



Grades 6-8

Parent Packet

How do I keep my kid safe on the Internet?

Internet safety goes **way beyond protecting kids from strangers or blocking inappropriate content**. It's about helping your kids use the Internet productively and practice **safe, responsible online behavior** -- especially when you're not there to answer their questions or check in on where they've ventured. Keep in mind that what may seem like basic knowledge to parents is new to kids just getting started in the digital world. Having a conversation **before your kid embarks online** helps set expectations and establish ground rules. Here are the basic guidelines to share with your kid:

- Follow your family's rules about when and where to use the Internet.
- Be polite, kind, and respectful.
- Understand a website's rules, and know how to flag other users for misbehavior.
- Recognize "red flags," including someone asking you personal questions such as your name and address.
- Never share your name, your school's name, your age, your phone number, or your email or home address with strangers.
- Never send pictures to strangers.
- Keep passwords private (except from parents).
- Never open a message from a stranger; it may contain a virus that can harm a computer.
- Immediately tell an adult if something mean or creepy happens.

5 Questions to Ask Before You Get Your Kid a Phone

Make sure they (and you!) are ready for the next step with conversation starters that get everyone on the same page. By [Sierra Filucci](#)

You're on your way to pick up your kid after school, and traffic is crawling or your train is delayed or your car breaks down. If only your kid had a phone, you could tell him you'll be late. It's moments like these that lead many parents to get their tweens or teens their first phones. But even though the convenience is compelling -- and your kid has probably been begging for one -- how do you know he's really ready?

If you're considering a smartphone for your kid, you'll need to think through a few things, from who will pay for it to whether she's responsible enough to use it appropriately. But once you decide to take the plunge, start the conversation with these five questions. Also, consider requiring your kid to complete [Digital Compass](#) (a Common Sense Media game that teaches digital citizenship) before handing over the device.

Why do you want a cell phone?

The answer to this question will help you understand what to expect once she gets the phone and where she might need some limits. Does she want to text with friends? Or play *Crossy Road* for hours?

Do you understand the rules your family and school have for phone use?

Most kids know they have to answer yes to this question, but it can help start the conversation about your family and school's expectations around how the phone is used, from whether they can download apps without permission to how they can or can't use the phone in the classroom. Be sure to discuss the consequences if rules are broken.

What are some concerns you think your family and teachers have about phones?

This question helps you understand what your kid thinks are the main sources of tension around kids and phone use. You can use this conversation to clarify any of your concerns, such as how often your kid is on the phone, whether he uses social media apps, and how to handle a call or text from a stranger.

What are five places it's not OK to use your phone?

Phone etiquette and safety are ongoing conversations, since kids will be experiencing some phone situations for the first time. But this is a good time to lay down the absolute basics, like no staring at your phone when Grandma's talking, no taking photos in locker rooms, no phones at the dinner table, and so on.

What will you do if you lose or break your phone?

Unfortunately, this is a real possibility. Talk about whether the phone will be replaced and, if so, who pays for it. Is insurance an option? Discuss options for preventing loss or breakage.

A Parent's Ultimate Guide to YouTube

How to enjoy YouTube with your kids without feeling overwhelmed and confused. By [Caroline Knorr](#)

Smosh, Good Mythical Morning, PewDiePie -- the names may not mean much to you, but chances are your kids are on a first-name basis. Their funny hosts, off-the-cuff commentary, silly antics, and bewildering (to adults) subject matter put them among the **most popular YouTube channels** for young teens, garnering millions (and, in the case of **game commentary PewDiePie**, billions) of views. In fact, according to a recent survey of U.S. teens by Variety, **the top five most influential celebrities are YouTube stars**. But information about these personalities' shows -- the content, quality, and age-appropriateness, for example -- isn't easy for parents to find.

Until **YouTube's app for kids** really catches on with fans, the original YouTube poses a challenge for parents. Anyone can create YouTube channels, they crop up seemingly out of nowhere, they don't follow program schedules, and they're cast out among thousands of other videos. Still, there are clues to figuring out which channels and creators are OK for your kids. YouTube clearly has a huge impact, and you'll learn a lot about your kids when you really dig into what they're tuning into. (Here's a rundown of some of the **most popular YouTube stars**.)

