

April 2025

RAISING DIGITALLY RESPONSIBLE YOUTH

a guide for parents and caregivers



SAFER
SCHOOLS
TOGETHER



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INTRODUCTION

Our current world is constantly changing based on technological developments. The digital landscape in 2025 looks vastly different than at the turn of the 21st century. It is imperative we inquire about what we need to know as parents/caregivers to protect our children and teach them how to responsibly and appropriately utilize technology. The parameters, rules, and expectations we put in place in our homes undoubtedly guide our children's sense of digital responsibility.

Raising children in a digital era can seem overwhelming at times. Technology has entered our lives rapidly over the past several years and continues to evolve daily. In reality, apps and technological devices may always change, but the behavior stays the same. Moderation is key to managing technology use in our homes. This does not need to be an “all or nothing” approach with either absolute prohibition or full unchecked usage, but we **must** reflect on the frequency we use technology.

It is beneficial to maintain an open, transparent, and ongoing dialogue with our children regarding the internet, technology, social media, and video games. Remaining approachable and representing that trusted adult to the children in our lives could make the difference between whether our children come to us when issues or uncomfortable situations arise, rather than feeling alone in the process and seeking comfort and advice from peers or strangers.

Technology is here to stay, whether we like it or not. Future employers and/or admissions departments are increasingly evaluating and assessing the digital reputations of our children and how they choose to represent themselves online. The goal of this parent/caregiver guide is to help introduce the major social media platforms, video games, and relevant trends that are already used or have the potential to be used by our children.

Stay the course. We want to prepare our children for their tech-infused futures and walk down this digital journey alongside them by staying informed. Good luck!



GENERAL HOUSEHOLD SUGGESTIONS

There are some general parenting/caregiver tips that help navigate creating a household that respects digital boundaries. Some of these can include:

- ***Keeping phones and devices out of the bedroom.*** Sleep is essential for growth. There is a direct correlation between electronic media usage in the bedroom and our children's sleep being negatively impacted.¹ Over 60% of our children have at least one media device in their bedroom, and as parents and caregivers, the frequency sits at over 90%.² Sleep disturbance in childhood is known to have adverse effects on health, including obesity, sedentary behavior, reduced immune function, and stunted growth. Poor sleep is also linked to adverse mental health experiences for our children.³
- ***Having a central charging station!*** If possible, have a central charging station for all portable digital devices. The kitchen table or island, living room, or another communal area in your house is a great place to keep *all* household devices charged at night, including your own! Modeling digitally responsible behavior and setting an example for our children that we do not need to sleep with our device(s) helps our children understand they do not need to either!



- ***Knowing our children's passwords.*** It is your parental and caregiving right! You paid for the device your child uses, which means...you guessed it! You own it! You have the right to spot-check devices that belong to you, including the ones that you gave your child. It is also essential for us to know our children's passwords in case anything happens and is to their benefit in case they forget their passwords.

¹ [Electronic media use and sleep in children](#)

² [Media Devices in Parents' and Children's Bedrooms](#)

³ [Children and Sleep | Sleep Foundation](#)

- ***Staying educated.*** You are doing an excellent job starting with this guide! You must stay diligent in keeping up with technology and how it evolves. If your child comes to you and asks to download an app that you are unfamiliar with, download the app and try it out yourself first. If they are looking into playing a new video game, play it first, or even with them! You would not send your child to a playground in a neighboring community without visiting it first – operate the same with the digital space. Play around with this space and do your research. If your child already has an app or game, ask them to teach you about it and how it works! This allows for increased open dialogue.
- ***Put tape or a sticky note/sticker over a device's camera when not in use.*** You can do this with a multitude of devices, including your computer(s) and cellphone.

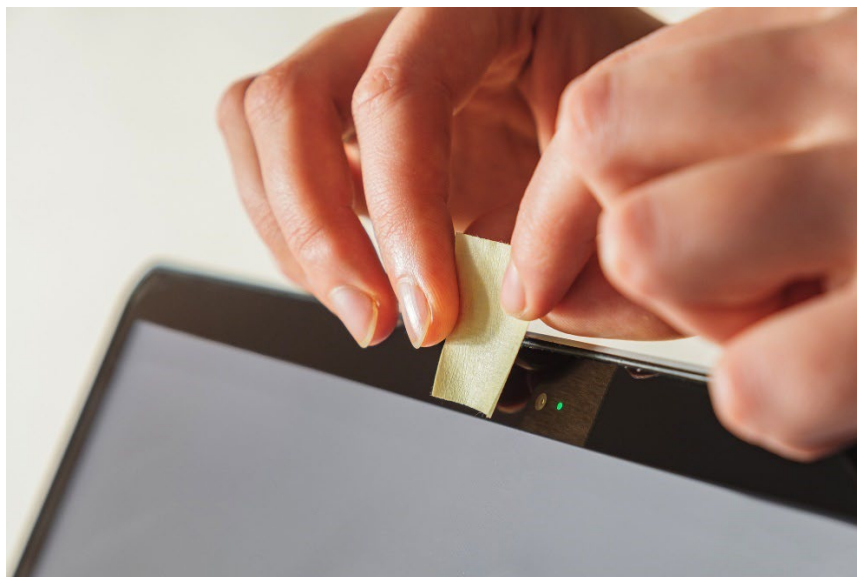


Photo by New York Post.

- ***Build a culture of openness.*** It is important to establish trust and a two-way dialogue about technology and social media. You want to be approachable to your children *when*, not if, a concern comes up in their digital lives. This can make the difference in our children reaching out to us instead of peers for advice when situations arise.
- ***Remember technology is not going anywhere.*** Introduce technology into your home and your children's lives at a pace you feel comfortable with, relative to your child's age and emotional maturity.
- ***Remember we are the caregiver, not a friend.*** We are not our children's best friends, but we can still have a close relationship while maintaining this boundary. We are responsible for ensuring their safety in the online world just as much as we are responsible for ensuring their safety in the offline world!
- ***Google yourself and your family.*** Any names, addresses, emails, phone numbers, or social media usernames that are associated with your family can be searched online; see what shows up before others do.
- ***Remember the permanency of the internet.*** We must remind our children about their digital tattoo and how what they post online and send electronically can have lasting impacts. Not *everything* we post online stays, but we do not get to decide what stays and what does not!

These tips are intended to be used in whole or in part alongside your personal parenting methods. You as a parent/caregiver know what is best for your child. It is important to put our children's well-being first; allowing

yourself to have a strong understanding of digital responsibility enables your child to as well, so they can make better decisions online and offline on their own.

If you would like to attend a parent session on Raising Digitally Responsible Youth, how to keep our children safe online, and understand current trends, please reach out to your school/school district or PAC and ask them to request a proposal from Safer Schools Together.⁴

⁴ [Request a Training \(saferschoolstogether.com\)](https://saferschoolstogether.com)

THE ESSENTIALS

There are many components to the online world that are generally known and understood by most digital users; however, here are three essential terms that we need to understand to take control of our digital responsibility:



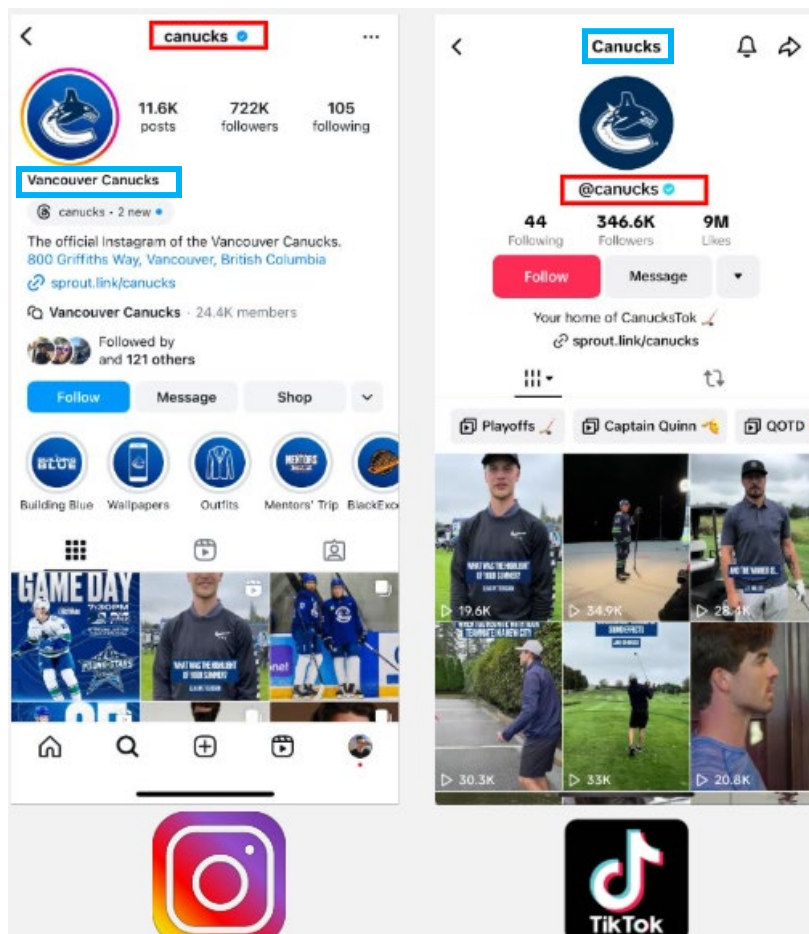
Hashtag

A hashtag (#) is a symbol added before a word or phrase to create a searchable category indexed by social media and discoverable by other users. Instagram, X, and TikTok are the primary platforms where hashtags are used. Hashtags are a way of making it easier to find and follow other users/posts within a particular category or contribute to a conversation. Hashtags are frequently used on X to create forms of community where individuals with similar interests can interact and group their posts under the same category (often negatively).



Username

A username is a unique online identity that is chosen to represent someone online. Most platforms make you choose a username when you create an account, and this username is typically unique to this individual user (meaning it may not be used by others unless that username is no longer in use). Be mindful that many social media platforms will also ask for a display or vanity name, which can be replicated by any user on the platform. It is imperative we know the difference between a username and a display name. As a vanity name is not unique, we must accurately know what our children's usernames are to accurately access their social media accounts. Below is an example that illustrates usernames versus vanity names. The red boxes indicate usernames, and the blue boxes indicate vanity names.

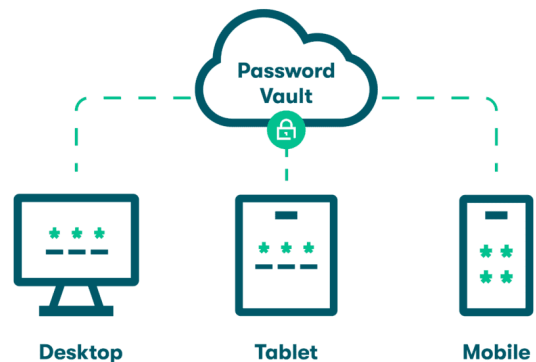
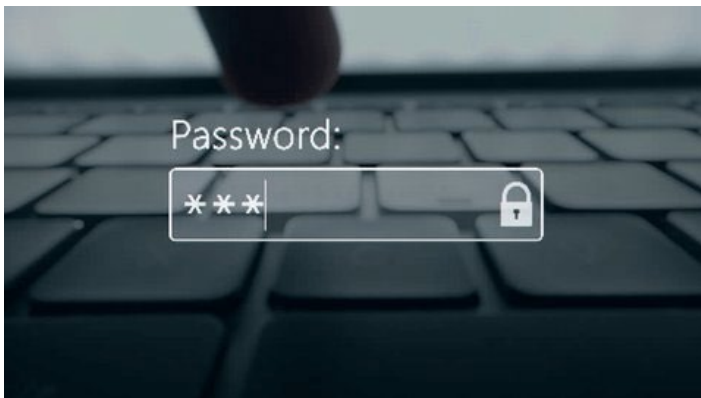




Passwords

We all know the challenge of trying to remember our passwords for a website or an app, and it is easy to fall into the habit of using the same passwords for all our logins. However, this is a dangerous habit that we must avoid, especially if it is something predictable such as a dog name or home address. We should remind our children ***to not share their passwords with their friends***! This is a major source behind accounts getting “hacked.” We must remind our children that who their friends are today may not be their friends tomorrow and set them up for success regarding protecting their information. We also need to model this – use different passwords for each platform you have an account for and ensure they are strong with a mix of numbers, letters, and special characters (!@#\$%^&*).

