PROBLEMATIC APPS TRENDING WITH KIDS & TEENS

Live Streaming Apps

These apps allow kids & teens to stream live videos to their friends and followers. The videos are geotagged & whoever watches the video knows your child's location and current activity. Theses sites are rife with examples of kids oversharing personal information.

Meerkat   Periscope   Livestream   Hang w/   Ustream

Self-Destructing Apps

Temporary apps allow people to send messages and images that self-destruct after a set period of time. Kids can use these apps to carefully manage their digital trails. However, it often inspires kids to share private, inappropriate things under the false impression that everything "disappears." It does not.

Burn Note
Snapchat
Slingshot

Hiding Apps

If children or teens wish to hide questionable apps, photos, or posts from parents, all they need to do is download one of these apps. These apps hide content on the homescreen as if it does not exist. Content can be disguised as a calculator or simply protected by a password.

Poof   Hide it
Vault   Spy Calc
KeepSafe

Micro-blogging Apps & Sites:

Users post short, edited comments, photos or videos and often solicit comments from viewers. Posts can be shared among friends and/or strangers.

Instagram   Vine
Tumblr   9Gag
Twitter

Chatting, Meeting, Dating Apps

These adult-oriented apps are not recommended for tweens or teens. The content is often highly sexual and most sites encourage contact between strangers. Age recommendations are typically 18+.

MeetMe   Tinder
Omegle   Down
Skout   Blendr

Texting Apps

These apps enable users to send short messages to friends (often for free) over the internet. Users do not pay a fee to a mobile carrier.

Kik Messenger
ooVoo
WhatsApp

Anonymous Apps

Anonymous apps allow users to go incognito online. These apps are often riddled with inappropriate content. They also can encourage bullying behavior and cruel comments.

After School   Whisper
Ask.fm   Yik Yak
Cloaq   Brighten

FOUR EASY SAFEGUARDS FOR MOBILE DEVICES

Parents can easily activate the Parental Controls & Restrictions on any device, especially one exclusively used by a child or teen. Restrictions allow parents to limit content, prevent kids from installing and deleting apps, disable in-app purchases, block websites, lock down privacy settings, and lots more. Be sure to password protect the Restrictions page with a PIN that your child does not know.

On an Apple device: Go to the **Settings > General > Restrictions**. Tap **Enable Restrictions** and create a new passcode—this should be different from the passcode you have set on the device's home screen. Do not share the Restrictions password with your child. You'll see a screen full of options.

1) **Turn off location services.** Most apps should not have access to a child's or teen's location. Parents can restrict access to GPS Tracking. On an Apple device: Go to Settings > Privacy > tap on Location Services. Review the list of apps and turn Location Services on and off as desired. For example, parents might allow it for the "Map" app, but turn it off for the "Instagram" app. This must be done every time you purchase a new app unless you set "don't allow changes" as your default.

2) **Turn off access to all app purchases & in-app purchases.** If your child or teen wants to install a new app, they must hand the device to you so that you can enter a password and authorize the purchase. This is the perfect opportunity to discuss whether you think an app is appropriate, establish ground rules, & enable the privacy settings. Settings > General > Restrictions>Installing Apps (Deleting Apps / In-app Purchases) to turn this feature on or off.

3) **Enable Content Filtering.** A device's built-in rating system allows parents to filter content. Parents can restrict the content of apps, movies, TV & music based upon a child's age (i.e. G, PG, PG13, R). Go to Settings > General > Restrictions. At the bottom of the screen look for the "Allowed Content" group. Parents can then turn off explicit content and install filters such as "clean" or "TV-PG13."

4) **Install a child-safe Internet browser.** Most devices come preloaded with web browsers such as Safari and Google that have no safety filters. Content is limitless. Devices do offer a website filter: go to Settings>General > Restrictions> Websites and opt to block all "adult content" or ban specific sites. This is somewhat effective for blocking explicit porn but adult content and violent images are still readily available with a simple Google search. For added security, parents can turn off Safari, Google etc. altogether under Settings. Parents can then download a web browser app of their choice with content screening based upon age. For elementary school children, tweens & young teens consider SweetSearch, Safe Search Kids on Google, K9 Browser, GoogleScholar, Zoodles.com, Kidzsearch, TweensBrowser, Kido'z. Parents of older teens may opt for a parental control app that allows parents to see which websites their kids are visiting then block specific sites and explicit content.