And it's worth doing. Kids love discovering new videos on YouTube, and that often means exposure to iffy stuff -- even when they're not seeking it out. With some simple tools, you can help your kids regulate their habits and increase the chances that their experience will be positive. Also, read **[our detailed review of YouTube](#)**.

The Basics

Watch with your kid. Simply ask your kids what they're watching and join them. In general, kids are tuning into certain channels or following specific YouTube personalities because they're entertained by them. Many kids naturally want to share the videos they like.

Watch by yourself. If kids don't want to share, get the name of the channel they're watching and watch it later. Watch a few videos by the same creator to get a feel for the content.

Be sleuthy. If you're concerned about the content your kid is watching on YouTube -- and you've tried talking to her -- there are ways of tracking her viewing habits. If she has a YouTube account (which only requires a Gmail address), her YouTube page will display her recently watched videos, recommended videos based on her watch history, and suggestions for channels similar to the ones she's watched. Even if your kid deletes her "watch history," the recommendations all will be related to stuff she's watched.

Subscribe. Encourage your kids to subscribe to their favorite channels rather than hunting around on YouTube for the latest ones from a specific creator. Subscribers are notified when a new video is uploaded, plus all their channels are displayed in My Subscriptions, making it easier, and faster, to go directly to the stuff they like.

Consider choosing subscriptions together, and make an event out of watching the newest uploads with your kids.

The Nitty-Gritty

Investigate the creator. The name of each video's creator appears beneath the video window and usually has a bit of information about the person behind the video and/or the channel itself. Google the creator's name to find out whether he or she has a Wikipedia page or another Web presence. You might find out that your kid's favorite YouTube personality has an impressive reach. LGBTQ advocate Tyler Oakley, for example, has a huge fan base that crosses demographics, making him a positive role model for all kinds of kids.

Look at the suggestions. The suggested videos listed on the right-hand side of the page are related in some way to the main video. Evaluate them to see if they seem age-appropriate, and that will provide an indication of the appropriateness of the main video.

Consider the ads. If an ad plays before the video, that's actually a good sign. To qualify for advertising and earn money (the goal of most YouTube channels), a creator must apply to be a YouTube partner by sending in some sample videos. YouTube rejects videos that don't meet their terms of service and community guidelines -- vulgar or stolen content, in other words. Yes, that means your kid sees more ads, but the trade-off seems worth it (and you can always mute the commercials).

Read the comments. YouTube comments are notorious for being negative, but it's worth reading them to get a sense of the channels' demographic and the tone of the discussion. Channel creators can moderate their comments to reduce the amount of negativity. Well-groomed comments are a good sign.

Watch the trailer. Many creators make highlight reels and trailers -- basically video ads for the channels themselves (which usually appear first on the channel page). Definitely watch them if they're available to get an overview of the host and the content.

Finding Good Stuff

Turn on safety mode. Be aware that YouTube is technically only for teens 13 and up, and what the site considers age-appropriate may not match your values. But YouTube offers a filter called Safety Mode that limits the iffy stuff. Simply scroll down to the bottom of any YouTube page. See where it says "Safety"? Click it on. (It will remain on for logged-in users on the same browser.)

Take YouTube's advice. Most kids find out about new videos either from their friends or by clicking on the related videos (which may or may not be appropriate). But YouTube itself offers several ways to home in on quality content. Visit [YouTube Nation for curated content](#) in a variety of categories. Read about YouTube news on [the company blog](#), and find out what's trending all over the country on the [Map](#) and the [Dashboard](#).

Watch later. YouTube gives you the ability to save videos to watch at a later time, which improves the odds that your kids will be exposed to stuff you've preapproved. You can create playlists, too, virtually designing a customized programming schedule of content for each of your kids or for different subjects they're interested in.

17 Apps and Websites Kids Are Heading to After Facebook

Social media apps that let teens do it all — text, chat, meet people, and share their pics and videos — often fly under parents’ radars. By Christine Elgersma

Gone are the days of Facebook as a one-stop shop for all **social-networking needs**. While it may seem more complicated to post photos on Instagram, share casual moments on Snapchat, text on WhatsApp, and check your Twitter feed throughout the day, **tweens and teens love the variety**.

You don’t need to know the ins and outs of all the apps, sites, and **terms** that are “hot” right now (and frankly, if you did, they wouldn’t be trendy anymore). But knowing the basics — what they are, why they’re popular, and **what problems can crop up when they’re not used responsibly** — can make the difference between a positive and a negative experience for your kid.

