

MOST USED APPS FOR TEENAGERS

What parents should know about them



Snapchat

Parents need to know that Snapchat is a popular messaging app that allows teens to exchange user-generated photos, texts, videos, and calls -- both audio and video. The developer claims that "Snaps" can't be saved within the app and are only viewable for one to 10 seconds before disappearing from the recipient's device, noting that the app notifies the sender if the recipient takes a screenshot of an image. However, several third-party programs easily intercept and store any Snaps sent to the user, and users can buy replays of Snaps via in-app purchase, negating the "temporary" aspect of the service. The app has gained a reputation as a "sexting" app because outgoing (and incoming) pictures, videos, and texts are not stored on devices, but many teens use it simply to exchange fun, silly pictures.



MyLOL

Its very existence is unknown to many parents. But it is the most -popular dating site for under-18s in the UK and is visited by more than 300,000 users a month. Parents need to know that this site isn't safe for teens. It claims to be a place for "teen dating" -- allowing teens as young as 13 to register -- but has **thousands of adult users**, many of whom are "friends" with young people. Some people post their real names, IMs, email addresses, and phone numbers. Others -- including young teens -- post sexually explicit comments and photographs that stop just short of nudity. Some users openly say they are men looking to meet under-age girls.



Live.ly

Parents need to know that live.ly is live video-streaming in a social-networking app that allows users to broadcast live video to online friends and is made by the same developers as [musical.ly - your music video community](#). Teens can log in with their [musical.ly](#), [Facebook](#), or [Twitter](#) account. The terms of use specify that users be at least 13 years old but that by using the service, they are affirming that they're 18, which makes little sense. As with any live-streaming service, there are concerns about what kids might see, what sort of information kids may give out, and the potential for bullying or inappropriate comments from viewers. The app, however, does warn users at the beginning of streams to not expose personal information and reminds them to "be nice," though no moderation or oversight is promised by the developers. Users can block viewers who post inappropriate comments, and viewers can report broadcasters if they are streaming iffy content, though the [terms of use](#) state that the developers have no obligation to do anything in response.



Facebook

Parents need to know that Facebook is a popular social-networking site (and app) where users connect with people of their choosing -- either privately or publicly -- and post pictures, text, or videos. Users also can play games, watch videos, decorate their pages, post and tag photos, share favorite product information, "like" favorite celebrities and social causes, live-stream video with Facebook Live, connect with goods and services, and live-chat via [Messenger](#), an app that is integrated with Facebook. Though the app itself doesn't generate iffy content (beyond underwear ads), users create plenty, so the content in a teen's feed is dependent on friends, and they can search for racy stuff -- and find it. On the [Safety](#) page parents can access directions about setting up a secure account, read about how to prevent online bullying, and get parenting tips around helping kids use social media responsibly. Because the privacy settings are layered and change often, it's important for users to check their settings and make sure they are only sharing with their intended audience.



Instagram

Parents need to know that Instagram is a popular [platform](#) for instantly enhancing photos and videos with cool effects and sharing them across a number of social media platforms. The terms specify that users should be at least 13 years old and should not post partially nude or sexually suggestive photos but do not prohibit the portrayal of violence, swear words, or drugs. Users can flag photos for review, but mature content still appears in some photos and in the comment sections. Photos shared in Instagram are public and may have location information unless privacy settings are adjusted. Also, it's possible to save other users' photos. Instagram Direct allows users to send private photos directly to other users. As of 2016, users can live-stream video, and video streams and selected private photos will disappear, [Snapchat](#) style.



Ask.fm

Parents need to know that you can't register for Ask.fm unless you're 13 -- or say you are during registration. But you can't go back and enter a new birth date once you've been denied. The site doesn't monitor content, which opens the door for content that's inappropriate -- and that's very, very easy to find. Bullying has been a major concern in the past; the British news website MailOnline reported that the site has been linked to the suicides of several teens. But Ask.fm has since launched a separate safety site to help teens understand how to adjust their profile settings for additional safety and have a more secure experience. Users, for example, follow each other anonymously. But kids also can be very visible, such as filming and posting video responses to user questions and sharing personal photos on the site.



WhatsApp

Parents need to know that WhatsApp Messenger lets users start video calls and send encrypted text messages, videos, photos, and audio messages to one or many people with no message limits or fees until after the first year of use, when there's a 99p annual fee. The catch is these messages can only be sent to other smartphone users who also have WhatsApp. Once you install the app, it checks your address book to see if anyone else you know is already using WhatsApp and connects you automatically. The app also suggests allowing messages to be sent from your phone to those in your address book who aren't yet using WhatsApp, encouraging them to sign up. WhatsApp's license agreement requires users to be age 16 or older.



Twitter

Parents need to know that this is the official [Twitter](#) app for mobile devices. It lets you do virtually everything you can in the browser version, including posting 140-character updates (known as "tweets"), viewing friends' feeds, sending private messages, searching, uploading photos, and following links. The app can post the user's location (street name and city) with each tweet, but users must opt in to this feature. The recent addition of native video also has resulted in many more video ads appearing in the app, and they autoplay unless that feature is disabled in settings. Additionally, users can conduct a group private chat -- not visible to outside users -- which might worry some parents.



Kik

Parents need to know that Kik Messenger is an app-based alternative to standard texting as well as a social networking app for smartphones. It has some cool features but also some possible downsides for safety and privacy. Kik users can download other apps with more features, such as video and a sketchpad, to be used on Kik, and users can see if their messages have been read by the recipients, which is a nice touch. That said, Kik should only be used by teens who can discern the difference between texting people individually, with groups, and within a social networking environment.



Tumblr

Parents need to know that *Tumblr* is a microblogging site that showcases a range of user-generated content including product ads, sexy images and ideas, depictions of drug use, and plenty of offensive language. The terms of service specify that *Tumblr* should not be used by children under 13, but the app stores rate it as mature and for 17 and older. Users can chat with each other if they follow each other's blogs, so it's possible that teens can chat with adults in real time. Curious kids could stumble upon racy, and even raunchy, images and writings. There's really everything under the sun here -- positive and negative.

