

TEXTING APPS



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. There's also a Kik community blog where users can submit photos of themselves and screenshots of messages (sometimes displaying users' full names)
- **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.



ooVoo is a free video, voice, and messaging app. Users can have group chats with up to 12 people for free -- and it's common for kids to log on after school and keep it open while doing homework.

What parents need to know

- **You can only chat with approved friends.** Users can only communicate with those on their approved contact lists, which can help ease parents' safety concerns.
- **It can be distracting.** Because the service makes video chatting so affordable and accessible, it also can be addictive.



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.

MICRO-BLOGGING APPS AND SITES



Instagram lets users snap, edit, and share photos and 15-second videos, either publicly or with 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

• **Users should be 13 years of age.** Kids are on the lookout for "likes." Similar to the way they use Facebook, they 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 kids post it 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 their followers if his or her account is public.

• **Private messaging is now an option.** Instagram Direct allows users to send "private messages" to 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.



Tumblr is like a cross between a blog and Twitter: It's a streaming scrapbook of text, photos, and/or videos and audio clips. Users create and follow short blogs, or "tumblelogs," that can be seen by anyone online (if made public). Many teenagers have tumblelogs 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 tumblelog to another. Many teens like -- and, in fact, want -- their posts reblogged. But do you really want your kids' words and photos on someone else's page?



Twitter is a microblogging site that allows users to post brief, 140-character messages -- called "tweets" -- and follow other users' activities. It's not only for adults; kids 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.

- *Minimum age restriction is 13.*



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.*
- *Minimum age restriction is 13.*