Below, we’ve laid out some of the most popular types of apps and websites for teens: texting, microblogging, live-streaming, self-destructing/secret, and chatting/meeting/**dating**. The more you know about each, the better you’ll be able to communicate with your teen about safe choices.

TEXTING APPS

GroupMe is an app that doesn’t charge fees or have limits for direct and group messages. Users also can send photos, videos, and calendar links.

What parents need to know

- **It’s for older teens.** The embedded GIFs and emojis have some adult themes, such as drinking and sex.
- **Teens are always connected.** Without fees or limits, teens can share and text to their heart’s content, which may mean they rarely put the phone down.

Kik Messenger 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 Kik community 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.

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.
- **It can be pushy.** 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.

PHOTO AND VIDEO-SHARING APPS AND SITES

Instagram lets users snap, edit, and share photos and 15-second videos, either publicly or within 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 are the default.** Photos and videos shared on Instagram are public 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.
- **Kids can send private messages.** Instagram Direct is like texting with photos or videos and you can do it with up to 15 mutual friends. These pictures don't show up on their public feeds. Although there's nothing wrong with group chats, kids may be more likely to share inappropriate stuff with their inner circles.

Musical.ly - Your Video Social Network is a performance- and video-sharing social network that mostly features teens lip-synching to famous songs but also includes some original songwriting and singing. Musers, as devoted users are called, can build up a following among friends or share posts publicly.

What parents need to know

- **Songs and videos contain lots of iffy content.** Because the platform features popular music and a mix of teen and adult users, swearing and sexual content are commonplace.
- **Gaining followers and fans feels important.** Teens want a public profile to get exposure and approval, and many are highly motivated to get more followers and likes for their videos.

MICROBLOGGING APPS AND SITES

Tumblr is like a cross between a blog and Twitter: It's a streaming scrapbook of text, photos, and/or video and audio clips. Users create and follow short blogs, or "tumblogs," that can be seen by anyone online (if they're 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 to be reblogged.

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.

LIVE-STREAMING VIDEO APPS

Houseparty - Group Video Chat is a way for groups of teens to connect via live video. Two to eight people can be in a chat together at the same time. If someone who's not a direct friend joins a chat, teens get an alert in case they want to leave the chat. You can also "lock" a chat so no one else can join.

What parents need to know

- **Users can take screenshots during a chat.** Teens like to think that what happens in a chat stays in a chat, but that's not necessarily the case. It's easy for someone to take a screenshot while in a chat and share it with whomever they want.
- **There's no moderator.** Part of the fun of live video is that anything can happen, but that can also be a problem. Unlike static posts that developers may review, live video chats are spontaneous, so it's impossible to predict what kids will see, especially if they're in chats with people they don't know well.

Live.ly - Live Video Streaming poses all the same risks that all live-streaming services do, so poor choices, oversharing, and chatting with strangers can be part of the package.

What parents need to know

- **It's associated with Musical.ly.** Because of the parent app's popularity, this streamer is all the rage, and "musers" (devoted Musical.ly listeners) have built-in accounts.
- **Privacy, safety, and creepiness are concerns.** Because teens are often broadcasting from their bedrooms to people they don't know, sometimes sharing phone numbers, and often performing for approval, there's the potential for trouble.

Live.me - Live Video Streaming allows kids to watch others and broadcast themselves live, earn currency from fans, and interact live with users without any control over who views their streams.

What parents need to know

- **Kids can easily see inappropriate content.** During our review, we saw broadcasters cursing and using racial slurs, scantily clad broadcasters, young teens answering sexually charged questions, and more.
- **Predatory comments are a concern.** Because anyone can communicate with broadcasters, there is the potential for viewers to request sexual pictures or performances or to contact them through other social means and send private images or messages.

YouNow: Broadcast, Chat, and Watch Live Video is an app that lets kids stream and watch live broadcasts. As they watch, they can comment or buy gold bars to give to other users. Ultimately, the goal is to get lots of viewers, start trending, and grow your fan base.