ANDROID Devices have similar parental controls: Tap on **Settings > Users > 'Add user or profile'.** Tap on **Restricted** to create profile for your child. (If you have not previously set a parental password, Tap **Set lock,** then choose to use either a pattern, PIN or password lock and follow the instructions.) Tap the Settings icon next to the **'New profile'** to give it a name, ie "John's Phone." The parent's account is now protected with a pattern, password or PIN. The child has her own account with access only to the apps the parents approved. Restrictions also block a child's access to the Google Play; a parent must enter the password to approve a new purchase.

Visit Commonsensemedia.org for additional articles on parental control apps, parental controls offered by wireless carriers & related topics.

TEXTING APPS

These apps enable users to send short messages to friends (often for free) over the internet. Users do not pay a fee to a mobile carrier. Texts & photos sent via these sites are not monitored by mobile carrier parental controls. Parents must activate monitoring tools, if offered.

Kik Messenger	**What is it:** Kik is an app that lets kids text for free. It's fast and has no message limits, character limits, or fees if you only use the basic features. Because it's an app, the texts won't show up on your kid's phone messaging service and you're not charged for them. Kik is rated for ages 17+ but many younger kids use it. **Drawbacks:** Kids are using the app for sexting and sending nude selfies. The term "sext buddy" is being replaced with "Kik buddy." Kik does not offer any parental controls and there is no way of authenticating users, making it easy for sexual predators to use the app to interact with minors. An app named OinkText, linked to Kik, allows communication with strangers who share their Kik usernames to find people to chat with. Kik is also loaded with ads and in-app-purchases. Kik specializes in "promoted chats" -- basically, conversations between brands and users.
ooVoo	**What is it:** ooVoo is a free video, voice, and messaging app. With ooVoo kids can "chat" with up to 12 people at a time; they can see up to four people at a time on screen during video chats. **Drawbacks:** The good news is that kids can only chat with approved friends on their contact lists. However, kids need to fully activate the safety settings to ensure that a stranger does not request to be an "approved contact." If parents don't activate safety features, children can readily video chat with strangers. Also, the app sometimes disguises adds for other apps as games.
WhatsApp	**What is it:** WhatsApp lets users send text messages, audio messages, videos, and photos to one or many people with no message limits or fees. **Drawbacks:** It's for users 16+ but younger tweens & teens are using the app. WhatsApp requires users to have a valid phone number for their username. After they sign up, it automatically connects kids to all the people in their address book who also are using WhatsApp, regardless of age. While it does not connect kids with strangers, it does not vet contact lists for age. It also encourages group messaging. WhatsApp does offer parents a "spy" tool to monitor usage. WhatsApp is not password protected and can easily be hacked in unsecure public hotspots.
	Similar apps: Viber, TextNow

MICRO-BLOGGING APPS & SITES

Users post short, edited comments, photos or videos and often solicit comments from viewers. Posts can be shared among friends and/or strangers.

