her teenage son was acting “different.” Sure enough, her instincts were correct.

**Snapchat 101** – Snapchat is a Mobile App that is designed so friends can chat quickly through photos and videos that appear quickly and then disappear. Many organizations, including YoungLife, CNN, and favorite athletes like JJ Watt have a Snapchat you can “follow” so it seems harmless.  Many believe you can’t see the conversation after the fact so there appears to be no way to monitor the app.

WRONG! You can absolutely delete conversations just like you can delete text conversations BUT it’s set up to have ongoing conversations (exactly like texting) without parents knowing what’s going on because the conversations are hard to find. To the inexperienced, conversations seem hidden. Lots of “swipes” left and right and up and down are required to get to the right screen where “chatting” occurs. USERS CAN EVEN FACETIME (it’s called “live chat” on Snapchat).

I’m here to help. I have wonderful kids just like you but even the brightest 14 year old can be lured by an internet predator so don’t be so fast to think your child “would never engage with a predator.” Predators are smart, know the system better than any of us, connect through other friends to make it seem like they know young users, use age appropriate verbiage and shortcuts, and quickly engage young people. Name one 14 year old with raging hormones that would not be flattered by a beautiful high school girl/boy telling them they are cute/pretty and “let’s be friends,” especially if they are posing as someone they know or a friend of a friend!” It can rapidly change into: “Want to trade?”, then “I’ll go first.” It’s intoxicating to a 14 year old and they quit thinking rationally.

**IMPORTANT: Snapchat is actually old news.**  Kids have moved on to have “conversations” on the back end of many online games (e.g., PS4, etc.) and other newer applications. Snapchat is not the only avenue for predators to connect with your child. The online games they are playing also can provide a platform to converse with creeps, on apps like Kik and lots of others.

**Snapchat Tip #1:** Scroll left and right and then when you get to the “SNAPCHAT” titled screen, with all the names of “friends” with ongoing conversations, make SURE to swipe right on the person’s name, then PULL DOWN the conversation from the top of the screen to see their entire dialogue. It looks like a blank screen unless you do this. So many parents miss this and don’t see the long ongoing conversations.

**Tip #2:** If you take a screen shot, Snapchat alerts the other user that a screen shot has been taken. Try it. This works perfectly as a tip for predators to stop a conversation if they believe they are being investigated. It also allows the user to know if someone took a screen shot of their Snapchat video or photo which was, of course, supposed to only be there for a few seconds. Once I screen captured the predator’s conversation with my son, it was over. I wish I had known this so I could have dialogued with this person longer while pretending to be my son and attempting to catch him.

**Tip #3:** If the person sends a picture of video from their phone it is actually saved in the conversation. If a person “snaps” from the app these are not saved so you can see the dialogue but not the “snaps” unless they come from their camera phone. Predators tell kids not to use their camera phone so they don’t get caught and carefully instruct them to only use the snap camera.

**How Snapchat works:**

1. The first screen is a camera/video screen to “snap” or video from the app. You can add text and determine how long you want the video to show (1-10 seconds) and then send to Snapchat “friends.” Click the arrow in the bottom right corner to send to someone or add to your own “story.”

2. From the camera screen (home screen that takes pics or video), swipe left to see all the montage type “stories” of friends who currently have a story on their profile. Some do and some don’t. Users put stories up and take them down fairly regularly. At the top, it lists who has “updated” their story recently. Then, “all stories” fall below that. Check out your own child’s “story,” you might be surprised.

3. From the camera screen (home screen that takes pics of video) swipe right to find the conversation screen called SNAPCHAT. From each name swipe again the right and you’ll open up the conversation. It only shows the last chat at the very top...not so fast...PULL DOWN THE WHOLE CONVERSATION.