

WE NEED TO TALK:

This is the first of our four-part newsletter in the “We Need to Talk” series. In order to help our children navigate social media, we, as parents and educators, must recognize that the medium is the message. Although staying media literate often seems like an insurmountable task, it is crucial to have some understanding of the sites and applications (apps) that the youth are using so that we can better assist them and guide them through this technological maze. Knowing what these sites and apps are, why they’re popular, and the potential dangers if they are not used responsibly is the key. Below is a brief overview of the most popular sites and apps that youth are using today.

<p>Twitter is a microblogging site that allows users to post brief, 140-character messages -- called "tweets" -- and follow other users' activities. Tweets are visible to the world and can be viewed by anyone.</p> 	<p>What parents need to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public tweets are the norm for teens. Though you can choose to keep your tweets private, most teens report having public accounts (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2013). 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. • It's a promotional tool for celebs. Twitter reels teens in with behind-the-scenes access to celebrities' lives, adding a whole new dimension to celebrity worship. You may want to point out how much marketing strategy goes into the tweets of those they admire.
<p>Facebook is an enormous, free social networking site with hundreds of millions of users all over the world. To use Facebook, you sign up with your email address, name, gender, date of birth, and password.</p> 	<p>What parents need to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook is not private. Anything posted online stays in cyberspace forever. Photos and comments can be disseminated to others. As well, images can be photoshopped and sent to others. • Friending can be risky. Many young people view the number of facebook “friends” they have as a badge of popularity. Many friend requests are accepted by young people even when they do not know who these “friends” are in real life. Online predators use facebook to engage young people as “friends”. • Parent “friending” does not eliminate risk. Many young people are creating two facebook accounts; one for their parents and another to use freely with their friends.
<p>Snapchat is a messaging app that lets users put a time limit on the pictures and videos they send before they disappear.</p> 	<p>What parents need to know:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>It can make sexting seem OK. The seemingly risk-free messaging might encourage users to share pictures containing inappropriate content.</p>

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<p>Kik Messenger is an app-based alternative to standard texting that kids use for social networking. It's free to use but has lots of ads.</p> 	<p>What parents need to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's too easy to "copy all." Kik's ability to link to other Kik-enabled apps within itself is a way to drive "app adoption" (purchases) from its users for developers. The app also encourages new registrants to invite everyone in their phone's address book to join Kik, since users can only message those who also have the app. • There's some stranger danger. An app named <i>OinkText</i>, linked to 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) to contests. • It uses real names. Teens' usernames identify them on Kik, so they shouldn't use their full real name as their username.
<p>Vine is a social media app that lets users post and watch looping six-second video clips. This Twitter-owned service has developed a unique community of people who post videos that are often creative and funny - and sometimes thought-provoking.</p> 	<p>What parents need to know:</p> <p>It's full of inappropriate videos. Within a few minutes of random searching it is easy to come across full nudity, illegal drug use etc. There's a lot of funny, clever expression on Vine, but much of it isn't appropriate for kids.</p> <p>There are significant privacy concerns. The videos you post, the accounts you follow, and the comments you make on videos are all public by default. But you <i>can</i> adjust your settings to protect your posts; only followers will see them, and you have to approve new followers.</p> <p>Parents can be star performers (without knowing). If your teens film you being goofy or silly, you may want to talk about whether they plan to share it.</p>
<p>Instagram is a platform that lets users snap, edit, and share photos and 15-second videos -- either publicly or with a network of followers.</p>  <p>Instagram</p>	<p>Teens are on the lookout for "Likes." Similar to Facebook, teens 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 teens post it to validate their popularity.</p> <p>Public photos are the default. Photos and videos shared on Instagram are public and may have location information unless privacy settings are adjusted.</p> <p>Hashtags can make photos even more visible to communities beyond a teen's followers.</p> <p>Mature content can slip in. The terms of service specify that users should be at least 13 years old and shouldn't post partially nude or sexually suggestive photos -- but they don't address violence, swear words, or drugs.</p>