

## **SOCIAL MEDIA APPS PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT**

Adapted from article titled: *16 Apps and Websites Kids are Heading to After Facebook* by Christine Elgersma (<http://www.common sense media.org>)

★ **Afterschool:** is a messaging board app that students can join by scanning their school I.D. or using their



Facebook profile. While the scanning feature provides some security from outside users, once in the app, the user is anonymous.

**What parents need to know:** Students are able to freely post about anything. There is even a section where students can scan their driver's license and enter a discussion only for students ages 17 and up, openly creating an environment for the discussion of more explicit material.

★ **Ask.fm:** is an anonymous question and answer platform website used regularly by young people around



the world. It allows anyone to post anonymous comments and questions to a person's profile and is increasingly being used as a means to communicate abusive, bullying and sexualized content. Ask.fm operates a similar friend system to Twitter: users can choose to "follow" other users. However, unlike Twitter, a user can never find out who is following them and can

only know the overall number of followers he/she has. By following a person, it allows a user to view questions and answers posted on other people's profiles.

**What parents need to know:** You can't register for Ask.fm unless you're 13 -- or say you are during registration (you can't go back and enter a new birth date once you've been denied). Bullying has been a major concern in the past; but in the past year, Ask.fm launched a separate safety site to help teens understand how to adjust their profile settings for additional safety and have a more secure experience. Users, for example, follow each other anonymously. But kids also can be very visible, such as filming and posting video responses to user questions and sharing personal photos on the site.

★ **Badoo:** is a giant, worldwide social-networking site. Countless pictures of people will appear for browsing



when a user registers (messages such as "806,941 people in your area want to see what you look like and find out more about you" pop up after registration). Even if those people aren't all necessarily nearby, some of them likely are and they will know where you are. Badoo's app store description says it is "100 percent safe and secure," but the app's developers indicate they do not monitor and are not responsible for content posted.

**What parents need to know:** Badoo has been cited in reports as having problems with privacy, falsified accounts, and money scammers. It is not intended, safe, or appropriate for teens.

★ **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. That may reduce issues such as sexting -- but words can hurt, too.

**What parents need to know:** It allows kids to communicate covertly. To discourage copying and taking screenshots, a spotlight-like system that recipients direct with a finger (or the mouse) only reveals a portion of the message at a time. It may encourage risky sharing. The company claims that its "Multi-Device Deletion" system can delete a message from anywhere: the device it was sent from, the device it was sent to, and its own servers. But it's wise to be skeptical of this claim. You don't have to have the app to receive a Burn Note. Unlike other apps -- for example, Snapchat -- users can send a Burn Note to anyone, not only others who have the program.

★ **Instagram:** is a social media and photo/video sharing app that allows users to 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 you apply fun filters and effects to your photos, making them look high-quality and artistic.

**What parents need to know:** Teens are on the lookout for "likes." Similar to the way they use Facebook, teens may measure the "success" of their photos -- even their self-worth -- by the number of likes or comments they receive. Posting a photo or video can be problematic if teens are posting to validate their popularity. Public photos and videos are the default unless privacy settings are adjusted. Hashtags and location information can make photos even more visible to communities beyond a teen's followers if his or her account is public. Private messaging is now an option. Instagram Direct allows users to send "private messages" to up to 15 mutual friends which may increase the likelihood of inappropriate content being shared among close friends.

★ **Jott:** is a social network and messaging app that allows users to send individual and group messages



(vanishing text and pictures, akin to [Snapchat](#)) to close friends and anyone else who attends their school. It works without a data plan or WiFi connection by using a "mesh network" that operates on Bluetooth low energy or using a router that can reach within 100 feet of each user.

**What parents need to know:** Even though there is an age restriction, the actual age isn't verified, and user content isn't monitored. The terms of service ban bullying, violence, and nudity and state that users 13–17 are agreeing they've read the terms and privacy policy with parents before signing up.

★ **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's messaging service, and you're not charged for them (beyond standard data rates).



**What parents need to know:** Stranger danger is an issue. Kik allows communication with strangers who share their Kik usernames to find people to chat with. The app allegedly has been used in high-profile crimes, including the murder of a 13-year-old girl and a child-pornography case. There's also a Kikcommunity blog where users can submit photos of themselves and screenshots of messages (sometimes displaying users' full names) to contests. It's loaded with ads and in-app-purchases. Kik specializes in "promoted chats" -- basically, conversations between brands and users. It also offers specially designed apps (accessible only through the main app), many of which offer products for sale.

★ **MeetMe:** although not marketed as a dating app, MeetMe does have a "Match" feature whereby users can "secretly admire" others, and its large user base means fast-paced communication and guaranteed attention.



**What parents need to know:** It's an open network. Users can chat with whomever is online, as well as search locally, opening the door to potential trouble.

