



What Parents Need to Know About Popular Apps with Teens

Ask.fm: A social site that lets kids ask questions and answer those posted by other users -- sometimes anonymously.

What parents need to know:

Bullying is a concern. This site has been reported to be linked to the suicides of several teens. Talk to your teens about cyberbullying and how anonymity can encourage mean behavior.

Anonymous answers are optional. If teens do use the site, they'd be best turning off anonymous answers and keeping themselves out of the live stream.

Questions & Answers can appear on *Facebook*. Syncing with *Facebook* means that a much wider audience can see the Q&As.

Kik Messenger: As with other messaging apps, Kik lets you send texts, pictures, and video. It also offers lots of other mini-apps that let you do everything from exchange virtual greeting cards to chat with strangers. Users don't have to reveal real names, so there's a layer of anonymity.

What parents need to know:

It's easy to send messages to a group or all users if you're not careful about settings, so teens might post things to everyone that they only mean to share with friends. Make sure they know how to navigate the settings and block people.

It's possible to have anonymous contact with strangers. Talk to your teen about what information they shouldn't share, and encourage them to block people they don't know. *Kik* employs "bots" (automated messages that look like they're from people but are actually a form of marketing), and if kids don't recognize a user or something seems off, tell them not to reply.

Many of the internal apps are concerning because they're trying to sell something or promote products. Make sure kids know whether they're allowed to spend and that "promoted chats" are actually advertising.

Omegle: An anonymous chat client through which users discuss anything they'd like. Its conversations are filled with lewd language and references to sexual content, drugs and alcohol, and violence.

What parents need to know:

Users get paired up with strangers -- that's the whole premise of the app. The app has been implicated in cases of sexual predators of teens. 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 websites.

Language is a big issue. And since the chats are anonymous, they're often much more explicit than those with someone who can be identified.

Whisper: A social "confessional" app that allows users to post whatever's on their minds. Users type a confession, add a background image, and share it with the *Whisper* community. It's intended for users age 17 and older.

What parents need to know:

The scenarios can be hard to stomach and things you don't want to know about people.

There's plenty of inappropriate content. All too often, Whispers are sexual in nature. Some use *Whisper* to solicit others for sex (using the app's geo-location "nearby" feature). Strong language and drug and alcohol references also are prevalent.

Whispers can go public.

Yik Yak: A geographically based anonymous-chat app that lets users send photos and texts to people near their location.

What parents need to know:

Yik Yak has been at the heart of many controversies and news stories because people have used it to make violent threats against other people and institutions.

For the most part, the culture is crass and rude; people don't often go on *Yik Yak* to make others feel good about themselves.

Temporary Apps

Temporary apps allow people to send messages and images that self-destruct after a set time window. Teens can use these apps to more carefully manage their digital trails -- so long as they don't share things they wouldn't normally send otherwise.

Burn Note: A messaging app that erases messages after a set period of time. It's limited to text; users can't send pictures or video.

What parents need to know:

It promises a complete delete. 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 from screenshots, which they also try to prevent).

Anyone can receive a Burn Note. If you don't have the app, you'll get a link to a *Burn Note* message. So even if your kid has no interest in reading supposedly super-secret messages, she could unwittingly get involved.

It could encourage cyberbullying. Since there is no record that a conversation took place, kids might feel they can get away with disrespectful behavior.

Line: A multifaceted text, video, and voice-messaging app that also integrates social media elements such as games and group chats.

What parents need to know:

Line includes a feature called "Hidden Chat," which is similar to *Snapchat*'s disappearing messages but with a few more options. Users can choose how long they'd like their message to last before it vanishes: two seconds or up to a week. These messages also can include location information, pics, and video. Though *Line* states that its servers are secure, as with *Snapchat* you can't be too careful.

In-app purchases are a big part of the *Line* experience: Want to use that set of super-cute cat emojis? It'll cost you. Paying for games and other features within *Line* can add up, and to keep communication free, the recipient also must be a *Line* user, meaning your friends have to sign up as well.

Line's terms of use state that "minors" need parental permission before signing up, but there's no process in place to monitor or track that information.

Snapchat: A messaging app that lets users put a time limit on the pictures and videos they send before they disappear.

What parents need to know:

It's not true that Snapchats go away forever. Data is data: Whenever anything is sent online, it never truly goes away. (For example, the person on the receiving end can easily take a screenshot of the image before it disappears.) Snapchats can even be recovered -- unaffiliated third-party services such as Snapsaved (which was recently hacked) give users the chance to save any Snapchatted pic. Also, users can pay to view Snaps multiple times.

It can make sexting seem OK. The seemingly risk-free messaging might encourage users to share pictures containing inappropriate content.

The best way to approach these apps with your kids?

Talk to them about their online reputations -- not in terms of "getting caught" by teachers, parents, or future employers but as a matter of being true to themselves. Acknowledge that, chances are, they'll come across extreme, inappropriate, or hurtful content online ... and that it's OK for them to ask you about it, especially if it upsets them.

** Information taken from www.commonsensemedia.org

Resources

www.commonsensemedia.org

www.cyberbullying.us

www.netismartz.org

www.digizen.org