



## **Grades 9-12**

Parent Packet

# 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.*

## Best Apps and Sites for College Prep

During junior year of high school, college application madness begins. Standardized test scores, scholarships, and essays start to dominate your kid's time. They may start to think about what **helps their chances** and how to **submit applications**, and they may find **opportunities** to beef up their experience. But don't worry — you don't have to go it alone. Check out these resources to help your kind find funding, boost test scores, write solid essays, develop strong time-management habits, and practice important life skills for when they're on their own.



### 30/30

✓ age 10+ ★★★★★

Must-have time-management app for attention deficits.

*Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad (2015)*



### Moment - Screen Time Tracker

✓ age 12+ ★★★★★

Slick app needs full access to track device use, set limits.

*Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad (2016)*



### Stop, Breathe & Think

✓ age 10+ ★★★★★

Appealing tool guides meditation and promotes compassion.

*Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad, Android (2014)*



### SAT Vocab by MindSnacks

✓ age 12+ ★★★★★

9 fun ways to practice; purchase needed to unlock full app.

*Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad (2012)*

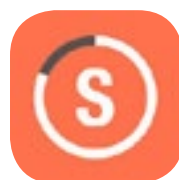


### Forest: Stay focused, be present

✓ age 12+ ★★★★★

Watch focus grow, have real-world impact with visual tool.

*Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad, Android, Windows Phone (2016)*



### Streaks

✓ age 12+ ★★★★★

Form or break habits, track progress daily with sleek tool.

*Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad (2016)*



### HowStuffWorks

✓ age 12+ ★★★★★

Popular, trusted resource covers mature topics responsibly.

*Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad, Android, Apps for Windows, Windows Phone (2011)*



### uVocab - Vocabulary Trainer

✓ age 12+ ★★★★★

Challenging practice app for SAT and ACT prep.

*Devices: Android (2013)*





### Evernote

✓ age 13+ ★★★★★

Organization tool helps kids manage their digital lives.

Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad, Android, Chromebook, Kindle Fire, Nook HD, Apps for Windows, Windows Phone (2013)



### Grockit

✓ age 13+ ★★★★★

Detailed, adaptive data helps kids study more effectively.

URL: <https://grockit.com/> (2013)



### Purdue Online Writing Lab

✓ age 13+ ★★★★★

One-stop site for writing help is a good resource for teens.

URL: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/> (2013)



### LinkedIn

✓ age 14+ ★★★★★

Teens should think twice before posting an online resume.

URL: <http://www.linkedin.com> (2013)



### Shmoop

✓ age 14+ ★★★★★

Clever study materials for teens merge humor and learning.

URL: <http://www.shmoop.com> (2013)



### SoundNote

✓ age 14+ ★★★★★

Cool study aid syncs written notes with recorded audio.

Devices: iPad (2014)



### Vocabador

✓ age 14+ ★★★★★

Mexican wrestling theme makes vocab engaging.

Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad (2011)



### Any.do: To-Do List, Calendar, Reminders & Tasks

✓ age 15+ ★★★★★

Multi-function, powerful organizer best for teens, adults.

Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad, Android (2017)



### SAT

✓ age 15+ ★★★★★

Trustworthy SAT prep from the folks who make the test.

URL: <http://sat.collegeboard.org> (2013)



### Schoold - FREE College Search & Scholarship Match

✓ age 15+ ★★★★★

Browse slick feed to find college info with some flaws.

Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad, Android (2017)



### DREAMer's Roadmap

✓ age 16+ ★★★★★

Find scholarships, college info for undocumented students.

Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad, Android (2016)



### Scholly

✓ age 16+ ★★★★★

Find scholarships, preview essays with targeted search tool.

Devices: iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad,

# Practical Tips for Easing Kids' Social Media Anxiety

*Fear of missing out can make social media-using teens feel stressed. Here's how you can help.*  
By **Sierra Filucci**

Teens text, tweet, snap, and post like crazy. In fact, about half of teens use social media every day, and for some, this means checking **Instagram** or **Snapchat** dozens (or hundreds!) of times a day. While many teens find **connecting with friends online a positive experience**, some just feel stressed out. This social media-specific anxiety has a name: **FOMO, also known as "fear of missing out."**

FOMO can take many forms. Sometimes it's the worry that a friend might be upset if you don't respond to a message or post right away. It can also be feeling left out if everyone's posting pictures of a party or event you didn't attend (or, worse, weren't invited to). But more generally, it's the sense that exciting stuff is happening online constantly and if you're not online too, you're missing out.

While FOMO might sound like a silly acronym, it can have very un-silly consequences. Studies have found that the 24/7 nature of social media can lead to kids feeling like they need to check and respond to friends' posts or messages constantly. As you can imagine, this can **lead to poor sleep quality, anxiety, and even depression.**

**Parents can help.** If you see your kids struggling — maybe they're always stressed out after being on the phone or they're staying up too late texting — step in.

**Listen.** It can be easy to dismiss FOMO and other social media stress as superficial, but for many tweens and teens, social media is social life. The more you show you care about how they feel, the more open they'll be.

**Don't judge.** Snapchat seems a little dumb, doesn't it? But for tweens and teens, connecting with their peers is a normal part of child development. For you, it meant hours on the phone. For them, it means lots and lots of rainbow vomit.

