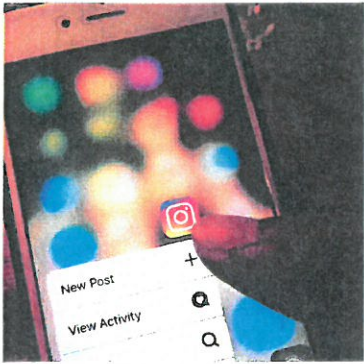


The Most Dangerous Apps of 2018



By Marina Spears

I consider myself to be a pretty "tech savvy" mom. My children and I are friends on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. I thought I knew all about the dangers of Tinder and KIK and our family has solid rules about online behavior, so I felt

comfortable. That was my first mistake: feeling comfortable.

Recently, my son finished his homework on a family computer and I felt prompted to check the history. Everything checked out except for a social media account that I didn't recognize.

It was a private account and I just had a weird feeling about it. With a little bit of mother-sleuthing I was able to deduce that the account was his. I was really taken aback!

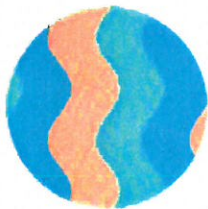
I usually keep track of my kids' online behavior, but then I just ... stopped. However, technology keeps moving forward and provides my kids with new ways to connect and communicate online, many of which-I am sad to admit-I had no idea.

We need to do better. We need to be aware of the apps that are available, because most likely, our kids already are. In fact my children knew about *all* of these, and had seen many of them on friends' devices.

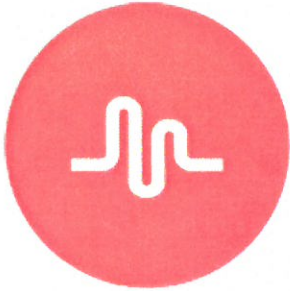
Do you know about these apps?



Amino: This app allows viewers to participate in online communities focused on similar interests, from Anime or Star Wars to Sexy Role Playing. It includes features for chatting, messaging, picture sharing, etc., all with strangers.



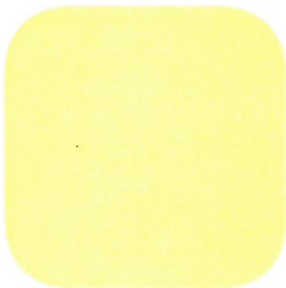
Live.ly: This is a live streaming app. Users create content and broadcast live to viewers that do not need to register any personal info or provide age verification. Anyone who has an account can access your child's "live stream," and your child has access to others' live streams that often contain nudity and offensive language and behavior.



Musical.ly: This sister site to Live.ly is promoted as a fun app for "kids" to lip sync and create their own music videos to share. Just like Live.ly, there is no age verification. All you need to sign up is a phone number, Facebook, Instagram or an email (any of which are easy to fake). It allows easy access to your child's profile as well. We have sexualized media, pornography, and cruel bullying on Musical.ly-and not just kid-to-kid, but adults bullying kids.



Omegle: This is an online chat forum in which two strangers are paired up based on similar interests and can chat via messages and video. The typical chat starts with "ASL": Age? Sex? Location? This is one that my kids told me, "Don't even open Omegle. You will not believe what you can see."



Yubo: (formerly called Yellow) This is a free app allowing users to connect (flirt) with others in their local area, similar to Tinder. There is no age verification to use the app, and it links up with Snapchat and Instagram, allowing strangers complete access to profile information and pictures.



Hot or Not: A comparison and rating app. Users send in their picture to be rated by others, and have the opportunity to view the “hottest” users in their area and connect with them.



Ask.fm: This site has been linked to some of the worst cases of cyberbullying. It allows users to ask anonymous questions. There is no way to know who is following you or who posted the question.



Vora: This is a dieting app that allows users to track their fasting activity. It has become very popular with youth who struggle with eating disorders. The app has a social media feature that connects the user with other fasters by creating profiles. Through the Vora Facebook page, users encourage each other to extend their fasts.



Hiding Apps: Some examples that fit into this category are Private Photo (Calculator%), Gallery Lock Lite, Best Secret Folder, and Keep Safe. These apps allow a person to hide

messages, pictures, etc., but show up as an innocuous icon, such as calculator or clock when someone else logs into the phone.



Social Media Apps: These apps include Snapchat, Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, and Pinterest. It is important to keep in mind that most apps have inherent risks. Messages and pictures on Facebook/Snapchat/

Instagram are easily deleted after being received or sent. It is also becoming very common for kids to create fake accounts on Instagram (and other social platforms) called “finstas.” Pinterest and Tumblr can have very questionable material as well, not just of a sexual manner, but in relation to self-harm, suicide, and other violence. Just because something has been around for awhile does not reduce dangers!

What can we do to keep our kids safe?

- Educate yourself and stay up to date with new apps. Every few weeks do a quick online search for “new social media apps.” Get familiar with the apps before your kids. Don’t allow yourself to get too comfortable and don’t shy away from technology you don’t understand.
- Discuss the apps/sites you find with your kids, ask them what they know, and keep the lines of communication open. Have monthly meetings with your family dedicated to all things involving the internet, apps, device usage, etc. You can even assign older kids to report on certain topics. Try having a family council to discuss this.
- Set appropriate parental controls, age restrictions for downloading apps, time restrictions, etc.
- Check your kids’ devices frequently and thoroughly. Connect to all of the apps from your child’s device. View the child’s activity, messages, contacts etc. Some companies, like Bark, offer software to help you monitor kids’ activity on phones and apps. Be aware of your kids’ friends online and offline.
- Educate your children on the dangers of “oversharing” online. Teach them that every move we make does not have to be documented online, and remind them that social media is not a diary or a personal photo album.
- **Most importantly**, maintain a connected relationship with your kids. Spend time with them, tell them you love them, and express your appreciation for them. Rely more on your relationship with them than filters and other safeguards!