TIP: Try a password manager! There are many free password manager apps available in the iOS app store and Google Play store, as well as in the form of browser extensions. Password managers store your passwords on a digital “keychain” and can help you to manage passwords (especially complex/strong passwords), so you do not have to! Make sure to do your research before picking a password manager and always use it at your discretion. If you do not feel comfortable using an online password manager, we recommend having a book with your passwords kept in a secure location.



SEXTING VS. SEXTORTION

There is no doubt that smartphones are having a tremendous impact on our everyday lives. The use of instant messaging has skyrocketed since the introduction of smartphones and social media. Research suggests that over forty-one million messages are sent out **every minute**,⁵ and this number is expected to continually increase.

The term 'sexting' emerged as the use of text messages and instant messages increased and is defined as sending sexually explicit photographs, videos, and/or messages. Sexting is also commonly found over popular apps, such as WhatsApp and Instagram Direct Messages, but is especially popularized through Snapchat because of the platform's ability to send photographs/videos and messages that can only be seen once before it "disappears" into cyberspace – unless, of course, someone was to take a screenshot and distribute it to others, or utilize another device to take a photo to avoid notifying the user by screenshotting...

Sexting has several dangers to acknowledge, especially regarding how it can permanently impact the lives of our children. One of the most dangerous scenarios we see occur repeatedly is sextortion. Sextortion "is a form of exploitation that involves the threat of releasing shared intimate videos, images, or explicit messages online."⁶ Sextortion can happen to anyone who chooses to sext, and it is not always a stranger someone has never met, it can also be someone close to the individual. It is crucial for our youth to understand that when they choose to engage in sexting, they are subjecting themselves to the risk of sextortion.

If you or someone you know is worried about their intimate images/videos are circulating the online space, there are resources available for support.

[Take it Down](#) is a free service that can help you remove or stop the online sharing of nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit images or videos taken of you when you were under 18 years old. When using Take it Down, you would first select the image(s) or video(s) on your device that you are concerned about; therefore, you need access to the original intimate image or video to utilize this service. Then, Take It Down will assign a unique digital fingerprint, called a hash value, to the image or video. The hash will be shared with participating online platforms that can use it to detect copies of these images or videos on their services and take action to remove the content or limit the spread. This happens without the image or video ever leaving your device or anyone viewing it, and you do not have to share any personal information.

For those over the age of 18, the [Stop Non-Consensual Intimate Images](#) website works the same way as Take It Down.



⁵ [Text, Don't Call: Messaging Apps Statistics for 2024](#)

⁶ [Sextortion: A Definition](#)



SOCIAL MEDIA APPS TO KNOW

SOCIAL MEDIA APPS TO KNOW

Snapchat (“Snap”)

Since its release in 2011, Snapchat has remained one of the most popular social media applications that our youth are using to communicate and share their digital lives. With over 414 million daily active users worldwide and over 4.75 billion Snaps created every day,⁹ Snapchat is the de facto medium of communication for students in grades 6-12. The reason for its popularity is that it turned text communication into a visual experience that allows users to send disappearing photos that leave behind (almost) no evidence and for the most part, do not become part of our children’s digital footprints.

The foundational feature that makes Snapchat desirable to our youth is the disappearance of photos/videos after they are opened. Users can set a viewing time of as little as 1 second up to 24 hours after which, once viewed, the image or video is deleted from the recipient’s device and from Snapchat’s servers as the company *claims*.¹⁰

Snapchat allows users to take still photos, record short videos, add text, and create drawings to send to a personalized, and typically private, list of friends. However, nothing stops the recipient from taking a screenshot or using a different device to take a picture or the image or screen recording of the video. **Note:** if you take a screenshot using the recipient device, Snapchat will notify the sender that you have taken a copy. This is also why the app appeals to our children, as the concept is that you cannot save/screenshot the image without notifying the original sender.

Despite news headlines that suggest Snapchat is “just a sexting app” or one that is *only* used to send nude photos, this is not the case and represents a very small usage of the app. However, it is important for us to know the relevance of this as parents and caregivers, as [Cyber Tip](#) notes 74% of sextortion incidents occur on either Snapchat or Instagram.¹¹ We invite you to watch the video below for a general overview of Snapchat.



Video by YouTube user Simple Alpaca.

Snapchat Lingo

⁹ [Snapchat Demographic Stats: How Many People Use Snapchat in 2024?](#)

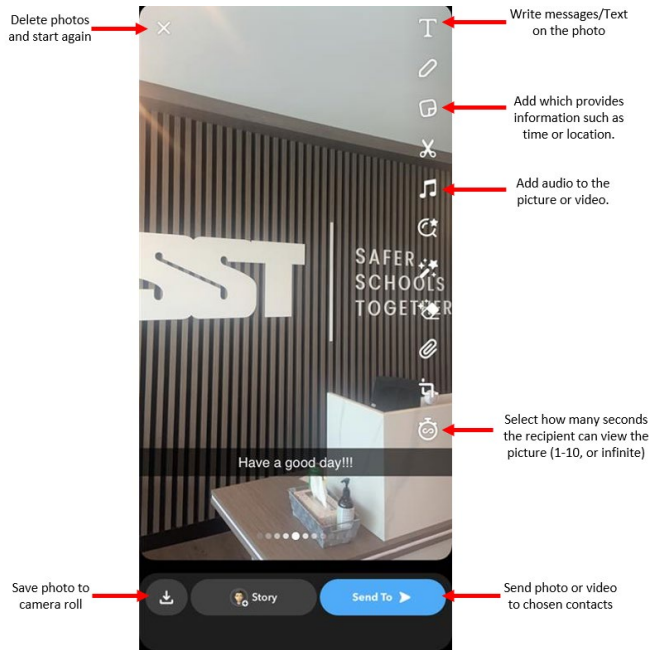
¹⁰ [Snapchat Support](#)

¹¹ [Cyber Tip](#)

Snap

A user takes a photo/video using their digital device/smartphone in real-time. The user can select an amount of time for the receiver to view the photo/video. A user can elect to have the photo/video they have just taken saved into their photo gallery, their '[My Eyes Only](#)' folder, or simply sent via Snapchat without being saved on their device.

YouTube user *How-To Authority* provides a helpful [video](#) that discusses what My Eyes Only is, and how a user can set this up.



Stories

A user can add the photo/video to their 'Story.' Depending on the user's privacy settings, the photos/videos added to a story can be viewed by all Snapchat users or just those on their friends' list for up to 24 hours.

Spotlight

Spotlight is a new dedicated tab where users can see short form videos, much like Instagram Reels or TikTok videos. Users have up to 60 seconds to create Spotlight Snaps for the public to see.

Bitmoji

Owned by Snap Inc., users are encouraged to create an avatar, known as a Bitmoji. A Bitmoji is a personalized emoji-like character designed to reflect the user's likeness. Users can personalize their avatar by changing hair texture, facial expressions, and body proportions. To further personalize their avatar, users can choose specific outfits that better portray personal style.

Discover Page

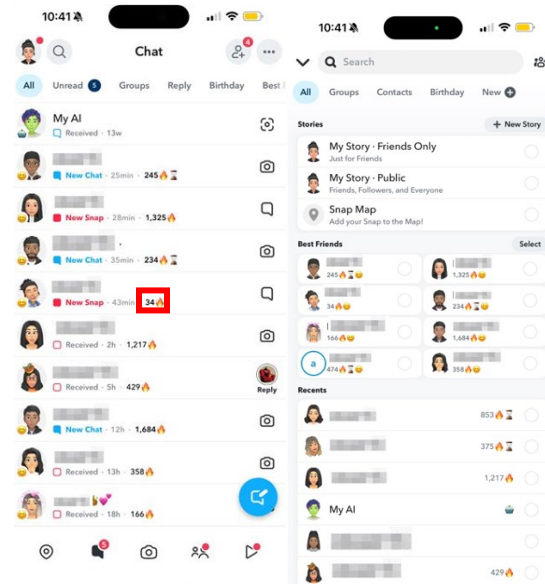
Snapchat's Discover page allows users to access a variety of Stories from publishers and other subscriptions tailored to their interests. To navigate to the Discover page, users simply swipe left while on the camera screen.

Chat

Users can type a text message, create a voice message, voice call, or video call within the Snapchat app to their friends. Once both parties have viewed the message, the message will vanish. The chat settings can also be manually changed within each conversation to be set to disappear after 24 hours instead. Additionally, users can save their chats from disappearing. Photos/videos from the camera roll or gallery of the user's device can be uploaded and sent within the chat. Group chats often exist between multiple friends. Often, we see negative group chat behaviors occur frequently on Snapchat, due to the ability for the messages to "disappear."

Streaks

Seen within the chat log screen, a user's 'Snapchat Streak' is the number of consecutive days that the account owner and a friend have sent at least, but no less than, one snap per day to each other. If they do not snap each other within 24 hours, they lose their streak with their friend. This is a huge deal for our youth – we have seen students avoid field trips or traveling to places where they cannot access their phones in order to keep up these streaks. Connected with snap streaks is when an emoji of an hourglass next to a streak may appear, which means the users will lose their streak soon and if they do not snap each other, indicating the time period is closing in on 24 hours since they last snapped. Below is an example of what streaks look like on both pages of Snapchat. The red box outlines what a streak looks like.



My AI

As the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) increases, we have seen a surge in the development of new AI services, specifically within social media. Most recently, Snapchat rolled out its own AI bot, called My AI. The new AI bot is powered by OpenAI's ChatGPT technology but has additional safety enhancements and controls that are unique to Snapchat.¹² What differentiates Snapchat's AI from services like ChatGPT or Midjourney is a user can customize the bot's name as well as the way it looks, reducing the perception of interacting with an AI system.

With My AI, users can leverage a variety of AI capabilities. To access My AI, users need to access the Chat screen. From the Chat screen, users will then be able to select My AI and ask the AI bot a variety of questions. Some examples of how My AI can be used include asking for advice, requesting help to plan a trip or find directions, or even asking for simple suggestions such as 'What should I make for dinner?'¹² If a user has shared their location with Snapchat, My AI will be able to provide specific information including nearby location recommendations.¹²

¹² [What is My AI on Snapchat and how do I use it?](#)

Users currently have the option to send feedback to Snapchat by pressing and holding any responses from the AI bot. This allows users to share more on what they would like to see more or less of while Snapchat continues to “train” the My AI bot.¹²

Unless you sign up and pay for Snapchat+, there is no verified way, nor has SST found a way to permanently remove My AI from a user's Snapchat account.¹³ We encourage parents/guardians to talk to their children about the risks associated with having conversations with AI, and how AI should not replace a trusted adult, parent, or adviser if they are experiencing a difficult situation.

