Social Media Apps Every Parent Should Know About

1. **Yik Yak:** The producers of this app call it "the anonymous social wall for anything and everything." All users are anonymous (registration requires no personal information, other than a user's location), and their posts are called "Yaks" and show up in a live feed for other users — or "Yakkers" — in their area. The app's content-generation and moderation is entirely in the hands of its users (who can "vote" posts up or down in the news feed; after two "down" votes, a Yak disappears). The app is rated ages 17+ and targets college students, who can use it to spread the word about parties and events or share their thoughts. But younger users are easily getting their hands on the app and using it to post hurtful comments and rumors about their peers.

2. **Tinder:** Tinder's developers describe the app as "the fun way to connect with new and interesting people around you." But it's mainly used as a dating tool or an anonymous hook-up locator by 20-somethings, college students, and even younger teens and tweens. (Yikes!) The app is rated ages 17+ but Tinder's privacy policy allows teens as young as 13 to register (the app connects with Facebook — which is also technically for ages 13+ — to pull in photos for users' Tinder profiles). Tinder helps people find others in their geographic location and allows users to view each other's photos and start instant messaging once both people have "liked" one another. The geo-location features and anonymous nature of the app put kids at risk for catfishing, sexual harassment, stalking, and worse.

3. **Ask.fm:** This app allows users to interact in a question-and-answer format — with friends, peers, and anonymous users alike. The app is rated ages 13+ and is most popular in Europe but is catching on in the U.S. Some kids have used the app for hurtful cyber bullying that has been linked to suicides. British schools have sent home letters calling for students to stop using ask.fm because of its use in several cyberbullying incidents there, and its loose regulation and lack of monitoring.

4. **Kik** is a mobile app that people can use to text with friends at high speed and with more of a "face-to-face feel" than regular texting (users' profile pictures appear in a little bubble next to their text, and they can quickly text photos, sketches, or even pre-designed greeting cards to individuals or groups). The app is rated ages 17+, but there is no age verification so anyone can download it. Like some other instant messenger apps, Kik allows your teen to connect with others using just a username (rather than texting from her phone number). But it begs the question: Should teens be texting with people beyond their phone contacts?

5. **Voxer**: This walkie-talkie PTT (push-to-talk) app allows users to quickly exchange short voice messages. They can have chats going on with multiple people at a time and just have to tap the play button to hear any messages they receive. Although it largely has an adult following, including some people who use it for their job, it's becoming popular among teens who enjoy its hybrid style of texting and talking.

6. **Snapchat** is an app that allows users to send photos and videos that disappear from view within 10 seconds after they're received. It's rated ages 12+. Some kids are using the app to send racy pics because they believe the images can't be saved and circulated. But it turns out that Snapchat pics don't completely disappear from a device, and users can take a screenshot before an image vanishes in the app.

7. **Poke** is Facebook's app that, similar to Snapchat, promises that photos sent will "self-destruct" within seconds after they're received. While Poke isn't nearly as popular as Snapchat, it is still gaining young users who can use it for sexting. Also like Snapchat, the images sent via Poke can be saved or viewed with certain workarounds. The App store rates it ages 4+ (but it is connected to Facebook, which is a 13+ site).

8. **Vine** is Twitter's mobile app that allows users to shoot and share short loops of video (6 seconds or less). It's rated 17+, but children and teens are still downloading it. As with any multimedia app, the content on Vine runs the gamut from naughty to nice. "With the most basic creative searching, kids can find nudity, sex, drug use, offensive language, hardcore sexuality, and more," Common Sense Media says in its review of the app. "While there are plenty of cute, fun videos, even adults might be shocked at some of the things they find."

9. **Whisper:** This 17+ app's motto is: "Share Secrets, Express Yourself, Meet New People." It has a similar feel to the now-defunct Post Secret app, which was discontinued shortly after its release because it filled up with abusive content. Whisper lets users set up anonymous accounts to make their messages or confessions overlap an image or graphic (similar to e-postcards), which other users can then "like," share, or comment on. While it allows for creative expression, it can also take overly personal content viral. The app also shows a user's location.

