



AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

More than Facebook: Teens use many apps to talk to friends, strangers

Staying connected with friends is very important to teens and preteens, which is why they love social media. But instant messaging and photo and video apps can put teens and preteens at risk. Parents should be aware that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are not the only places where teens are spending their time.



Some apps are attractive to teens because they allow users to change their names, seem anonymous or promise that what is posted gets deleted after a certain amount of time. But even “temporary” photos, videos and instant messages can be saved or recorded and passed on.

Following are examples of social media that teens use to communicate with friends and strangers on smartphones and tablets. Sexual content, safety, privacy and language are among issues noted in the description for many of these apps. Parents should check reviews, ratings and age appropriateness of apps their teen may be using.

- Vine (rated for age 17+): allows user to post and watch 6-second looping videos.
- Kik (age 17+): users exchange instant messages, photos, videos, sketches and smileys.
- Whisper (age 17+): encourages users to “Express yourself. Share secrets. Meet new people.”
- Whatsapp (age 16+): allows users to send unlimited instant messages to others with the app and shares your child's location.
- Snapchat (age 12+): A photo, video, caption can be sent to a friend, and then disappears soon after being viewed. It can be saved as a screenshot.
- Pheed (age 12+): allows users to share text, photos, videos, voice-notes and music and connect with others. People can charge others to see their “channel” (page). This app cannot be monitored by parents remotely if the account is created on the child's smartphone.

The American Academy of Pediatrics advises parents to set limits on social media use for their child.

- Do not allow smartphones or tablets in the bedroom at night. Monitor how much time they are used during the day.
- Check parental controls. Age restrictions can be changed under the settings menu so apps that are rated age 18+ cannot be downloaded. For details, visit Apple (<http://support.apple.com/kb/ht1904>). Change Google Play settings to Everyone under “content filtering” on Android devices. Parents also can set a password to restrict downloads by age rating.

As a final safety measure, parental control apps are available for free or purchase. Apps can track what's being used, how long they are used and block or limit use. Parents should read each app's description and check ratings to find the best fit.

— Trisha Koriath