Instagram	**What is it:** Users snap, edit, and share photos and 15-second videos, either publicly or with a private network of followers. It unites the most popular features of social media sites: sharing, seeing, and commenting on photos. It also lets kids apply fun filters and effects to their photos, making them look high quality and artistic. **Drawbacks:** Teens are on the lookout for "likes" & they often measure the "success" of their photos -- even their self-worth -- by the number of likes or comments they receive. Photos & videos shared on Instagram are public unless privacy settings are adjusted. Hashtags and location information are available to strangers on public accounts. Private messaging is now an option, but must be chosen. Instagram Direct allows users to send "private messages" to up to 15 mutual friends. These pictures don't show up on their public feeds.
Tumblr	**What is it:** A cross between a blog and Twitter. It's a streaming scrapbook of text, photos, and/or videos and audio clips. Users create and follow short blogs, or "tumblelogs," that can be seen by anyone online (if made public). Many teens have tumblelogs for personal use: sharing photos, videos, musings, and things they find funny with their friends. **Drawbacks:** This online hangout is hip and creative but often raunchy. Images and videos that depict sex, violence, self-harm, drug use, and offensive language are readily available. The default mode for any new profile is "public." Private posting involves an awkward workaround, requiring members to create a second profile, which they can password-protect. Like retweeting, a tumbleblog is reblogged from one tum\elog to another. Many teens like -- and, in fact, want -- their posts reblogged.
Twitter	**What is it:** Twitter is a microblogging site that allows users to post brief, 140-character messages -- called "tweets" -- and follow other users' activities. It's not only for adults; teens like using it to share tidbits and keep up with news and celebrities. **Drawbacks:** Public tweets are the norm for teens. Though kids can choose to keep their tweets private, most teens have public accounts. Also, new posts appear immediately. Even though kids can remove tweets they regret, their followers can still read and retweet a post until it's removed. This can get kids in trouble if they say something in the heat of the moment.
Vine	**What is it:** A social media app that lets users post and watch looping six-second video clips. This Twitter-owned service has developed a devoted following who post videos that are often creative, funny, and sometimes thought-provoking. Teens usually use Vine to create and share silly videos of themselves and/or their friends and families. **Drawbacks:** It's full of inappropriate videos. In 3 minutes of random searching, Common Sense Media came across a clip full of full-frontal male nudity, a woman in a fishnet shirt with her breasts exposed, and people blowing marijuana smoke into each other's mouths. There are also significant privacy concerns. The videos a kid posts, the accounts he follows, and the comments he makes are public by default. Kids need to proactively adjust their privacy settings to keep their posts private and limited to approved followers. Kids may post embarrassing videos of friends and family with getting their permission.
9Gag	**What is it:** One of the most popular apps for distributing memes and pictures online. It is is a free app/social media site that focuses on uploaded images with attached captions and text. **Drawbacks:** All kinds of pictures are shared on 9Gag. Neither the picture nor captions are moderated, plus they can come from any uploader. Sarcastic, degrading & potentially hurtful pictures or posts are common. While there are many harmless posts, just scrolling through the "daily favorites" exposes your kid to crude humor, sexually suggestive material and offensive behavior.

SELF-DESTRUCTING APPS

Temporary apps allow people to send messages and images that self-destruct after a set period of time. On the positive side, kids can use these apps to more carefully manage their digital trails. On the negative side, it often inspires kids to share or say things they wouldn't normally. Kids are under the false impression that everything "disappears." It does not. These apps also prevent parents from monitoring comments and sharing.

Burn Note	**What it is:** Burn Note is a messaging app that erases messages after a set period of time. Unlike many other apps of this sort, it limits itself to text messages; users cannot send pictures or video. **Drawbacks:** It allows kids to communicate covertly. A spotlight-like system that recipients direct with a finger (or the mouse) only reveals a portion of the message at a time. Kids may feel tempted to reveal more than they would otherwise, since Burn Note's developers claim it deletes every copy of the message (except screenshots, which they also try to prevent). This complete erasure claim has never been proven, and similar apps have had to retract such claims. Kids don't have to have the app to receive a Burn Note. Unlike other apps -- ie Snapchat -- users can send a Burn Note to anyone, not only others who have the program. Since no record that a conversation took place exists, kids often feel they can get away with cruel or explicit comments.
Snapchat	**What it is:** Snapchat is a messaging app that lets users put a time limit on the pictures and videos they send before they disappear. Most teens use the app to share goofy or embarrassing photos without the risk of them going public. However, there are lots of opportunities to use it in other ways. **Drawbacks:** It is the #1 app used for sexting, mostly because people think it is the safer way to sext. However, it's a myth that Snapchats go away forever. Snapchat concedes that it can recover deleted files. Also, the person on the receiving end can take a screenshot of the image before it disappears
Slingshot:	**Slingshot:** Facebook's version Snapchat. The twist is that before you can view a photo or video you've received, you'll have to send the sender a shot of your own. After you've viewed it, the shot disappears. The video or photo options coupled with the ability to type or draw on an image create an easy way to share brief moments and creative messages. Users register for the app with their Facebook account or a mobile phone number, and the app will search your contacts for friends who have the app. **Drawbacks:** Although the app comes from Facebook, you're not required to have a Facebook account to use it; you can send and receive shots with people who aren't your Facebook friends. Also anyone who knows your teen's phone number or Slingshot username can send photos and videos to your teen. Unless your teen turns off location services, her city, date, and time will appear each time she sends anything from Slingshot.

Similar apps: Poke, Wire, and Wickr, Frankly, Blink

CHATTING, MEETING, DATING APPS AND SITES

These adult-oriented dating apps are not recommended for kids or tweens. The age recommendations are typically 18+.