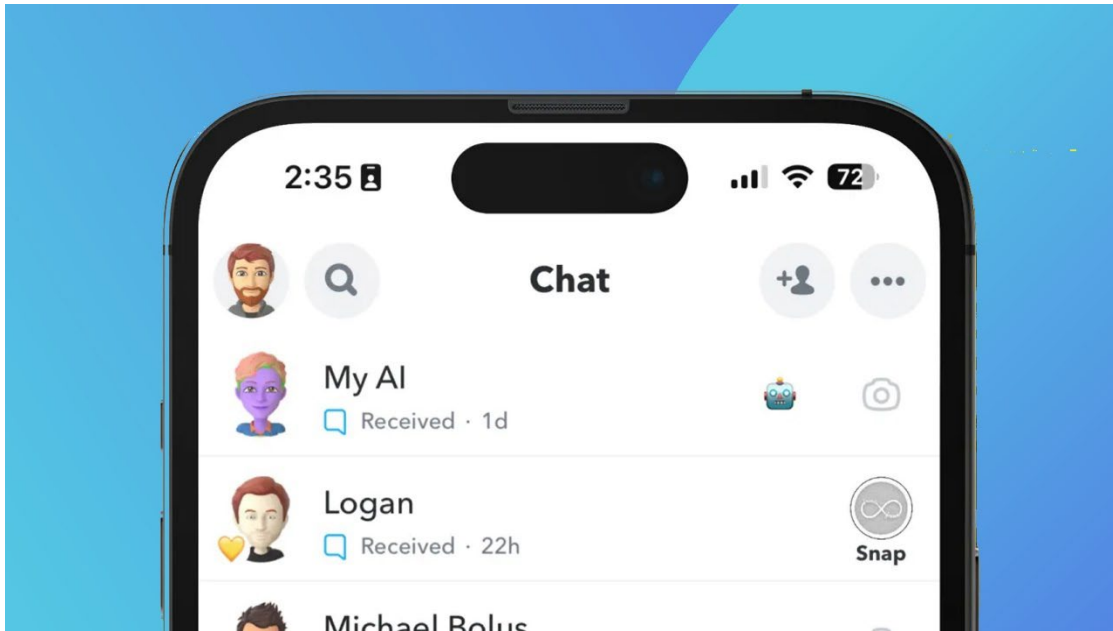


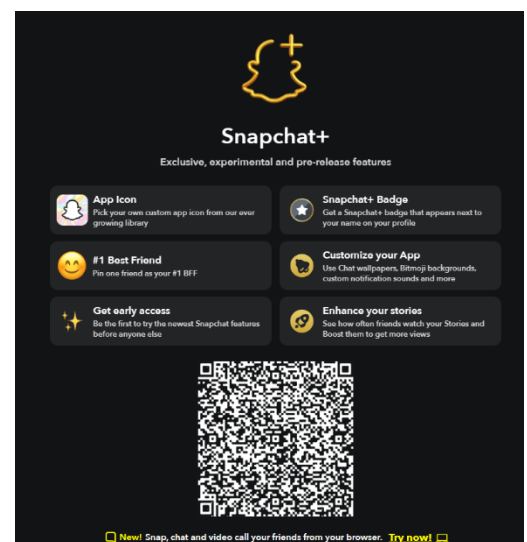
Photo from Creative Bloq.

Snapchat +

In 2022, Snapchat released a subscription-based feature called Snapchat+. This monthly subscription is accessed within the Snapchat app and offers a collection of exclusive features.

Snapchat+ has 11 million paying subscribers.¹⁴ According to Snapchat, the “subscription will allow [them] to deliver new Snapchat features to some of the most passionate members of [their] community and allow [them] to provide prioritized support.”¹⁵

There are several unique features of Snapchat+, which include priority story replies, allowing a Snapchat+ user's posts to become more visible on the platform. Snapchat+ users can also assign a specific emoji for friends to show they have viewed their Snaps, add custom backgrounds for their Bitmojis, and change the look of the Snapchat icon on the home screen of their device. In addition, Snapchat+ users



¹³ [How do I Unpin my Snapchat AI?](#)

¹⁴ [Snapchat+](#)

¹⁵ [Introducing Snapchat+](#)

can set time lengths to send a photo to as short as .10, .25 and .50 of a second.

Snapchat for Web

In 2022, Snapchat released Snapchat for Web which allows users to access the Snapchat application from their PC or laptop via <https://web.snapchat.com>. This new feature includes most of the same features as the mobile version including posting, direct messaging, group chats, video sharing, and voice calling. Snapchat users who already have accounts can login to the web version with the same credentials they use on their mobile devices or can sign up for a new account on the web. Once either mobile or desktop applications are synced, users can continue their conversations with other Snapchat users.

To use Snapchat for Web, users are required to give the application access to a webcam and/or microphone for users to post, video, and voice call. If the user does not grant access or does not have a webcam or microphone available, they will still be able to text chat on the application. As well, please know that you will not be able to access the Snap Map via the Snapchat Web version.

Snap Map

The Snap Map allows users to view Snaps of sporting events, celebrations, breaking news, etc. in their communities and around the world. This feature is only available within the application itself. However, perhaps the most concerning content viewable from this map, is that it shows where your friends are...and exactly where they are...in real-time. Users can share their locations with everyone on their “friends” list so they can see exactly where their friends are and what they are specifically doing (driving, at an airport, sleeping, listening to music, etc.) in real-time on a virtual map.

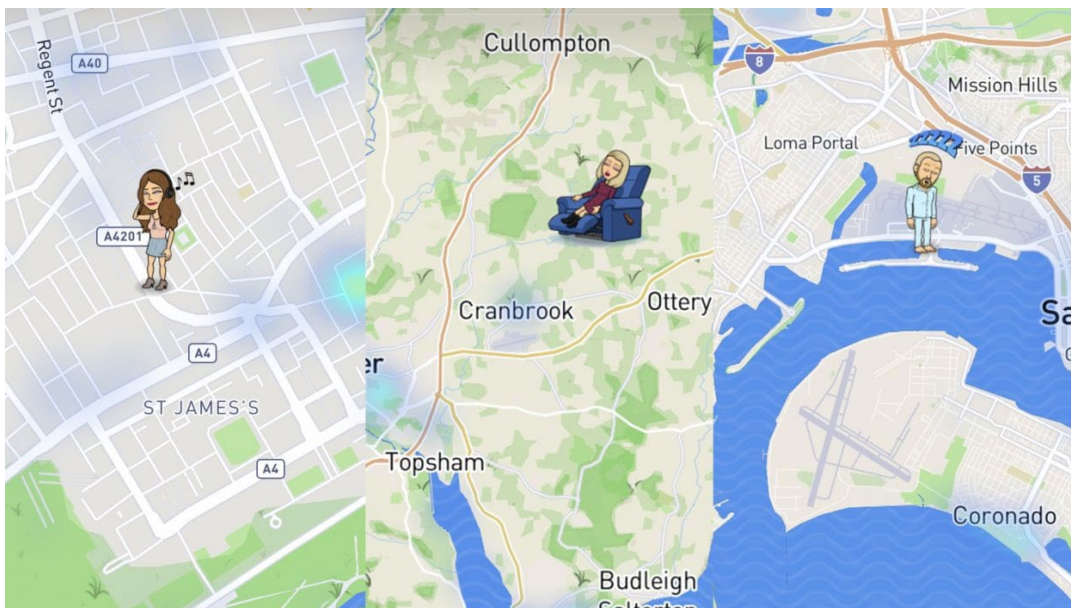
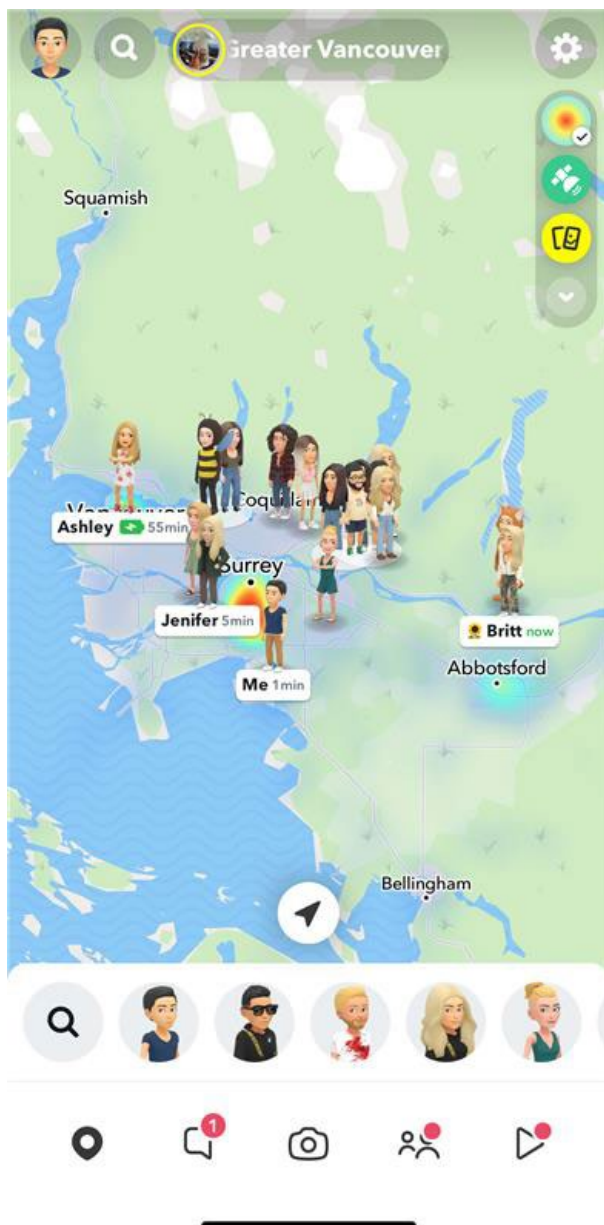


Photo from Mashable.

Below is an example of what the Snap Map looks like to a user from the mobile application while logged into their account.



The characters you see on the screen to the left are all friends of the Snapchat user whose account we are using to preview the Snap Map. All of these friends have the Snap Map enabled. They are represented by a Bitmoji¹⁶ they designed for themselves.

This is why it is so important that our children only communicate with close friends and family that they know and trust in real life on Snapchat.

Within the Snapchat Settings, users can turn off the ability for others to see their location by enabling something called Ghost Mode or only allowing their location to be viewed by certain friends (i.e., their best friend) and/or parents/caregivers or other trusted adults.

Ghost Mode is a full privacy mode that makes a user's presence on the Snap Map invisible to other users. This disallows other users from viewing their location, including users on their friend list.

The Snap Map is often used by SST Threat Analysts and law enforcement to find missing students by asking their peers to share their Snap Map with us.



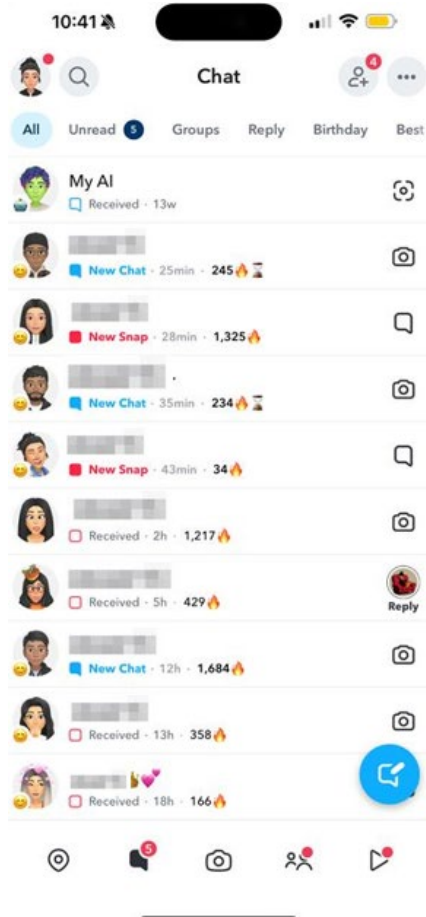
¹⁶ [Bitmoji](#)

Message Screen

Here is an example of what the Snapchat Chat screen could potentially look like within a Snapchat account.