Lots of details are required. First and last name, age, and ZIP code are requested at registration, or you can log in using a Facebook account. The app also asks permission to use location services on your teens' mobile devices, meaning they can find the closest matches wherever they go.

★ **Omegle:** is an app and chat site that puts two strangers together in their choice of a text chat or a video chat room. Being anonymous can be very attractive to teens, and Omegle provides a no-fuss opportunity to make connections. Its "interest boxes" also let users filter potential chat partners by shared interests.



**What parents need to know:** Users get paired up with strangers. That's the whole premise of the app. And there's no registration required. This is not an app for kids and teens. Omegle is filled with people searching for sexual chat. Some prefer to do so live. Others offer links to porn sites. Language is also a big issue. Since the chats are anonymous, they're often much more explicit than those with an identifiable user might be.

★ **ooVoo:** is a free video, voice, and messaging app. Users can have group chats with up to 12 people for free -- and it's common for kids to log on after school and keep it open while doing homework. Maybe they're using it for group study sessions?



**What parents need to know:** You can only chat with approved friends. Users can only communicate with those on their approved contact lists, which can help ease parents' safety concerns. It can be distracting. Because the service makes video-chatting so affordable and accessible, it also can be addicting. A conversation with your kids about multitasking may be in order.

★ **Periscope:** is an app that lets you explore the world by watching and creating live broadcasts. When a broadcaster is live, they're sharing video, audio and location (which is optional) with viewers.



Viewers can interact with the broadcaster in real-time using messages and hearts. You can follow people to get notified in the app or watch from links posted on Twitter. These broadcasts are called "scopes" and are posted for 24 hours for viewers to see and then they are deleted. If a user wants to keep a "scope" they can capture their scopes using Katch.me. The most popular Periscope resource is PeriscopeTV (PeriscopeTV.me), which posts popular scopes and has a guide of the very best scopers. The age limit for Periscope is 13 which is really young.

**What parents need to know:** Perhaps the most obvious concern is the potential for the sharing of inappropriate content or streaming sexually suggestive video to others. The app does not store broadcasts forever but it is possible to save a broadcast using other software. There are also issues regarding personal privacy. A common issue happens when teens "scope" a party but the attendees of the party are unaware that they are being filmed.

★ **Poof:** is an app that allows users to make other apps "disappear" on their phone. Kids can hide any app they don't want parents to see by opening the app and selecting other apps.



**What parents need to know:** Luckily, you can no longer purchase this app. But, if it was downloaded before it became unavailable, your child may still have it. Keep in mind that these types of apps are created and then terminated quickly, but similar ones are continuously being

created. Others to look for:

Hidden Apps:



App Lock:



Hide it Pro:



★ **Private Photo (Calculator%)**: is an app designed to help students hide photos and videos behind an



Private Photo  
(Calculator%) [4+]  
Digital Mind Co., Ltd. >  
Offers In-App Purchases

★★★★☆ (53)

FREE



Fake Calculator -  
Secret photo and... [4+]  
One Wave AB >

★★★★☆ (155)

\$1.99



Secret Calculator for  
iPhone [4+]  
FireBird Creations >

★★★★☆ (26)

\$1.99

innocent looking calculator app. This application looks like a calculator but entering a passcode opens a private area. All files are securely stored in the app and cannot be viewed in the default iPhone camera rolls. It looks almost identical to the calculator you would find standard on these devices, and it even functions as a calculator. A user must type in the app's correct pass code to access the app's secret function, which is to hide pictures and videos.

**What parents need to know:** The implications are clear; students with these apps are trying to hide content from parents, teachers etc.

Parents should also be aware of similar apps like Fake Calculator and Secret Calculator.

★ **Secret - Speak Freely**: is a social-media app that's designed to let people voice whatever is on their



mind without anyone being able to know who said it. The app promises anonymity, but that's a tough promise to keep in the digital world. Because it is seen as anonymous, people voice all sorts of thoughts and content that may be of a sexual, violent or inappropriate nature.

**What parents need to know:** Despite the site's promise of anonymity, the app demands that users supply their email addresses and phone numbers so it can match them with their friends (though you don't know who's posting what). Although there's something freeing in being able to voice your thoughts without social ramifications, SECRET- SPEAK FREELY raises some red flags. For an app that promises anonymity, it gathers a lot of personal information -- including your email address and phone number. It offers reasons for this, but that's still a strong tie back to you that threatens the very secrecy users likely are seeking. That said, the app quickly is becoming a phenomenon -- and parents should certainly be aware of it. Also, the app does allow users to report content they find inappropriate, which is a step above what some other "anonymous" sharing sites offer.

★ **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.

**What parents need to know:** It's a myth that Snapchats go away forever. Data is data: Whenever

an image is sent, it never truly goes away. (For example, the person on the receiving end can take a screenshot of the image before it disappears.) Snapchats can even be recovered and it can make sexting seem OK. The seemingly risk-free messaging might encourage users to share pictures containing sexy images.