**Encourage their offline lives.** FOMO can chip away at kids' self-esteem, but the best defense is a strong sense of what makes kids unique, worthy, and valuable. Help kids participate in sports, clubs,

drama, or volunteer work to help them weather the ups and downs of social media anxiety.

**Set limits.** After all the listening and validating is over, set some basic limits around when and where the phone or computer can be used. Start with turning phones off an hour before bedtime and storing them in your room to help kids resist the temptation to stay up late texting. You can suggest they tell their friends they'll be signing off at a specific time, so they won't be expecting a response.

**Shift the focus.** If kids are feeling overwhelmed by keeping up with all the social stuff online, encourage them to focus on the creative side of Instagram, for example, instead. Entering photo contests or building a portfolio can shift the focus to the positive side of social media.

**Ask open-ended questions.** You don't need to solve their problems for them. But you can help them think about what is and isn't working for them. Here are some questions to try:

- Are there any habits you might want to change? (Such as not checking your phone before bed.)
- What would happen if you turned off your phone? For an hour? A day?
- Have you thought about rewarding yourself for not checking your phone or social media for a certain amount of time? (Make a game of it!)
- What are the pros and cons of using Instagram and other social-networking apps?
- What would happen if you unfollowed or unfriended someone who was making you feel bad on social media?
- Do you notice that you have better or worse reactions to posts or messages depending on how you feel that day?

# 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.

# What Parents Need to Know About Technology Addiction

*A typical teen's day includes up to nine hours of texting, gaming, watching videos, and posting on multiple social networks — even while doing homework. It's enough to make you wonder: Is my kid addicted to technology?* By [Michael Robb](#)

Look around, and it's easy to see how media and technology have changed our day-to-day lives, even compared to a decade ago. **We bring our devices with us everywhere and depend on them for work, school, play, and our social lives.** But what are the downsides to this “always connected” lifestyle — especially for kids?

To find answers to these questions — and, more importantly, to help families create a healthy digital lifestyle — Common Sense examines the latest scientific research about problematic media use in our new report, ***Technology Addiction: Concern, Controversy, and Finding Balance***. Along with the report, we're releasing the results of a poll, ***Dealing with Devices: The Parent-Teen Dynamic***, which asks teens and parents how they feel about the technology in their lives.

What we determined is that problematic media use is a growing issue, but true technology addiction — while associated with very serious repercussions — may be a real risk for only a vulnerable few. **The report reveals large gaps in research on technology addiction.** For example, when does problematic media use become harmful? And if people aren't actually addicted, what's going on — and how can parents help? Much of the existing research was conducted with college students and adults, not specifically with children. To understand how media use affects kids as they grow, we need much better research. Here's what we know now:

## Highlights from the poll:

Half of teens and over one-quarter of parents feel they're addicted to their mobile devices.

- At least a few times a week, more than three-quarters of parents and 41 percent of teens feel the other gets distracted by a device and doesn't pay attention when they're trying to talk.
- Seventy-two percent of teens and 48 percent of parents feel the need to immediately respond to texts, social-networking messages, and other notifications.
- Despite conflicts, most parents feel their teens' use of mobile devices has made no difference or has even helped their relationship.

## And findings from the report:

- **Internet addiction is potentially serious.** There is no agreement on whether it's a true addiction, how to measure it, or whether it's something that is highly related to or even caused by another disorder, such as depression or ADHD. However, “Internet gaming disorder,” which involves excessive online gaming, may be included by the American Psychiatric Association in the next version of the DSM (the resource used to diagnose mental and psychiatric disorders).

- **Multitasking may be harming our ability to stay focused.** And “multitasking” is actually a misnomer; we may think we’re doing multiple things simultaneously, but we’re actually rapidly shifting our attention between individual tasks. Research shows that multitasking can hurt your ability to get things done, slow you down, and make it harder to remember things that happened while you were multitasking.
- **Media and technology use is a source of friction for many families. Many children feel their parents check their devices too often, and a large number of parents struggle with limiting their children’s use of media and technology.**

While there are no easy answers, we do know parents can have a huge impact on how kids use media. **The challenge is figuring out how to get the most from technology without letting it get out of control.** By taking a balanced approach to media and technology — **setting screen limits, establishing device-free zones, and reducing multitasking** — you can help your whole family develop healthy media habits.

## How do I talk to my kid about Internet porn?

There's no sugarcoating it: **It's easy for kids to find porn online**, even through completely innocent searches. Many parents find themselves confronting this issue much sooner than they imagined, with kids who may not even understand exactly what sex is. If younger kids are frequent Internet users, it's a good idea to **set up content filters or parental controls** to reduce the chances they'll be exposed to inappropriate images or video. Once kids are a little older, you can teach them to click away from content that is clearly not intended for kids their age and explain that certain stuff on the Internet is for adults only.

If you think your kids might encounter porn online, either by accident or on purpose, it's a good idea to explain what pornography is in an age-appropriate way.

- Tell your kids that it's natural to be curious. Avoid saying something that may make them feel ashamed.
- Make sure they know you're available to talk about any subject -- nothing's off the table.
- Look for other resources -- books, age-appropriate websites, movies -- that can educate your kids about sex, intimacy, puberty, and relationships.
- For older kids, explain that pornography typically presents the extremes of human relationships -- and that the people depicted are usually paid actors. It's not representative of real intimacy.
- For teens, explain your family's policy on viewing Internet porn. One thing to consider: Some porn sites can introduce harmful viruses onto your home computer.

# 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.

# 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).