As parents and caregivers, we can use the Chat Screen Icon Guide and the Friend Emoji charts on the following pages to see whom our children interact with most on Snapchat.

To assess your knowledge, try answering the following questions (answers in footnotes at the bottom of this page):



- What does a blue-colored notification mean?¹⁷
- What does a pink-colored notification mean?¹⁸
- What does a purple-colored notification mean on Snapchat in general?¹⁹
- How many days has this user's longest Snap Streak lasted?²⁰
- When was the last message received by this user?²¹
- Does this user currently have a Snap Story? How do you know?²²

¹⁷ Text or audio communication.

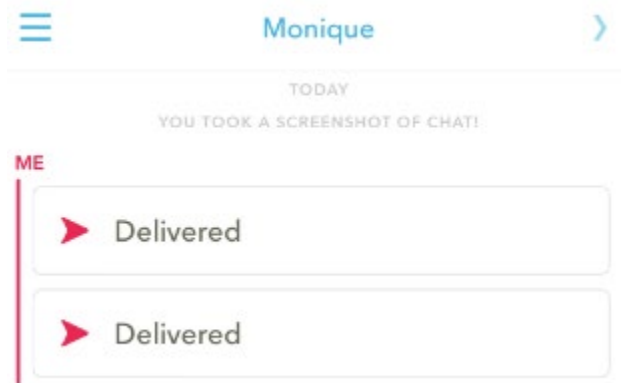
¹⁸ Photo communication.

¹⁹ Video communication.

²⁰ 1684.

²¹ 25 minutes ago.

²² No; there would be a round photo in the upper left-hand corner of the screen.



- Are the Snaps to Monique incoming or outgoing?²³
- What type of Snaps were sent to Monique (Photo, Video, or Text)?²⁴
- At the top of the Snapchat with Monique, there is a notification that a screenshot was taken of the chat – who can see this?²⁵





²³ Outgoing as they say 'Delivered' rather than 'New Snap' or 'New Chat'.

²⁴ Photo.




²⁵ Both the user who took the screenshot and Monique.

Chat Screen Icon Guide




Sent Icons

-  You sent a Snap without audio
-  You sent a Snap with audio
-  You sent a Chat
-  Depending on privacy settings, a gray pending icon may appear if someone has not accepted your friend request





Opened Icons

-  A friend opened a Snap without audio
-  A friend opened a Snap with audio
-  A friend opened a Chat




Received Icons

-  You have an unopened Snap (or group of Snaps) without audio
-  You have an unopened Snap (or group of Snaps) that includes audio
-  You have an unread Chat

Viewed Icons

-  Your Snap sent (without audio) has been viewed
-  Your Snap sent (with audio) has been viewed
-  Your Chat has been viewed
-  A Snap or Chat is pending and may have expired

Screenshot Icons

-  A screenshot has been taken of your Snap without audio
-  A screenshot has been taken of your Snap with audio
-  A screenshot has been taken of your Chat

Replay Icons



-  Your Snap sent without audio has been replayed
-  Your Snap sent with audio has been replayed

Photo courtesy of Snapchat

Friend Emoji Guide

Friend Emojis are determined by Snapchat to keep track of the status of a user's friends. These can change over time based on the interactions between users. Friend Emojis can also be altered in the settings of Snapchat, but this is what comes standard when an individual begins a Snapchat account.²⁶

Super BFF

You have been each other's #1 [Best Friend](#) for two months in a row. This is getting serious!

BFF

You have been each other's #1 Best Friend for two weeks in a row. Aww!

Besties

You are each other's #1 Best Friend. You sent the most Snaps to this Snapchatter, and they sent the most Snaps to you, too.

BFs

They're one of your Best Friends! You send a lot of Snaps to this Snapchatter, but they're not your #1 Best Friend.

Mutual Besties

Your #1 Best Friend is also their #1 Best Friend.

Mutual BFs

One of your Best Friends is also one of this Snapchatter's Best Friends!

Snapstreak!

You're on a [Snapstreak](#)! This appears next to the number of days that you and a friend have continually Snapped each other.

Snapstreak is ending

Your Snapstreak is going to end soon! Both you and your friend need to send a Snap to each other within 24 hours, or you'll lose your Snapstreak. Chats and Snaps sent in Groups don't count!

Birthday

It's your friend's [birthday](#)! This appears next to your friend's name on the date they entered as their birthday on Snapchat.

Photo courtesy of Snapchat.

²⁶ [How to change Snapchat Friend Emojis](#)

Instagram (“Insta/IG”)

Owned by Meta,²⁷ the popular photo and short video-sharing app Instagram has over 500 million+ daily active users.²⁸ If you see a youth scrolling up with their thumb on their smartphone looking at photos, chances are they are looking at Instagram.

**#love #instagood #beautiful #fun #smile
#photooftheday #instagramers
#selfie #pretty #lol
#picoftheday #instalove
#bestoftheday #best #beauty
#fashion #nofilter #pamper #cute
#salonselfie #selfie #throwbackthursday**

Hashtags (#) are used often on Instagram. This gives people a way to be introduced to and follow other users with similar interests. We recommend watching the video below for a general overview of Instagram.



Video by YouTube user Simple Alpaca.

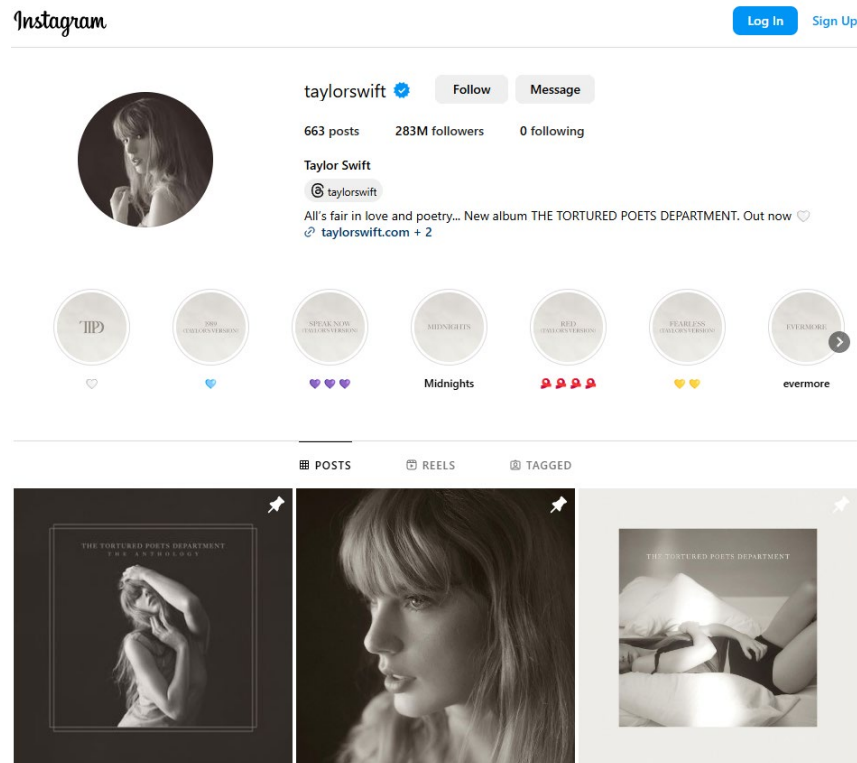
²⁷ [Meta Platforms](#)

²⁸ [How Many People Use Instagram?](#)

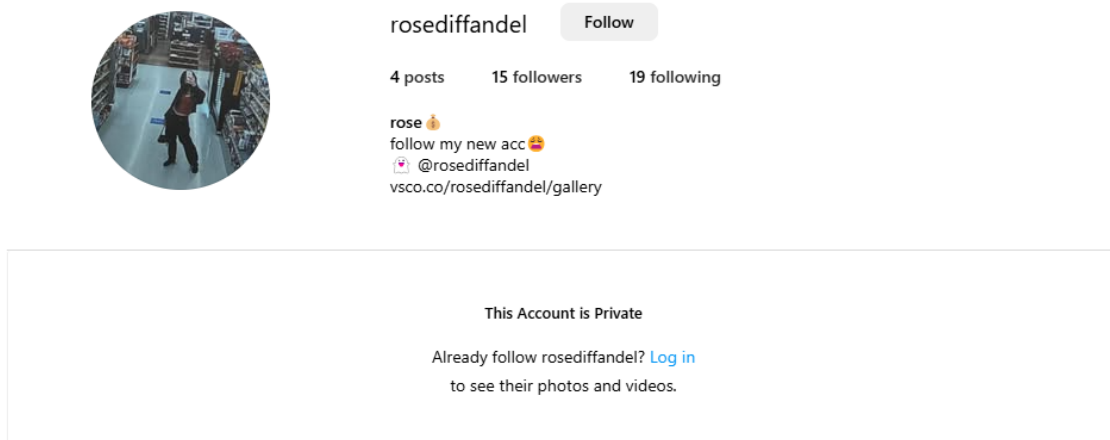
Privacy Settings on Instagram

On Instagram, users either share posts with everyone by having a public profile or only share posts with people they have approved to follow them with a private profile. SST strongly suggests our children have private profiles until they are ready to start using their profile as a portfolio for prospective jobs, for admission to post-secondary institutions, or other personal/professional projects.

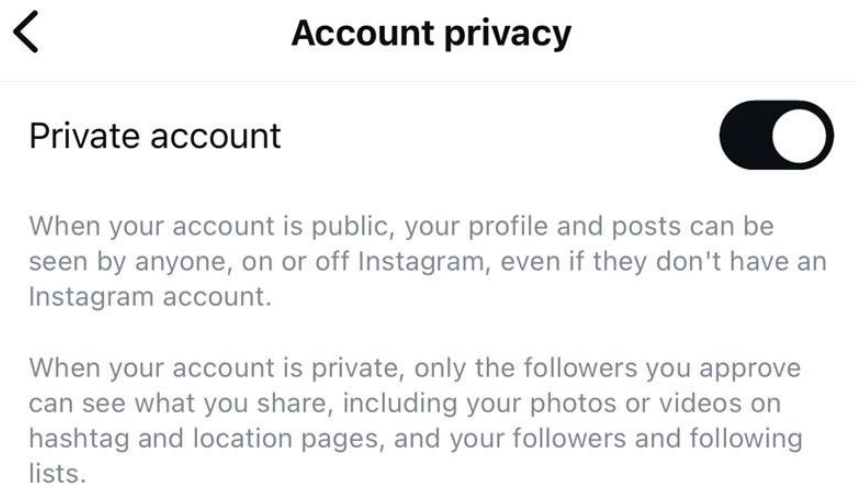
A public profile will show the account's content publicly on Instagram, even without logging in:



A private profile will show the account but not the content they post:



Having a private account on Instagram requires users to go to their account settings and switch their account to private. There, under 'Account Privacy,' users can toggle the Account Privacy switch.



Instagram Stories

Instagram users have the ability to post photos/videos to their “Stories” for the public, their followers, or a list of “close friends” to see. These stories are only visible for 24 hours wherein this concept was copied from Snapchat due to its popularity with our youth. Users can see who has watched their Instagram Stories and can receive poll questions, messages, and reactions from other users as well.