What parents need to know

- **Kids might make poor decisions to gain popularity.** Because it's live video, kids can do or say anything and can respond to requests from viewers — in real time. Though there seems to be moderation around iffy content (kids complain about having accounts suspended "for nothing"), there's plenty of swearing and occasional sharing of personal information with anonymous viewers.
- **Teens can share personal information, sometimes by accident.** Teens often broadcast from their bedrooms, which often have personal information visible, and they sometimes will share a phone number or an email address with viewers, not knowing who's really watching.
- **It's creepy.** Teens even broadcast themselves sleeping, which illustrates the urge to share all aspects of life, even intimate moments, publicly — and potentially with strangers.

SELF-DESTRUCTING/SECRET APPS

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. After a major hack in December 2013 and a settlement with the FTC, Snapchat has clarified its privacy policy, but teens should stay wary.
- **It can make sexting seem OK.** The seemingly risk-free messaging might encourage users to share pictures containing sexy images.
- **There's a lot of iffy, clicky content.** Snapchat's Discover feature offers a grab-bag of articles, videos, and quizzes from magazine publishers, TV networks, and online sources mostly about pop culture, celebrities, and relationships (a typical headline: "THIS is What Sex Does To Your Brain").

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.** People normally don't confess sunshine and rainbows; 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.

CHATTING, MEETING, DATING APPS AND SITES

Monkey — Have Fun Chats. If you remember Chatroulette, where users could be randomly matched with strangers for a video chat, this is the modern version. Using Snapchat to connect, users have 10 seconds to live video-chat with strangers.

What parents need to know

- **Lots of teens are using it.** Because of the connection with Snapchat, plenty of teens are always available for a quick chat — which often leads to connecting via Snapchat and continuing the conversation through that platform.
- **Teens can accept or reject a chat.** Before beginning a chat, users receive the stranger's age, gender, and location and can choose whether to be matched or not.

MeetMe: Chat and Meet New People. The name 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.

What parents need to know

- **It’s an open network.** Users can chat with whomever’s 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 a chat site that puts two strangers together in their choice of a text chat or a video chat. Being anonymous can be very attractive to teens, and Omegle provides a no-fuss way 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 a big issue.** Since the chats are anonymous, they’re often much more explicit than those with identifiable users might be.

Yellow - Make new friends is an app that is often called the “Tinder for teens” because users swipe right or left to accept or reject the profiles of other users. If two people swipe right on each other, they can chat and hook up via Snapchat or Instagram.

What parents need to know

- **It’s easy to lie about your age.** Even if you try to enter a birth date that indicates you’re under 13, the app defaults to an acceptable age so you can create an account anyway.
- **You have to share your location and other personal information.** For the app to work, you need to let it “geotag” you. Also, there are no private profiles, so the only option is to allow anyone to find you.
- **It encourages contact with strangers.** As with Tinder, the whole point is to meet people. The difference with Yellow is that the endgame is sometimes just exchanging social media handles to connect there. Even if there’s no offline contact, however, without age verification, teens are connecting with people they don’t know who may be much older.

The bottom line for most of these tools? If teens are using them respectfully, appropriately, and with a little parental guidance, they should be fine. Take inventory of your kids’ apps and review the best practices.

TV senior editor Polly Conway and former Common Sense Education writer Kelly Schryver contributed to this article.

9 Social Media Red Flags Parents Should Know About

Find out which social media features are cause for concern -- no matter which app your kid is using.

By *Christine Elgersma*

It can be hard to keep up with the latest apps that kids are using. Just when you've figured out how to talk to your kids about *Facebook*, **they've moved on to *Instagram* or *Snapchat***. But here's the deal: Even when new apps come along, adding new features such as the ability to disappear or track your location, they're often not that different from other apps. And if you know what to look for, you can help your kid avoid some common social media pitfalls such as **drama**, **cyberbullying**, and **oversharing**.

Does a red flag mean your kid shouldn't use a particular app? Not at all. Most kids use social media apps safely -- and kids don't always use every feature of every app. Also, you can often disable certain features so they're no longer a problem. Finally, talking about using social media safely, responsibly, and respectfully is the best way to help your kid identify and avoid red flags. Here are the most common social media red flags, the apps they're found in, and tips for dealing with them.

Age-inappropriate content. Some examples: ***Ask.fm*, *Tumblr*, *Vine***

Friends can share explicit stuff via messaging (for example, sexting), but the bigger concern is whether an app features a lot of user-generated content that isn't appropriate to your kid's age. Your teen may not even need to follow users who are posting explicit stuff to come across it.