Meet Me	**What it is:** "Chat and Meet New People" is its catchphrase. Formerly myYearbook, this social network helps users (as young as age 13) discover and chat with teens that have similar interests. Although not marketed as a dating app, *MeetMe* does have a "Match" feature whereby users can "secretly admire" others. **Drawbacks:** MeetMe is an open network. Users can chat with whoever is online. Lots of personal details are required to register: name, age, and ZIP code. You can also log in using a Facebook account. The app asks permission to use location services on your teens' mobile devices, so kids can find the closest matches nearby & "meet" them.
Omegle	**What is it:** A chat site (and app) that puts two strangers together to text chat or video chat. Chat participants are only identified as "You" and "Stranger." Omegle provides a no-fuss, no registration opportunity to make connections. Its "interest boxes" lets users filter potential chat partners by shared interests. **Drawbacks:** The whole premise of the app is to pair users with strangers, typically for explicit sexual conversations. According the Omegle website: "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."
Skout	**What is it:** Skout is a flirting app that allows users to sign up as teens or adults. They're then placed in the appropriate peer group, where they can post to a feed, comment on others' posts, add pictures, and chat. They'll get notifications when other users are near their geographic area. Users receive notifications when someone "checks them out" but must pay points to see who it is. **Drawbacks:** While the teens-only section seems to be moderated reasonably well for explicit content, there's no age verification process for users. It's easy for a teen to say she's older than 18 and an adult to say she's younger. It encourages dating strangers.
Tinder	**What it is:** Tinder is a photo and messaging dating app for browsing pictures of potential matches within a certain-mile radius of the user's location. It's very popular with 20-somethings as a way to meet new people for casual or long-term relationships. **Drawbacks:** The app is rated as 18+ but many teens are on it. Meeting up (and hooking up) is pretty much the goal. Tinder is all about swipes - swipe right to "like" a photo or left to "pass." If a person whose photo you "liked" swipes "like" on your photo, the app allows you to message each other. Due to the rating system, it is often used for cyber-bullying, because a group of kids will target another kid and purposefully make his/her rating go down. The Geolocation feature means it's possible for teens to meet up with anyone nearby. It is easy for adults and minors to find one another.
Down	**What it is:** This app, which used to be called *Bang With Friends*, is connected to Facebook. Users label their Facebook friends as someone they'd like to hang with or someone they are "down" to hook-up with. **Drawbacks:** Although identifying someone you are willing to hook-up with doesn't mean you will actually hook-up with them, it creates a hook-up norm within a peer group.
Blendr	**What is it:** Blendr is 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. **Drawbacks:** There are no authentication requirements, so sexual predators can contact minors and minors can meet up with adults. And again, the sexting.
	Similar Apps: Badoo & Hot or Not (users rank people's photos on a 1-10 scale)

ANONYMOUS APPS

On the positive side, going incognito online helps us express ourselves in ways we might not be able to in the real world. On the negative side, anonymous apps are rife with inappropriate content. They also can encourage bullying behavior and cruel comments.