Photo by NapoleonCat.

Instagram Reels

Instagram Reels were added as a feature in 2020 and were originally 15 seconds long.²⁹ These are short videos with music included, remarkably similar to the style of TikTok videos. Instagram Reels can now be up to 90 seconds and can also be cross shared on Meta's other platform, Facebook. Instagram Reels are the fastest-growing feature of Instagram worldwide and are expected to have over 2.35 billion users each month.³⁰ Instagram reels rival TikTok surrounding posting short videos to which users have an endless scroll of options to see, and utilize this persuasive design so users can always stay on Instagram instead of switching to TikTok.

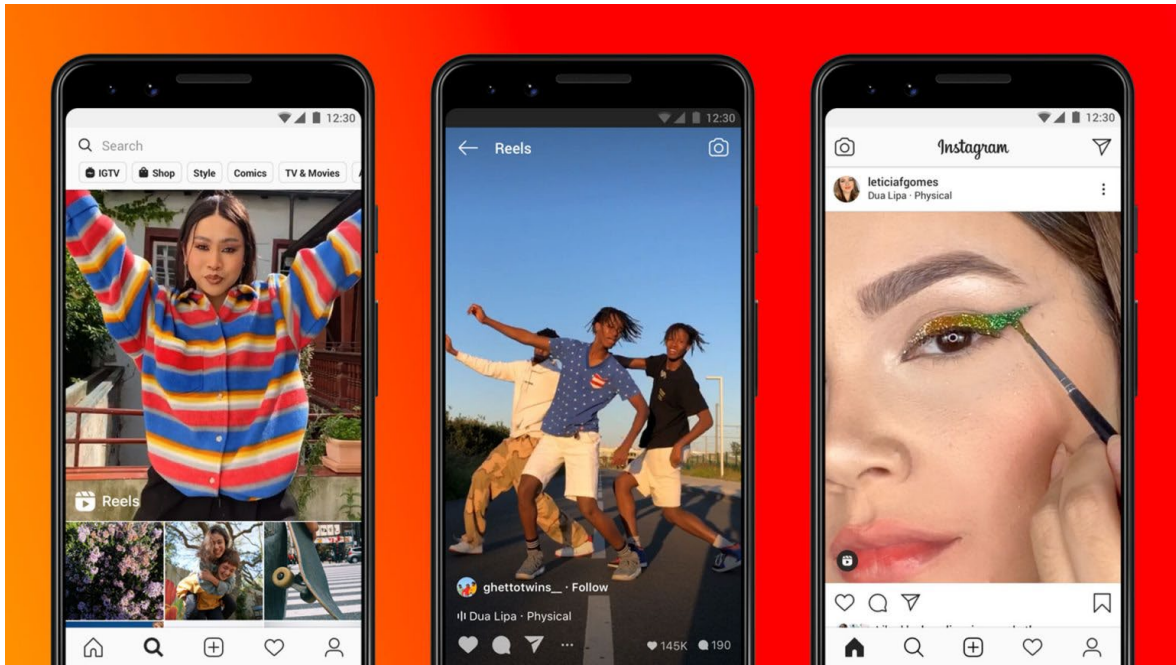


Photo by BuddyMantra.

Direct Messaging ("DMs")

Instagram has the option for users to communicate one-to-one by messaging privately. Direct Messaging, or 'DMs,' is a private message inbox within the Instagram app. This is a feature that allows users to communicate privately, like text messaging, or also the option to create group chats to communicate with multiple users at once. Yes, Instagram DMs are where our youth receive private messages from their friends and participate in group chats, but there is also the possibility they may receive messages from strangers. Furthermore, there is currently no way to disable Instagram DMs. If you do not follow a user, yet they message you, this is filtered into a section called Message Requests. Within this section, there is further filtration to 'Hidden Requests,' where Instagram may hide a DM from your generic Message Requests screen if it deems the message as potentially inappropriate.

It is important to note that photos, videos, and voice recordings can be sent through Instagram DMs, including from accounts that are not mutual (does not follow the user/the user does not follow them). Additionally, users can enable "Vanish Mode," similar to Snapchat's feature, which deletes chats after a recipient views them.³¹

²⁹ [Instagram Reels](#)

³⁰ [Instagram Reels Stats](#)

³¹ [Instagram Vanish Mode](#)

Nighttime Nudges

Instagram's Nighttime Nudges is a recent addition aimed at encouraging today's youth to reduce their late-night usage of the app. When a user between the ages of 13 and 17 spends more than 10 minutes on Instagram, especially in sections like Reels or DMs during late hours, they will receive a gentle reminder suggesting it is time for a break.³² These nudges are programmed to appear automatically after 10 p.m. and cannot be disabled, although users can dismiss them.³³ This initiative is part of Instagram's broader efforts to promote healthier usage habits among today's youth, complementing other features on Instagram such as 'Take a Break' and 'Quiet Mode.'

Threads

Threads is a recent addition to Instagram, introduced as a new option for conversation (similar to X, formally known as Twitter), where users can engage in real-time conversations. Threads offers the ability to post messages with a 500-character limit and videos with a duration of up to 5 minutes. Users are prompted to sign up for Threads through their existing Instagram account, enabling users to also share posts from Threads directly to their Instagram Stories.

³² [About Instagram teen privacy and safety settings](#)

³³ [Instagram will now 'nudge'](#)

TikTok

TikTok is currently one of the world's most popular video-sharing social networking applications, centered around short videos with popular songs or sounds added. TikTok reigned as the most downloaded app globally in 2024³⁴ and has been downloaded 4.92 billion times across iOS and Android devices.³⁵ With over 1.6 billion monthly active users³⁶, despite several incidents of data breach allegations³⁷ and being banned in several countries,³⁸ TikTok is not going away anytime soon.

TikTok has strategically marketed to younger audiences, and although users must be 13 years of age to sign up, the content is not filtered. However, TikTok does offer some form of parental control under their Family Pairing feature.³⁹ However, age-inappropriate content inevitably reaches 37.3% of its estimated audience who are under the age of 18,⁴⁰ as well as audiences who are potentially younger than the required 13 years of age, as you can lie about your age.

The average time a user spends on TikTok is 95 minutes per day,⁴¹ an increase from the average two years prior of 46 minutes.⁴² This time is spent either creating and sharing short videos or watching the existing plethora of TikTok videos uploaded to the platform already. Either way, the average time a user spends on TikTok is nearly 100 minutes every day. This time exceeds the amount of time spent on other social media platforms such as YouTube (48.7 minutes), Snapchat (30 minutes), and Instagram (33.1 minutes).⁴³ We recommend watching the video below for an overview of TikTok.



Video by YouTube user Simple Alpaca.

³⁴ [Leading mobile apps](#)

³⁵ [TikTok Statistics](#)

³⁶ [How Many People Use TikTok](#)

³⁷ [TikTok sued for billions over use of children's data](#)

³⁸ [Which countries have banned TikTok?](#)

³⁹ [How to Use TikTok's Parental Controls](#)

⁴⁰ [TikTok User Statistics](#)

⁴¹ [9 Stats About Average Time Spent on TikTok 2024](#)

⁴² [10 TikTok Statistics You Need to Know](#)

⁴³ [Average Time Spent On Social Media](#)

TikTok is an extremely popular app for our children, but there is also a growing number of adults on TikTok. More than 44% of users are between the ages of 20-39 years old.⁴⁴ Adults joining the app are not necessarily there to create a safe space for TikTok's younger audiences and may not even realize that children of all ages can see the content they choose to post.

Although TikTok states in its Terms of Service⁴⁵ that moderators will take down any inappropriate content, but it may take hours, days, or not even happen at all. This is something to consider when keeping in mind that more than one billion TikTok videos are viewed *every day*.⁴⁶



With the increasing popularity of video-sharing apps, there are a couple of different apps to look out for that are similar to TikTok, such as Triller,⁴⁷ as well as any apps released that can share videos with added music or sounds.

YouTube has also followed this trend with YouTube Shorts, which can be found on [Page 32](#) of this guide.

X (formally known as Twitter)

⁴⁴ [Global TikTok user age and gender distribution 2024](#)

⁴⁵ [Terms of Service | TikTok](#)

⁴⁶ [TikTok Statistics You Should Know](#)

⁴⁷ [Home | Triller](#)

X, formally known as Twitter, was purchased by Elon Musk in 2023 and was officially rebranded as X.⁴⁸ Since its release in 2006, the social media app has garnered widespread popularity. Users can post tweets containing text, images, videos, and links, limited to 280 characters. X allows users to follow other accounts and receive updates from them in their personalized timelines. X functions as a platform for individuals, organizations, and businesses alike to disseminate information, participate in discussions, voice opinions, and stay informed on diverse topics of interest.

X profiles include various elements found in other popular social media profiles, including a profile picture, a cover photo, a brief bio, a URL, a date of birth, and user location. While users are not required to provide all of this information, they have the option to do so.

X is commonly used by individuals to discuss ideas, trends, and current events. These are often posted in real-time on the platform as incidents occur. Furthermore, hashtags are commonly used on this platform to create different communities that discuss topics under the same heading. The effectiveness of showcasing world events in real-time on X is extremely helpful for SS/TA teams, as well as the hashtags feature.



Features of X

Hashtags (#)

Hashtags are a pivotal tool for categorizing content and fostering discussions around specific topics. School administrators should be aware of how hashtags can influence student interactions and the visibility of posts. When using hashtags, today's youth can join larger conversations, connect over shared interests, or engage in trends relevant to their personal lives. However, hashtags also make posts more discoverable, potentially exposing individuals to a wider audience. Understanding the use of hashtags can provide insights into popular trends, concerns, or topics circulating within a school community, aiding educators in addressing relevant issues and promoting a positive digital environment. A hashtag is a symbol added before a word or phrase to create a searchable category indexed by social media (in this case, X) and becomes searchable by other accounts.




Instagram, X, and TikTok are platforms where hashtags are most commonly used. When a user clicks on a hashtag, they will be shown other posts and profiles where that same hashtag was used.

⁴⁸ [Elon Purchases X, Formerly Known as Twitter](#)

Verified Accounts



Checkmarks

Blue or Gold Checkmark -   

While browsing X, users may come across accounts with a blue checkmark beside the username; these are called Verified Accounts. The blue checkmark denotes that the account has an active subscription to X Premium and meets the [eligibility requirements](#) to obtain a verified account.⁴⁹ The Gold checkmark indicates the account is an official organization, and a grey checkmark indicates the account represents a government/multilateral organization or official.⁵⁰

In April of 2023, X began winding down their legacy Verification program, and accounts that were verified under the previous criteria (active, notable, and authentic) no longer retain a blue checkmark unless they are subscribed to X Premium.⁵¹

Explore Page

The Explore Page is a feature tailored to highlight trending content, including tweets, news, and topics currently popular, either locally or globally. The Explore Page is curated based on user interactions and interests; this page provides school administrators with valuable insights into what topics students may be engaging with. By understanding the dynamics of the Explore Page, school administrators can gain a broader understanding of trends that could impact school culture and student behavior, while also remaining informed about discussions relevant to their school community.

Direct Messages (DMs)

Direct Messages, or DMs, allow users to send and receive private messages with other users on X. Users can send messages, tweets, or media from their personal devices through this feature and have the ability to create group chats to facilitate larger conversations.

Bookmarks

Bookmarks are accessible only through device or account access and allow users to save tweets for future viewing. Users often save posts they enjoy or wish to reference later. Each user can only access their own bookmarked tweets.

