Apps You Need To Know About

The world of technology is ever-changing. Unlike in the past when parents didn't know how to work the VCR, not knowing how to work today's technology presents true risks to your child. The following are just a sampling of common apps that are being used by youth. Just because your child uses these apps doesn't mean they are engaged in risky behavior... but as a parent you should know the risks so you can educate your children. As with all technology, your best weapon is communication and monitoring. Know what your child is up to, turn off their access to wi-fi when you are concerned, and watch their emotional state for cues that something may be bothering them.

Whisper   This app allows you to post secrets anonymously and to chat with other users in your geographic area.

> *Risks:* Many children are drawn to communicating with strangers, feeling that their secrets are safer with them than with their friends. This app is a perfect tool for ill-intentioned strangers looking to connect with young people because it allows you to exchange messages with people nearest to you . Because of the proximity, anonymity can easily be lost.

YikYak   All Yik Yak users are anonymous. They don't create a profile or account, but they can post comments that are accessible to the nearest 500 people within a 1-5 mile radius. A psychiatrist called this the most dangerous app he'd ever seen because it "can turn a school into a virtual chat room where everyone can post his or her comments, anonymously. Untruthful, mean, character-assassinating short messages are immediately seen by all users in a specific geographic area."

> *Risks:* This app is causing problems in schools across the United States, with students maliciously slandering teacher, staff, and other students. In fact, several schools have now banned smart phones from campus because of this particular app.

Kik   A free app-based alternative texting service that allows texts/pictures to be sent without being logged in the phone history. (Similar apps: Viber, WhatsApp, TextNow)

> *Risk:* Makes it easier for your child to talk to strangers without your knowledge since it bypasses the wireless providers' short message services (SMS). Children also think they can "sext" without parents finding out. In addition, strangers can send your child a "friend request."

Snapchat   Allows you to capture an image or video and make it available to a recipient for a specific time. After that time limit is up, the picture/video automatically disappears forever...or so Snapchat claims. (Similar apps: Poke, Wire, and Wickr)

Risks: Kids can receive (or send) sexually inappropriate photos. This app also makes kids feel like they can "sext" or send inappropriate pictures without consequences because the image will self-destruct automatically. The truth is that nothing sent over the internet disappears. There are always ways to retrieve and capture those images, such as taking a screen shot.

Vine Allows users to watch and post six second videos.

Risks: While many of the videos are harmless, porn videos do pop up into the feed, exposing your children to sexually explicit material. You can also easily search for/access porn videos on this app. Predators utilize this app to search for teens and find their location. Then they try to connect with them via other messaging apps.

ChatRoulette and Omegle These apps allow you to video chat with strangers.

Risks: Not only are users chatting with strangers, they could be chatting with a <u>fake stranger.</u> "Chat sites like Chatroulette and Omegle have done their best to produce systems that warns users when the people they are chatting to are potentially using fake webcam software, however developers still manage to slip under their radars with frequent updates." So a fifty-year-old man could set up a fake webcam and use images from a 15-year-old boy that looks like a teen celebrity to convince your child to send inappropriate pictures or get information about your child's location.

Tinder Users post pictures and scroll through the images of other users. When they think someone is attractive they can "flag" the image. If that person has also "flagged" them in return, the app allows you to contact them.

Risks: This app, and similar apps such as Down, Skout, Pure, and Blendr, are primarily used for hooking up.

Poof Hides other 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.

Risks: If children have apps that they want to keep hidden from their parents, all they have to do is download this app and "poof," their screen is clear of any questionable apps. So, if you see the poof app on their phone, you may want to ask them what they are hiding.

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.

Risks: 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.

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.

Risks: Hurtful messages from cyberbullies can be even more biting when they're spoken and can be played repeatedly

Poke Poke is Facebook's app that, similar to Snapchat, promises that photos sent will "self-destruct" within seconds after they're received.

Risks: While Poke isn't nearly as popular as Snapchat, it is still gaining young users who can use it for sexting. Also like Snapchat, the images sent via Poke can be saved or viewed with certain workarounds. The App store rates it ages 4+ (but it is connected to Facebook, which is a 13+ site).

Tumbler
Many children and young teens are also active on this 17+ photo-sharing app. It can also be used for sharing videos and chatting.

Risks: Common Sense Media says Tumblr is "too raunchy for tykes" because users can easily access pornographic, violent, and inappropriate content. Common Sense also notes that 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.

Risks: 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. Check out connectsafely.org's "A Parents' Guide to Instagram."

Shots of Me
Justin Bieber has invested in this 12+ "selfie-only" photo-sharing app in part because he was attracted to its "anti-trolling" aspect; it does not have a comment section under photos posted on the app. Instead of a public comment area, the app has a direct-messaging feature where users can only send private messages to one another.

Risks: The anti-trolling feature might also help ward off cyberbullying among teens who like to put meanness on display (but teens could still be nasty via private message). The app does show a user's location and how long ago a photo was added unless those features are managed in the app's settings. Shots of Me is currently available only for Apple devices. It's not the only "selfie-centered" photo-sharing app — another one called Frontback has a split screen that allows users to simultaneously share a regular photo and a selfie (think: a photo of the ocean and a selfie of the photographer sitting happily in a beach chair), and easily reveal their location.

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.)

Risks: "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.

Facebook and Twitter
Do all these new social media apps mean that Facebook and Twitter are in decline? A 2013 survey by Pew Internet found that U.S. teens have "waning enthusiasm" for Facebook — in part because their parents and other adults have taken over the domain and because their peers engage in too much "drama" on the site. But Facebook still remains the top social media site among U.S. teens, who say that their peers continue to stay on the site so they don't miss anything happening there. Your child may keep a profile on Facebook but be much more active on newer platforms.

Meanwhile, Twitter use is rising among teens. The 2013 Pew survey found that 24 percent of online teens are on Twitter, up from 16 percent in 2011.

Blendr
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.

> *Risks:* There are no authentication requirements, so sexual predators can contact minors and minors can meet up with adults. And again, the sexting.

Down
This app, which used to be called *Bang With Friends*, is connected to Facebook. Users can categorize their Facebook friends in one of two ways: They can indicate whether or not a friend is someone they'd like to hang with or someone they are "down" to hook-up with.

> *Risks:* 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. Depending on your sexual values, this might be something you don't want for your child. Also, because of the classification system, a lot of kids will feel left out or unwanted, which can lead to anxiety, etc.

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.

> *Risks:* 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.

MeetMe
"Chat and Meet New People," says it all. 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.

> *Risks:* It's an open network. Users can chat with whoever's online, as well as search locally, opening the door for 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.