- **What to do:** Ask your kid whom she follows, and ask to see what's being posted. Use the app yourself and get a sense of what comes up in an average feed. Then try searching for content you're concerned about and see how easy it is to find. Check the terms of use to see what the app allows and whether users can flag violators.

Public default settings. Some examples: ***Instagram*, *Tumblr*, *Twitter*, *Vine*, *Ask.fm***

Many apps allow a user to have a public or private profile, only shared with friends; however, some apps are public by default, which means that a kid's name, picture, and posts are available to everyone.

- **What to do:** As soon as you download the app, go into the settings to check the defaults. If a kid is using the same program on a browser, check there, too.

Location tracking and sharing. Some examples: ***Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Snapchat*, *Instagram*, *Messenger***

Wherever you go, there you are -- and your social media apps know it. Though you may only indicate a city or neighborhood in a profile, allowing location identification often means that you're tracked within a city block, and your posts may include your location.

- **What to do:** Turn off location settings on the phone AND in the app; check to see whether previous posts include location information, and delete it.

Real-time video streaming. Some examples: *YouNow, Periscope, Meerkat (Facebook soon)*

Live streaming is just that -- live -- so it's very easy to share something you didn't mean to. Kids may use these apps in private (such as in their bedrooms) and inadvertently share personal information without knowing exactly who is watching. Though they may seem temporary, embarrassing or mean moments are easily captured and shared later.

- **What to do:** Talk to your kids about why they want to share video of themselves and what they should and shouldn't share. Talk about positive, constructive uses of video sharing, such as creating shorts using editing programs or creating an interest-based channel to funnel your teen's creativity.

Ads and in-app purchases. Some examples: *Kik, Line, Snapchat, Facebook*

Free apps have to get paid somehow, and many developers do it through advertising and providing purchase opportunities. Some track what you buy and show you targeted ads, and some even have targeted chats with businesses, which means your kid is invited into a chat with someone trying to sell a product.

- **What to do:** Know what's available in the app and set limits around purchases. Check out the types of ads coming at your kids, teach them to recognize all the kinds of digital marketing, and talk about what to do if they're approached online by someone trying to sell something.

"Temporary" pictures and videos. Some examples: *Snapchat, Burn Note, Yik Yak, Line, Meerkat, Periscope, YouNow*

Nothing shared between devices is truly temporary, even when an app builds its whole marketing around it. Compromising pictures and texts get kids in real trouble because they believe what they're sending is private and will disappear.

- **What to do:** Let your kids know that nothing they send is truly temporary, and it's easy for others to share what you've sent. Because it's often hard for kids to really consider consequences, and they might think it won't happen to them, it might be worth sharing some of the **recent cases** of kids getting in legal trouble because of "disappearing" pictures.

Subpar reporting tools. Some examples: *Yik Yak, Snapchat, Omegle, Yeti - Campus Stories*

Most apps have a system for reporting abuse or violations of the terms of use -- but not all do. The level of moderation also varies widely. Some apps monitor posts or use automated filters to flag content.

- **What to do:** Read the terms of service to get an idea of what's allowed and how much posts are moderated, and have your kids read it, too. Make sure they know how to report harassment and block other users when necessary.

Anonymity. Some examples: *Yik Yak, Whisper, Ask.fm, Omegle*

Anonymity doesn't always breed cruelty, but it often does. On anonymous sites, people feel that their comments are consequence-free -- and end up hurting others. Also, though kids may feel safe enough to share sensitive or painful things they might not otherwise, they often don't get the necessary support or help -- and may get attacked.

- **What to do:** Make sure your teen understands the risks involved and that they know how to block and report other users if necessary. Also, if they need connection but it's hard to talk about a problem (especially with you), give them opportunities to share with other safe, trusted people.

Cyberbullying. Some examples: *Yik Yak*, *Ask.fm*, *Burnbook* (only website right now)

Though many apps have improved their monitoring and reporting features, cyberbullying is still a reality. It can happen on any social media app, but some have a notorious mean streak. If an app allows anonymous posting and is used in schools, chances are some teens will abuse it.

- **What to do:** Ask around and pay attention to what parents, teachers, and other kids say about it to get a sense if it's stirring up trouble. Make sure your teen understands how to report and block other users, and check the school's policy about cyberbullying.