⁴⁹ [X Verification Guidelines](#)

⁵⁰ [Profile labels and checkmarks on X](#)

⁵¹ [X Verification Guidelines](#)

Lists

Lists allow users to customize, organize, and prioritize tweets they see in their timeline. Users can join lists created by others or create lists of their own. Once a list is created, the owner of the list can then add or invite other users to join. Lists can either be public or private, depending on the preference of the creator.

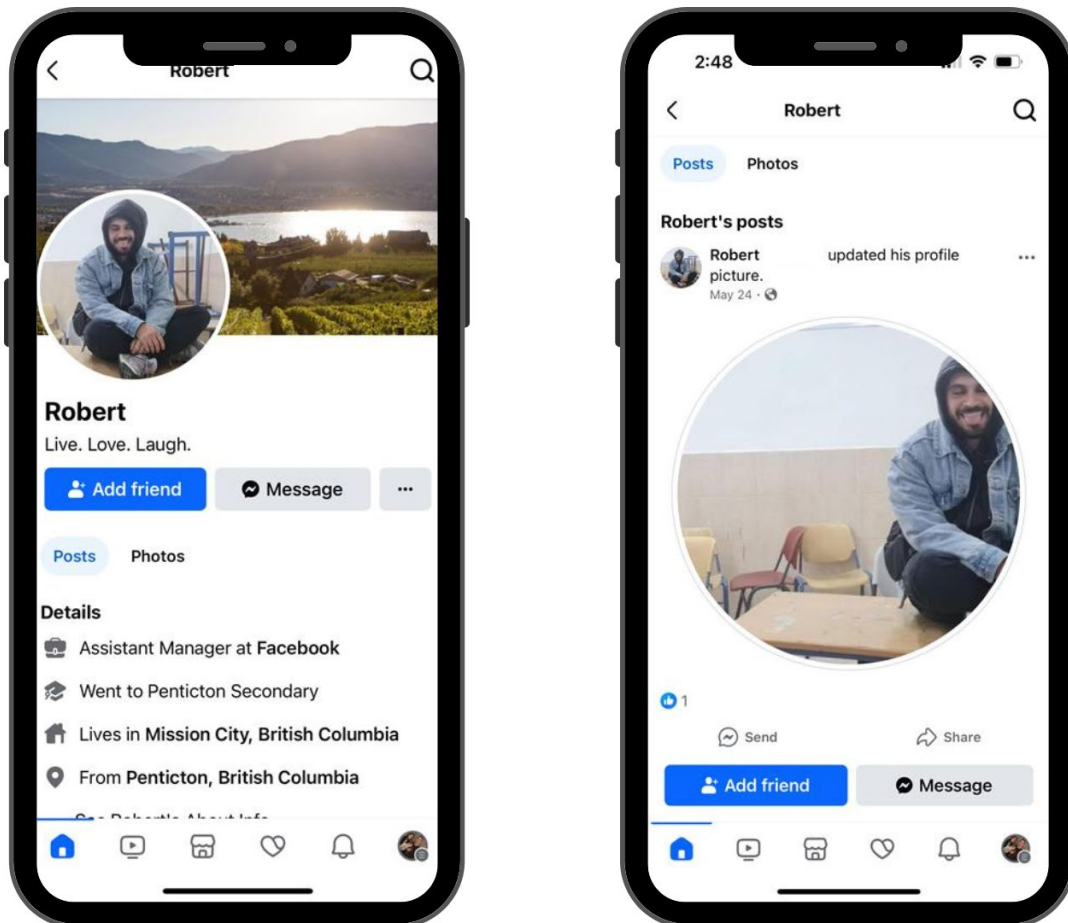
Profile Page

A user's Profile Page shows everything the user has tweeted/retweeted, media they have posted, tweets or accounts they have liked, and any tweets they may have been mentioned in.

Facebook & Facebook Messenger

Although less popular among youth in comparison to other social media apps, Facebook and Messenger are still highly active and are important to note. Both owned by Meta, Facebook, and Messenger can be used together under Facebook's web browser platform, or separately in their own respective apps from the iOS App Store or Google Play store.

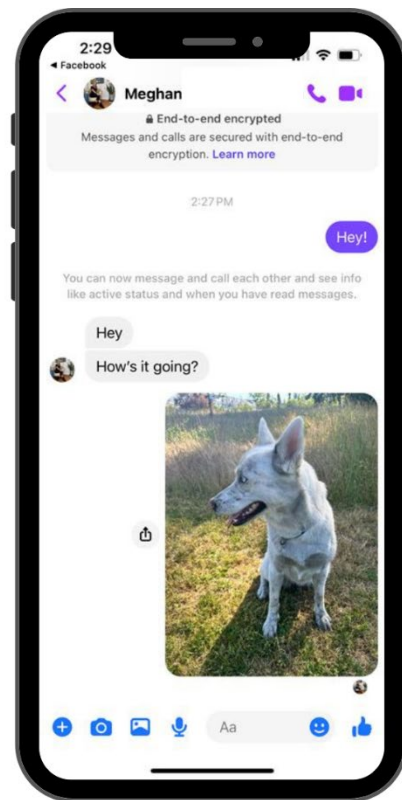
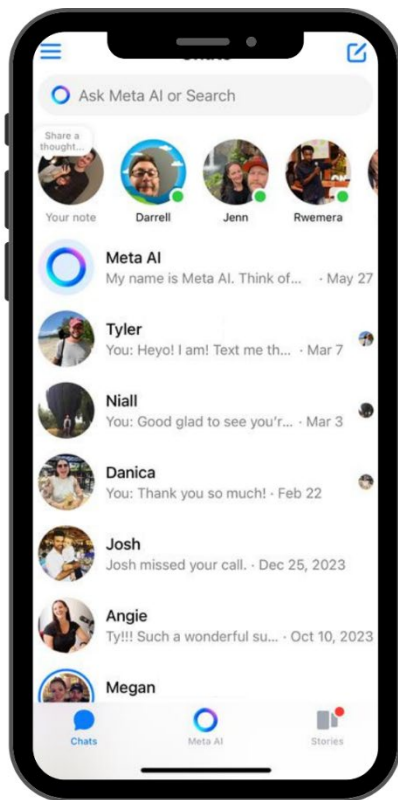
Facebook is a social media platform that allows users to stay connected with friends and family online. Since its creation in 2004, Facebook has over five billion downloads⁵² and is now operated under the umbrella company Meta, which also owns Instagram. Similar to Snapchat and Instagram, Facebook also has the option to view "Stories" which are posts made to share with your social media friends that last for 24 hours.



Messenger is a separate app which is an exclusively instant and direct messaging service, that automatically connects to a user's Facebook friend list. As Messenger is integrated into the desktop version of Facebook but not the mobile version, the separate Messenger app had 262.5 million downloads in 2023⁵³ and is used on mobile more frequently than the standalone Facebook app.

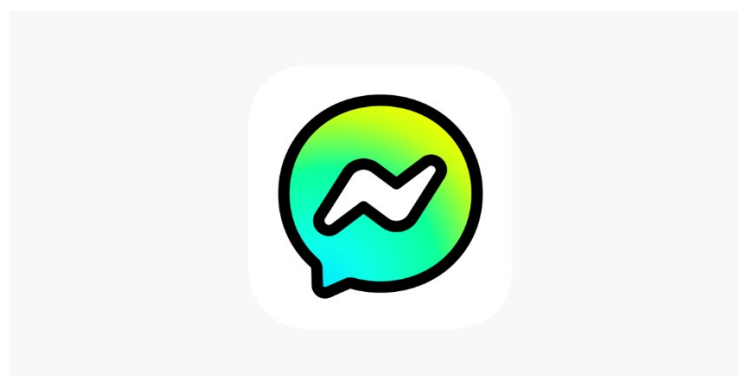
⁵² [Facebook Revenue and Usage Statistics](#)

⁵³ [Facebook Messenger - Statistics & Facts](#)



In 2017, an application called Messenger Kids was released. Messenger Kids is an application for children to communicate with pre-approved friends and family through their parents' Facebook accounts. Messenger Kids features include:

- Recent contacts and chat history: this allows parents and caregivers to see whom their child is chatting with, whether they are video chatting or sending messages, and how frequently those conversations happened over the past 30 days.
- Log of images in chats: this allows parents and caregivers to see the most recent photos and videos their child has sent and received in their inbox.
- Reported and blocked contacts: this allows parents and caregivers access to a list of the reporting and blocking actions their child has taken in the app.
- Remote device logout: this allows parents and caregivers to see all devices where their child is logged into Messenger Kids and log out of the app on any device through the Parent Dashboard.
- The ability to download your child's information: this allows parents and caregivers to request a copy of their child's data.



YouTube

PewDiePie, MrBeast, Markiplier, and DanTDM: these names may or may not be familiar to you, but if your child spends time on YouTube, they have likely come across videos by these YouTube “famous” creators before. The over-the-top humor, outrageous pranks, and clickbait⁵⁴ video thumbnails make these types of YouTube creators extremely popular and influential.

Owned by Google, consider YouTube the Google of video. Created in 2005, YouTube is currently the second most visited website in the world⁵⁵ (second to Google) with over 2.49 billion monthly active users⁵⁶ and approximately five billion videos are watched every day.⁵⁷

YouTube can be used as a way for users to pass the time, express themselves, learn new skills, and watch content they enjoy such as sports, video games, etc. However, it can also be extremely easy to cross over into watching less-than-appropriate topics and content. Parents should set parameters on video watching and moderate access to age-appropriate videos. It is vital to be aware that inappropriate content is frequently seen with the more time a user spends on the platform; therefore, there must be oversight for our children’s usage of YouTube. The video below gives a historical overview of YouTube.



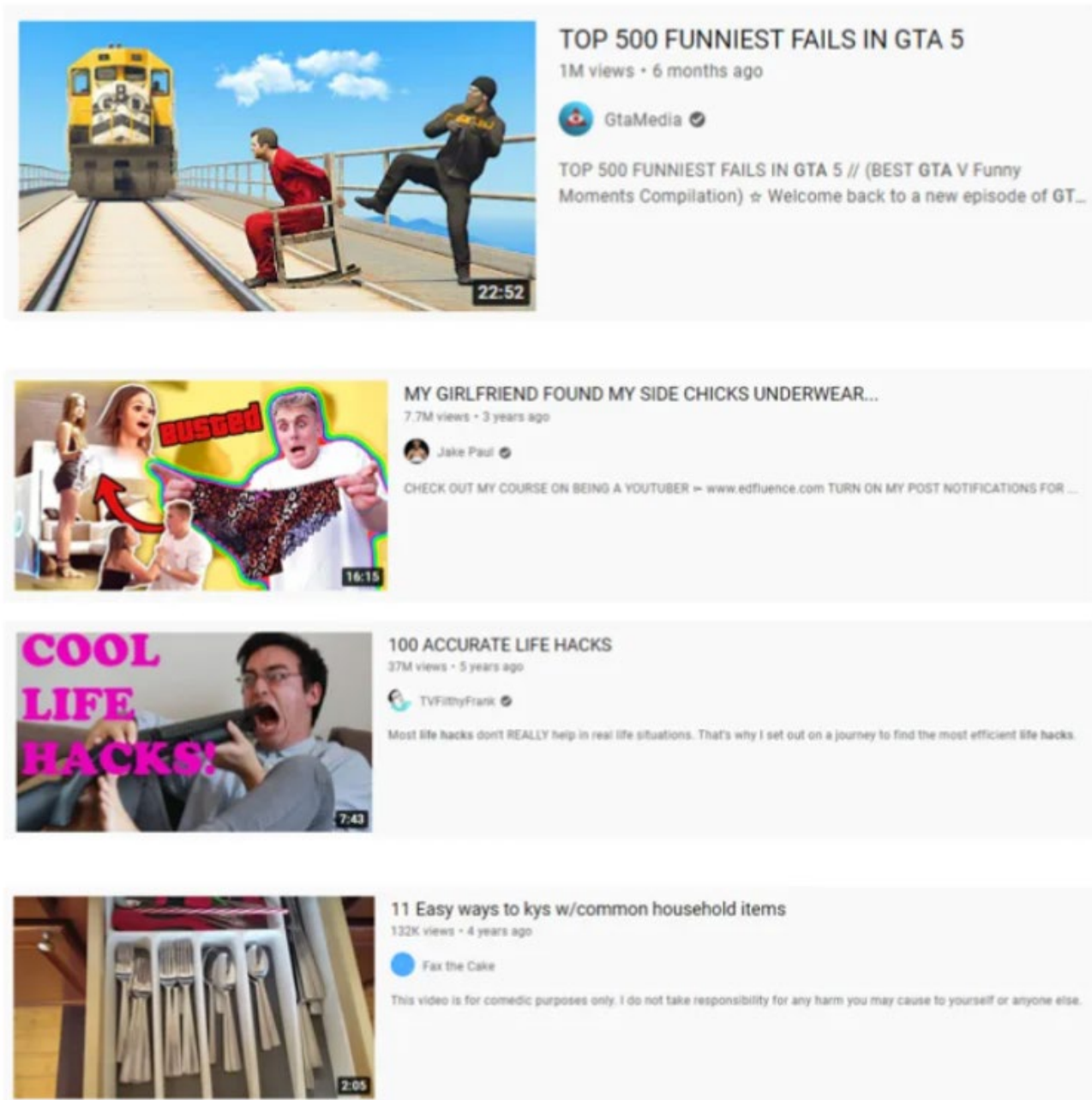
Video courtesy of YouTube user Creator Brain.