★ **Tumblr**: is like 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 "tumblogs," that can be seen by anyone online (if made public). Many teens have tumblogs for personal use: sharing photos, videos, musings, and things they find funny with their friends.



**What parents need to know**: Porn is easy to find. This online hangout is hip and creative but sometimes raunchy. Pornographic images and videos and depictions of violence, self-harm, drug use, and offensive language are easily searchable. Privacy can be guarded but only through an awkward workaround. The first profile a member creates is public and viewable by anyone on the Internet. Members who desire full privacy have to create a second profile, which they're able to password-protect. Posts are often copied and shared. Reblogging on Tumblr is similar to re-tweeting: A post is reblogged from one tumblog to another. Many teens like -- and, in fact, want -- their posts reblogged. But do you really want your kids' words and photos on someone else's page?

★ **Twitter**: is a microblogging tool 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.



**What parents need to know**: Public tweets are the norm for teens. Though you can choose to keep your tweets private, most teens report having public accounts. Talk to your kids about what they post and how a post can spread far and fast. Updates appear immediately. Even though you can remove tweets, your followers can still read what you wrote until it's gone. This can get kids in trouble if they say something in the heat of the moment.

★ **Vine**: is a social media app that lets users post and watch looping six-second video clips. This Twitter-owned service has developed a unique community of people 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.



**What parents need to know**: It's full of inappropriate videos. In just minutes of random searching, it's easy to come across explicit nudity, violence and drug use. There are significant privacy

concerns since all settings are public by default. Users can adjust the settings to protect posts; only followers will see them, and new followers must be approved. Parents can be star performers (without their knowledge) especially if your teens film you being goofy or silly, you may want to talk about whether they plan to share it.

★ **WhatsApp:** WhatsApp lets users send text messages, audio messages, videos, and photos to one or many people with no message limits or fees.



**What parents need to know:** It's for users 16 and over. Lots of younger teens seem to be using the app, but this age minimum has been set by WhatsApp. Privacy can be a concern since after you sign up, it automatically connects you to all the people in your address book who also are using WhatsApp. It also encourages you to add friends who haven't signed up yet.

★ **Whisper:** is a social "confessional" app that allows users to post whatever's on their minds, paired with an image. With all the emotions running through teens, anonymous outlets give them the freedom to share their feelings without fear of judgment.



**What parents need to know:** Whispers are often sexual in nature. Some users use the app to try to "hook up" with people nearby, while others post "confessions" of desire. Lots of eye-catching, nearly nude pics accompany these shared secrets. Content can be dark and common Whisper topics include insecurity, depression, substance abuse, and various lies told to employers and teachers. Although it's anonymous to start, it may not stay that way. The app encourages users to exchange personal information in the "Meet Up" section.

★ **Yik Yak:** is a free social-networking app that lets users post brief, Twitter-like comments to the 500 geographically nearest Yik Yak users. Kids can find out opinions, secrets, rumors, and more.



Plus, they'll get the bonus thrill of knowing all these have come from a 1.5-mile radius (maybe even from the kids at the desks in front of them!).

**What parents need to know:** By default, your exact location is revealed unless you toggle location-sharing off. Each time you open the app, GPS updates your location. This app has it all: cyberbullying, explicit sexual content, unintended location-sharing, and exposure to explicit information about drugs and alcohol. It can be gossipy and sometimes cruel nature and some teens have been caught using the app to threaten others, causing school lockdowns and more.

★ **Youtube:** is a free video sharing website that makes it easy to watch online videos. You can even create and upload your own videos to share with others. Originally created in 2005, YouTube is now one of the most popular sites on the Web, with visitors watching around 6 billion hours of video every month. The site is entirely user-generated and relies on its community to flag videos that violate YouTube's terms of service (mostly for sexual content, language, and hate speech).



**What parents need to know:** Plenty of inappropriate content can surface by typing in the most innocent of search terms, so parents will want to monitor kids' use. Kids who create their own channels and upload their own videos may be subject to inappropriate comments posted by other users unless the videos are made private. Similar to facebook and Instagram, many kids post videos without privacy settings to generate "likes" and the amount of likes on a video may be negatively tied to children's self-perception and esteem. Many kids love YouTube and rely on it as a way of keeping up with popular culture; videos go "viral" when viewers share the clips they like. One of the Web's most popular destinations for people of all ages, YouTube now curates its videos, suggesting clips and new "channels" based on what you've watched previously. Kids can also discover new videos by seeing what's popular and trending throughout its immense collection. These new features can easily increase the amount of time your kids spend on the site. YouTube does offer parents the ability to filter out objectionable content and comments using Safety Mode. However, Safety Mode doesn't catch everything, and it's easy to disable. YouTube also has three channels by which users can access specialized content: YouTube Kids, YouTube Gaming, and YouTube Music.