10. **Tumblr:** Many children and young teens are also active on this 17+ photo-sharing app. It can also be used for sharing videos and chatting. Common Sense Media says Tumblr is "too raunchy for tykes" because users can easily access pornographic, violent, and inappropriate content. Common Sense also notes that users need to jump through hoops to set up privacy settings — and until then, all of a user's photo and content is public for all to see.

11. **Instagram:** This hugely popular photo-sharing site is owned by Facebook, so you may be more familiar with it than with other photo-sharing apps. The app is rated 13+ and may be slightly tamer than Tumblr, but users can still find mature or inappropriate content and comments throughout the app.

12. **Shots of Me:** Justin Bieber has invested in this 12+ "selfie-only" photo-sharing app in part because he was attracted to its "anti-trolling" aspect; it does not have a comment section under photos posted on the app. Instead of a public comment area, the app has a direct-messaging feature where users can only send private messages to one another. The anti-trolling feature might also help ward off cyberbullying among teens who like to put meanness on display (but teens could still be nasty via private message). The app does show a user's location and how long ago a photo was added unless those features are managed in the app's settings.

13. **Jailbreak Programs and Icon Hiding Apps**: These aren't social media apps — and they're confusing — but you should still know about them (especially if you have a tech-savvy teen or have had to take away your child's mobile phone privileges because of abuse)."Jailbreaking" an iPhone or "rooting" an Android phone basically means hacking your own device to lift restrictions on allowable applications — meaning, the user can then download third-party apps not sold in the App Store or Google Play store. It's hard to say how many teens have jail broken their mobile device, but instructions on how to do it are readily available on the Internet. Cydia is a popular application for jailbroken phones, and it's a gateway to other apps called Poof and SBSettings — which are icon-hiding apps. These apps are supposedly intended to help users clear the clutter from their screens, but some young people are using them to hide questionable apps and violent games from their parents.

14. **Facebook and Twitter**: Do all these new social media apps mean that Facebook and Twitter are in decline? A 2013 survey by Pew Internet found that U.S. teens have "waning enthusiasm" for Facebook — in part because their parents and other adults have taken over the domain and because their peers engage in too much "drama" on the site. But Facebook still remains the top social media site among U.S. teens, who say that their peers continue to stay on the site so they don't miss anything happening there. Your child may keep a profile on Facebook but be much more active on newer platforms. Meanwhile, Twitter use is rising among teens.

Suggestions for next steps:

Sit down with your child and find out which apps he/she is using, how they work, and whether she has experienced any issues on them, such as cyberbullying or contact from strangers. Look into apps that help you monitor your child online. And keep these tips in mind:

- You can set up age limits on your child's device. The 2013 Pew Research Center survey found that nearly 40 percent of teens say that they have lied about their age to gain access to a site or create an account, so restricting kids' access to apps by age rating is a wise move.

- You can't join every site or app and monitor your child's every move online; teens will always find a new platform that their parents don't know about yet. Rather than hovering or completely barring your child from downloading every social media app, sit down and go over some general rules to keep him smart and safe online. Here's a good one from Common Sense Media: "If you wouldn't share it with your family, don't share it online."

- Tell your child to let you know if someone is hurting her or making her feel uncomfortable online, even if the person is acting anonymously. Use the Cyberbullying Research Center's "Questions Parents Should Ask Their Children About Technology" to guide your discussion. Our printable anti-bullying pledge and parent/child online agreement are also useful tools.

- Make a rule that your child must ask for permission before downloading any apps — even free ones — just so you're aware of them. When your child wants to join a new social media platform, go through the security settings together to choose the ones you're most comfortable with. Advise your child not to share passwords with anyone, including best friends, boyfriends, or girlfriends

**All of this information was taken from the Family Education website.

Fun.familyeducation.com