⁵⁴ [What is Clickbait?](#)

⁵⁵ [Top Website Ranking](#)

⁵⁶ [How Many People Use YouTube](#)

⁵⁷ [How Many YouTube Videos Are Watched in A Day](#)

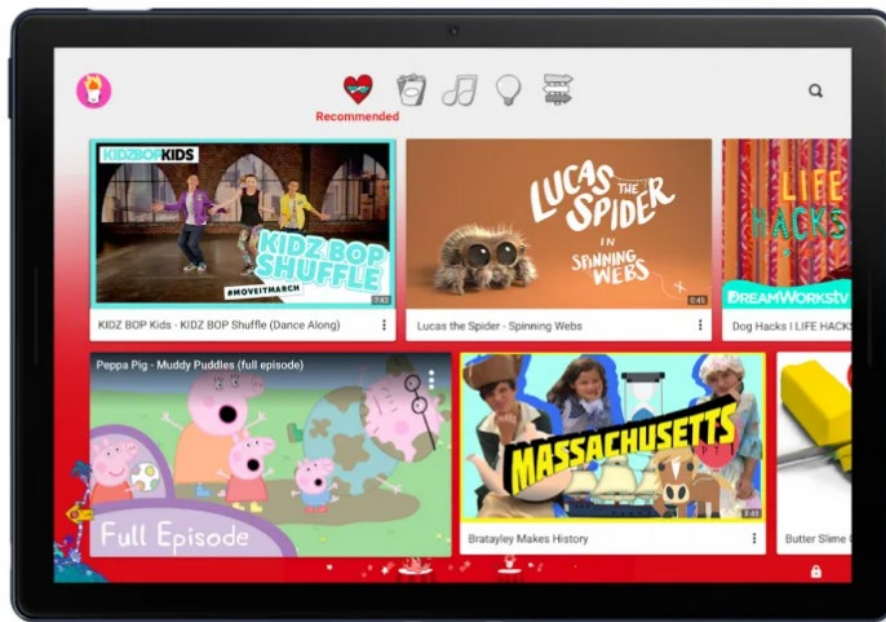


Above are just a few examples that could potentially appear as 'Suggested Videos' on the front page upon visiting YouTube. Users can watch YouTube passively without being logged into an account or can sign in to track the type of videos they watch and like, subscribe to channels, and upload their own videos. Note how the videos differ on the level they are appropriate for our children.

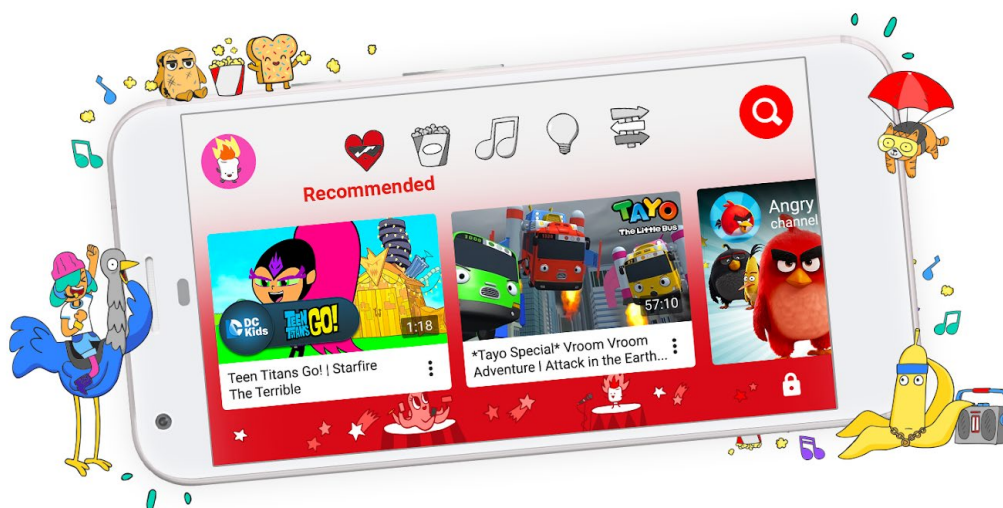
Although YouTube does offer features such as Restricted Mode,⁵⁸ it is best practice to download YouTube Kids for children under 13 years of age. This version of YouTube (explained in further detail on the following page) only displays content tagged as 'Kid-Friendly' by YouTube and their trusted 'Kid-Friendly' creators and advertisers.

⁵⁸ [Turn Restricted Mode on or off on YouTube](#)

YouTube Kids

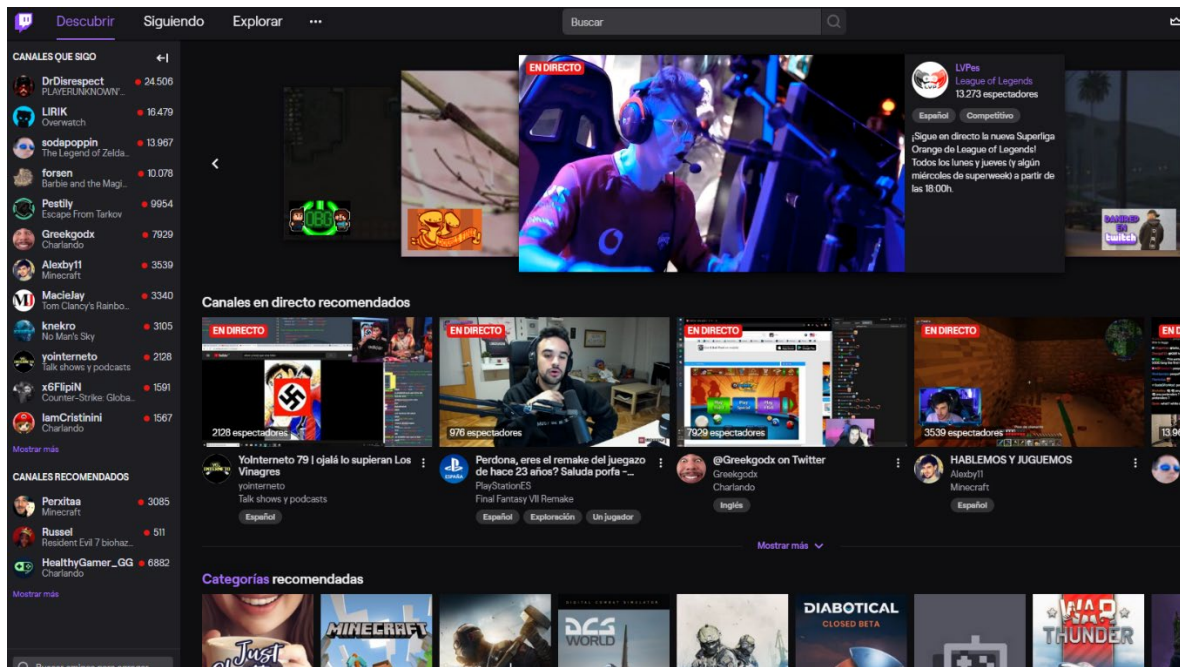


For younger audiences, YouTube has created an app specifically aimed at children between the ages of 3-8. The videos on YouTube Kids are heavily censored and focus more on family-friendly entertainment and learning. YouTube Kids is a separate application from YouTube and must be set up using an adult's email address. From there, the adult user can set up profiles for their children and even control in-app searching. Parents/caregivers can also set viewing timers to help monitor and control app usage. Important to note, however, is the possibility for even YouTube Kids to show our children inappropriate content. It was noted how after researchers worked with a multitude of kids under the age of eight, who viewed videos on YouTube Kids for an hour, 27% of the content was intended for an older audience.⁵⁹ But, overall, YouTube Kids can be an effective alternative to YouTube as it introduces our youngest to digital media on your terms as a parent and caregiver, and with specific, child-friendly boundaries.



⁵⁹ [YouTube Kids Common Sense Media](#)

Twit



Twit is a live video streaming service that primarily focuses on video games. During a stream, there is a streamer who is the person conducting the broadcast with or without live webcam footage and is typically playing a video game while engaging with their live audience in the live chat.

Viewers can chat with the streamer and other users in the stream's live chat log, in which other viewers can respond back to them, or the streamer may respond by voice as well. Twitch users have sent more than 28 billion chat messages since the streaming service's inception in 2011.⁶⁰ The average Twitch user can be found using Twitch for 95 minutes per day,⁶¹ which can include watching and/or streaming.

Twit is generally free to watch, and following streamers is also a free feature. However, there are certain paid subscriptions that users can use to give streamers a set amount of money per month to support their stream, called Subscriptions, as well as single-time payments called Donations/Tips and Bits. These can be purchased for real-world currency through the Twitch platform and spent within the website/app towards any streamer with this feature enabled.

Because Twitch is owned and operated by Amazon, any user with an Amazon Prime account is eligible for Twitch Prime and is given one free Subscription pass per month. This can be used in the same way a regular Subscription is used.

Although gaming is still the most popular topic on Twitch, there are also other topics, such as 'Just Chatting,' 'Art,' and 'Pools, Hot Tubs, & Beaches.' It is important to note that although some channels may restrict viewers to ages 18+ (monitored only by a button confirming you are over 18, where no actual age verification occurs), many streams that do not have an age restriction still broadcast inappropriate content.

⁶⁰ [Twitch Statistics](#)

⁶¹ [Twitch Statistics](#)

Discord

Discord is a free voice and text messaging application that is available as a desktop, browser, and mobile application (for iOS and Android users) with over 150 million monthly active users.⁶² Typically, Discord is used as a space for video gamers to chat either by instant message, voice chat, or video chat. Discord is now used for many diverse types of online communities, such as YouTuber/Influencer chat channels, art communities, and as a place to meet new people. It is estimated that 530 million Discord messages are sent every day (where this does not include the number of exchanged voice communications – the most common way to communicate on Discord).⁶³

Within Discord, users can create or join 'Servers' where they can invite as many people as they would like to engage in a chat together. Voice chat can be used as either an open mic or push-to-talk, a feature that only allows others to hear you by enabling voice via the designated button set by a user on their keyboard or mouse. Users can also share their computer screens with Discord.

