
INSIGHTS

FOR FAMILIES



Apps to Help Supervise Online Activity



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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

It isn't easy for parents to know exactly what their kids are doing when they are apart. Even when kids know the rules, they sometimes break them anyway when they are away from the watchful eyes of parents. That's what kids and teens do to assert their independence. That's normal, but rules exist for a reason — usually to ensure that they stay safe.

Rules for online safety are no different. There are a number of ways kids can engage in risky behavior online as well. Fortunately, there are digital tools to help parents help their children when they are online.

First, communicate with your kids

The best first steps involve communication. In a TEDxSacramento talk called, "Wake up!: Helping our youth navigate the digital world," social media safety expert Thomas Dodson said, "Only about 15 percent of young people are having conversations with their parents about their activities online." He said that kids previously had a small audience as they navigated the challenges of youth, and the internet has changed that for today's children. "Growing up is happening online in front of the entire world." www.beabovethefray.org/

Discussing what our children do and see online should happen on a regular basis, and expectations should be clear before kids get the keys to the digital world.

Consider a contract

Many parents outline the rules for digital devices and cell phone use with their children before they hand them their own device. And others go farther by asking them to sign a contract with specific consequences for violating the rules. There are dozens of sample contracts online. Find a template to customize with a simple web search. An example from cyberbullying.org is here: <http://bit.ly/2Twja0C>. The goal is to enforce safe digital activity for both the child with the phone and any possible recipients of communication via the cellphone.

Trust but verify

Parents who have concerns about their children's internet activity can fight fire with fire, so to speak. There are many digital tools and apps to help parents watch their kids virtually. There are monitoring apps that students know about and spying apps that record activity without the awareness of the user.

Parents will have to choose the app based on their concerns and taking into account any qualms about violating their children's privacy.

(Over)

Recommended parental control apps

There are a variety of apps to help parents oversee online activity. The most useful ones can help limit time on the device, track usage and location and block apps or games. Some may require a subscription fee. Before subscribing, check our digital device. Many now have controls built in. For example, Google's Family Link and Amazon's parental controls have gotten good reviews, and Apple offers some parental controls.

The following are some of the apps recommended by Digital Trends. <http://bit.ly/2saZyDD>

Family Time: For Android and IOS. Blocks apps, tracks activity, sets time limits and tracks location.

Qustodio: Android, IOS, Kindle, Nook. Blocks apps, tracks activity, sets time limits.

ESET: Android. Blocks apps, sets time limits, basic activity tracking. More features are available for a fee.

Web Watcher: Android and IOS. Blocks apps, tracks activity, tracks location without the user's knowledge. This is essentially spyware.

Apps parents should know about

Keeping up with the trendy teen apps is difficult. Conduct a regular internet search for the latest list to stay informed. Here are 10 apps teens are using that parents should know about from an ABC news affiliate. <https://abc13.co/2SFBQea>

Calculator: This app looks like a calculator but functions like a secret photo vault.

Omegle: A free online chat website that promotes chatting anonymously to strangers.

Yellow: This app is designed to allow teens to flirt with each other in a Tinder-like atmosphere.

Whisper: An anonymous app where the creators promote sharing secrets and meeting new people.

Ask.fm: Ask an anonymous question and get an answer. This app has been linked to the most severe forms of cyberbullying.

Hot or Not: Strangers rate your profile. The goal is to lead to a hookup.

Burn Book: People post anonymous rumors about others through audio messages, texts, and photos.

Wishbone: An app that allows users to compare kids against each other and rate them on a scale.

Kik: A messaging app. Kik has built apps and web content that can be filtered on your home computer.

Instagram: Many kids are now creating fake accounts to hide content from their parents. Kids also like to text using Instagram because messages are deleted once the user leaves the conversation.