After School	**What is it:** After School is one of the most popular apps trending among tweens and teens. Using location services, the app connects large numbers of students at their specific school and allows them to communicate with each other anonymously and instantaneously. **Drawbacks:** Posts are anonymous, instant and widespread within a school. Many comments are benign, but cruel comments, threats & vicious rumors can be instantly shared with all "After School" users within a school. In response to an on-line petition from students, Apple pulled "After School" from its store until a safer version was offered. After School added default filters for "sexual, drugs, profane and gross content" but inappropriate content still appears. (Students who send a screenshot of a school ID to After School can unlock explicit 17+ content.) There is no filter for mean comments. If an adult changes her age on Facebook, she can easily sign-up and pose as a student.
Ask.fm	**What is it:** A popular social networking site that allows users to ask other users questions and answer them while remaining anonymous. **Drawbacks:** While there are many positive interactions on Ask.fm, the site is overrun with nasty comments & lewd posts. Some "questions" are targeted criticisms of other kids. Some "answers" are cutting and derogatory. The site has been linked 9 documented teen suicides. The Q&As sync to Facebook so the target audience is broader than just Ask.fm users. Teens do have the option to block some posters.
Cloaq:	**What is it:** An anonymous posting site that doesn't collect any personal information and assigns random usernames. Users can post text and pictures and comment on content from sites such as Buzzfeed and Mashable. There is no word limit to the size of posts. **Drawbacks:** Introduced un April 2015, Cloaq is gaining traction because its community is relatively supportive of its own members. Some users claim that they "hold themselves to a higher standard." The anonymous posts are sometimes personal, sometimes philosophical, and sometimes just chatty. Mature language and topics is the most frequent iffy content in the main feed. The recommended age for users is 15+ but users do not have to provide any identifying information to get a username.
Whisper	**What is it:** An anonymous social "confessional" app that allows users to post whatever's on their minds, paired with an image. **Drawbacks:** Some whispers and confessions are benign, but all too often Whispers are sexual. Some use Whisper to solicit others for sex using the app's geo-location "nearby" feature. Lots of eye-catching nearly nude pics accompany these shared secrets. Strong language and drug and alcohol references also are prevalent. Content can also be dark and common Whisper topics include insecurity, depression & substance abuse. Although it's anonymous to start, the app encourages users to exchange personal information in the "Meet Up" section.
Yik Yak	**What is it:** An anonymous & free social-networking app that lets users post short comments. The 500 geographically nearest Yik Yak users within a 1.5 mile radius receive the post. Kids can post opinions, secrets, rumors, and more that immediately get shared locally -- within a classroom, school building, football field, party etc. The poster is anonymous but Yik Yak users know the poster is nearby. **Drawbacks:** This anonymous app has it all: cyberbullying, cruelty, explicit sexual content, unintended location-sharing, and exposure to explicit information about drugs and alcohol. Some teens have used the app to threaten others, causing school lockdowns and more. Its gossipy and cruel nature can be toxic to a high school environment, so administrators are cracking down. Some schools have banned access. Safety is also a concern because it reveals a child's location. By default, a child's exact location is shown unless he/she toggles location-sharing off. Each time they open the app, GPS updates their location.
Brighten	**What is it:** An anonymous app that encourages kids to post kind compliments that will "Brighten" a friend's day. Rated age 12+. **Drawbacks:** A poster can write anything they want. Gossip and rumors about sex, appearance & popularity are common. Posts go to all "friends" on shared contact lists, so large groups of friends/ acquaintances can read Jane's "compliment" to Beth. This group can also comment on the compliment. Brighten encourages users to report unkind activity & does ban abusers.

HIDING APPS

If children have apps that they want to keep hidden from their parents, all they have to do is download these listed apps and their home screen is "clear" of any questionable content. If you discover any of these "hiding" apps on their device, you may want to ask them what they are hiding.

Kids can also hide the purchase of questionable apps from parents by simply changing their home screen settings. On the iPhone, kids can hide applications on their home screen by going into the Settings > General > Restrictions and checking "off" next to applications that they don't want to show up on the home screen. Androids offer the same option of hiding apps from the home screen. You can do so by going to the App Drawer > Home > Settings > Hide Applications and choosing apps that you would like to hide.

Poof	Poof hides apps on your phone. You select which apps you would like to hide and their icons will no longer show up on your smartphone screen.
Vault & Vaulty	Vault & Vaulty are apps disguised as a speech bubble. It allows kids to create a password-protected 'Vault" in which media such as photos and videos can be hidden away from the main image gallery. Vaulty will also take a picture of any person who tries to access the Vault with the wrong password.
Hide It Pro	Hide It Pro allows kids to hide media and the app itself is disguised as an "Audio Manager" that seemingly controls the volume of the smartphone. However, pressing and holding the app reveals a locked screen behind which users can hide messages, photos, videos, and apps.
KeepSafe	It allows kids to upload pictures and videos into the app from the photo gallery and it keeps them secured under a password. This app also has a built-in feature called "Safe Send." Kids can send a picture that will be visible for 20 seconds before self-destructing. The application developers claim that KeepSafe's "Safe Send" is like Snapchat but works with everyone, even if they don't have the app. The recipient receives a link via text message that takes them to the picture that the KeepSafe user sent. A screenshot can be taken of any photo before it "disappears."
Spy Calc	This app appears as a calculator icon. A number password is typed into the keypad to unlock the app and display hidden photos and videos.

Similar apps: Best Secret Folder, Gallery Lock, KYMS, Private Photo, Calculator%, Secret Calculator & Smart Hide Calculator

LIVE STREAMING APPS

These apps allow kids and teens to stream live videos to their friends and followers in real-time. Users can link these apps to their Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. accounts to reach a wider audience. The videos are geotagged & whoever watches the video knows your child's location and current activity. Theses sites are rife with examples of kids oversharing with strangers about their school, age, address and whether they were home alone.

Popular Apps: Meerket, Periscope, Livestream, Ustream, Hang w/