What can I tell my kid to do if he or she is being cyberbullied?

Kids may not always recognize teasing as bullying. Some kids also may be too embarrassed or ashamed to talk to their parents about it. That's why it's important to talk about **online and digital behavior** before your child starts interacting with others online and with devices. To prepare your kid for going online or getting a cell phone, or, if you know he or she has been bullied online, offer these steps he or she can take immediately:

Communicate appropriately. Use the right language for your audience. You might write or speak to a teacher differently from a friend. And never use all caps!

Keep private things private. Don't share personal information, including passwords, your home address, inappropriate images, and gossip.

Respect others. Be courteous. Disagree politely.

Don't lie, steal, or cheat. Don't try to deceive others. Remember to give credit where credit is due. And, although it's easy to copy others' work, download things without permission, or use game cheat codes, don't do it.

Be an "upstander." If someone you know is being targeted by a bully, stand up for that person. You would want him or her to do the same for you.

Report misbehavior. The Internet is a giant community, and you can help it be a nice place.

Follow your family's rules. If your parent tells you to avoid certain websites or to stop texting after a certain time, listen. The more you act responsibly, the more privileges you'll get.

Think before you post, text, or share. Consider how you and others might feel after you've posted something. It's not always easy to take back what you've said online, and your online behavior can create a lasting footprint.

Apps to Help Keep Track of What Your Kids Are Doing Online

Though open communication is best, these tools can help parents who want a little extra control.

By *Christine Elgersma*

As kids become more independent, we want to foster their sense of responsibility and give them room to prove themselves. But it can be difficult to navigate this natural separation, especially when kids are doing who-knows-what on their devices. There are constant questions: Where are they? Who's contacting them? What are they doing online? Since tweens and teens are often tight-lipped about their lives, it can be tricky to get clear answers.

Though direct communication is always best, and the conversations around **online safety and digital citizenship** should start long before a kid becomes a teen, there are occasions when parents feel it's necessary to **monitor what kids are doing on their devices**. Maybe they've broken your trust or you're worried about their safety. Whatever the case, there are tools to track what your kid is up to. Be aware that spying on your kid can backfire and that kids can find a way around just about any type of tracking. But if you're at the end of your rope or just need extra help managing your kid's digital life, then one of these tools might work for you. To get more information, check out our **advice about cell phone issues**, including **basic parental controls**, and less invasive (and expensive) ways to **limit access to content**.

Bark: Similar to VISR (see below), kids and parents need to work together to hook up accounts to the service. It also analyzes all device activity and alerts parents when a problem is found. If they get an alert, parents will see the content in question and get suggestions on how to handle it (\$9/month).

Circle Home and Go: This app manages the Circle with Disney device, which pairs with your home Wi-Fi and controls all Wi-Fi-enabled devices. Can create time limits on specific apps, filter content, set bedtimes, and restrict internet access for the whole house or for individuals. Circle Go will let parents filter, limit, and track on networks outside the home Wi-Fi (the **Circle device** is \$99, the Circle Home app is free, and the Circle Go service will be \$9.95/month).

Limitly: If screen time and specific app use is your concern, this system might work for you. It lets you track your kid's app use and limit time using the device or certain apps (free, Android-only).

Pocket Guardian: Parents get alerts when sexting, bullying, or explicit images are detected on your kid's device, though you won't see the actual content or who it's from. Instead, the alert can prompt a conversation, and the app offers resources to help (\$9.99-\$12.99/month).

Trackidz: With this program, you don't see specific content from your kid's device, but you can track app installations and use, block browsers and apps, manage time in apps and on the device, block out device-free time, grant bonus time, track location, get an alert when your kid's phone is turned off, and see your kid's contacts. It also claims to detect cyberbullying by tracking when your kid's device use drops dramatically, which can indicate avoidance. Setting up a geo-fence lets parents track a kid's location and alerts them when a kid has gone outside the boundaries, and a kid can tap the power button to send an emergency message to parents (currently free, but will be \$6.99).

VISR: For this one to work, a parent needs the kid's usernames and passwords, so be aware that it's easy for kids to set up dummy accounts. Once enabled, the tool analyzes posts and emails for bullying, profanity, nudity, violence, drugs, and late-night use and sends parents alerts when anything iffy is detected (currently free, but will be \$5/month).