Discord also offers a paid subscription service called Discord Nitro⁶⁴ that allows users to have Discord upgrades such as increased upload limits, customized emojis within servers, HD video streaming, Server Boosts, custom profiles, and access to games and activities to play within the platform with friends – and much more. Below is a video illustrating how Discord works.



Video courtesy of YouTube user Discord.

Features of Discord

The general layout of most features on Discord is similar to chat features in applications such as Microsoft Teams or Slack, which are often used by businesses, schools, and organizations to communicate.

⁶² [Discord Statistics](#)

⁶³ [Discord Statistics, Facts and Trends](#)

⁶⁴ [Nitro Benefits and Features | Discord](#)

Status Icon

The status icon is located at the bottom left corner of the app and is attached to the user's avatar or profile photo. Clicking on the avatar will open a menu allowing a user to change their status to either online, idle, do not disturb, or invisible. Users can also create a custom status to reflect what activity they are engaging in, what music they are listening to (by connecting with applications such as Spotify or Apple Music), or which game they are playing. If the custom status option is chosen, this gives other users the ability to join the games the user is playing, or even listen along to the music they are listening to.

Username

Beside a user's avatar is their username. In the example shown on the right, we can see the username of this user is CatsRCool#9339.

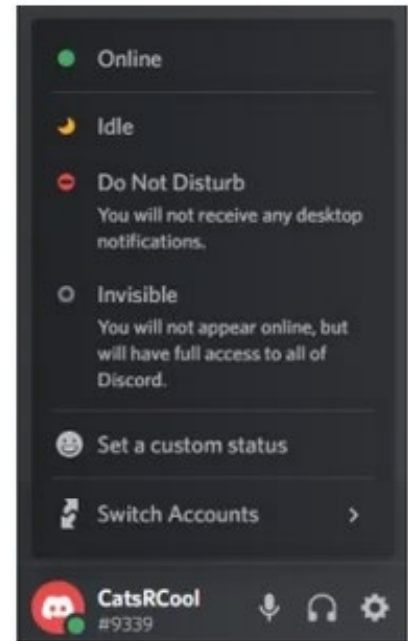
Discord usernames are unique in the sense that the username (in this case, CatsRCool) can be changed as many times as the user wishes without any cool-off period, and for free. The ability to freely change a username can make it difficult for SS/TA teams to identify individual user accounts. Remember the difference between a username and a vanity name though – the username will be unique also in the sense that only one individual on discord can have that username.

Chat Feature

Discord's chat features can be used in multiple ways, including direct messaging (DMs). From the home screen, located on the top left corner of the Discord application, users can see all DMs received from friends they have added. They can also see DMs from users they have not added as friends if their account settings allow for it.

DMs can include one-on-one chats between users or group chats with multiple users. Discord allows for up to ten users in a single DM group chat. Regardless of user privacy settings, a user does not have to be friends with other users in DM group chats to interact in the group chat.

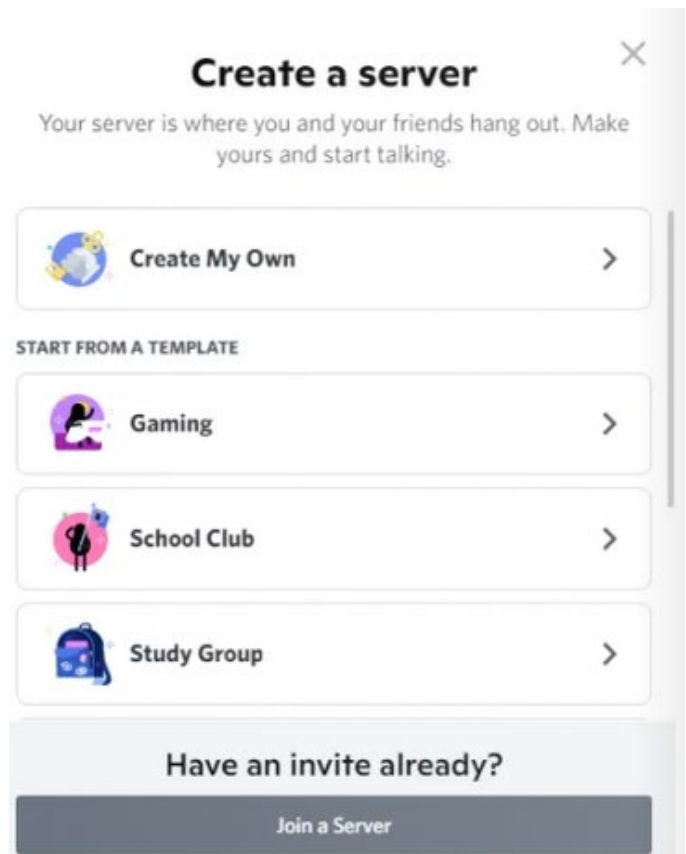
DMs and group DMs both have the same chat features and capabilities. Users can send messages, add emojis, stickers, and GIFs, send files, start voice calls, or start video calls. Voice and video calls can be conducted within a group DM with all users; however, not all users have to be in the call for it to stay active.



Creating a Server

If users wish to have more than ten members interacting with each other, they may either join or create a server. A server is a centralized communication channel that can be used for multiple purposes. Third-party applications and bots can also be used to bring in different elements to the server, such as polls, ticket submissions, chat games, helping moderate chat from spam or inappropriate content, and more.

To create a server, users can either create their own from scratch or start from a template pre-programmed in the application. Users can name the server any name they want, which can be changed at any time by users who have permission to do so.

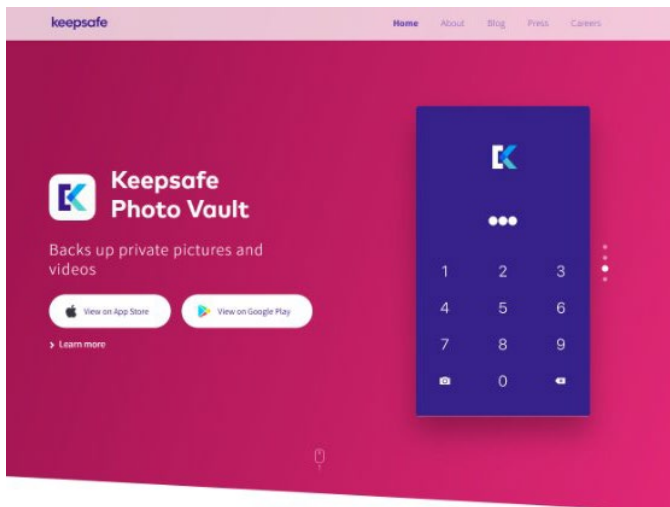


Vault Apps

Vault apps are mobile applications designed to hide private photos, videos, files, or other applications on a device, usually by using the icon of another app such as a calculator, camera, or notes. Vault apps are popular amongst teens in order to protect their mobile privacy by using app locking, private bookmarks, incognito browsing, cloud backup, and more. However, teens should be reminded that using technology is a privilege and they are not entitled to full privacy on their devices for their own safety. It is essential you are aware as a parent or caregiver what these applications look like, and to conduct digital check-ins for these apps. What is important to note as well is the popularity of our children utilizing Snapchat's 'My Eyes Only' feature as a version of a vault app as well.



There are two vault apps that are quite common for our children to use. One is Keepsafe⁶⁵, and another is Private Photo Vault.⁶⁶ It is important to note that for Keepsafe, if you input the passcode wrong when prompted, the app will take a photo from the front-facing camera; therefore, the next time your child logs into the app, they will receive a photo of you alerting them that you tried to access their vault app.

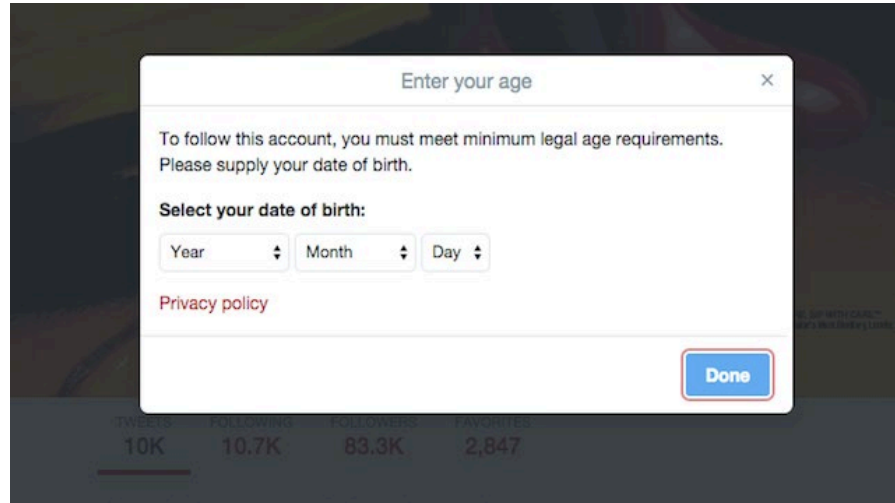


⁶⁵ [Keepsafe](#)

⁶⁶ [Private Photo Vault](#)

The “Rules” (That No One Follows)

Although many social media platforms and apps have a User Minimum Age Agreement⁶⁷ either to sign up or that are outlined in their Terms of Service, younger users typically bypass these to circumvent the platform’s efforts for age restriction.



Internet, Texting, and Social Media Lingo/Slang

LINGO	TRANSLATION	LINGO	TRANSLATION
2 man	Double Date	Kush	Marijuana
Addie	Refers to ADHD (female version)	Lit	Cool/Awesome
Alpha	Those at the “top” of the male socio-sexual hierarchy	Lock in	Become massively focused on something
AMA	Ask me anything	LOL	Laughing out loud
Ana	Refers to Anorexia (female version)	Low-Key	Quiet/Modest
Andy	Refers to ADHD (male version)	LVL	Refers to what age someone is
Annie	Refers to Anxiety (female version)	Max	Refers to Anxiety (male version)
ASL	Age/Sex/Location	Maxxing	Improve one’s physical appearance
Ate	You successfully did something/pulled something off	Merch	Merchandise
ATM	At the moment	Mewing	Face Exercise to improve Jawline
Aura points	A term used to determine how cool or not you are	Mia	Refers to Bulimia (female version)
Beige flag	A quality of someone that is weird/off-putting but not enough to break up/reject them	MOFO	Mother f*****
Bella	Refers to Borderline (female version)	Molly	MDMA
Ben	Refers to Borderline (male version)	Mood	Relatable feeling or situation

⁶⁷ [Age Limitation in Terms and Conditions Agreements](#)

Bet	I agree	NBD	No big deal
Beta	Someone who is weak/soft (in opposition to alpha or sigma)	NM	Not much/Nothing much
BF/GF	Boyfriend/Girlfriend	No Cap	No Lie
BFF	Best friend forever	Noob	Inexperienced
Bih	Short form of b****	NP	No problem
Bill	Refers to Bulimia (male version)	NVM	Never mind
Bob	Refers to Bipolar (male version)	O/	Used as a form of emoji to resemble the Nazi salute
Body count	The number of people an individual has had sex with	Olive	Refers to OCD (female version)
Bonespo or Thinspo	Utilized as a term regarding eating disorders that refers to images of bones protruding that are “inspiring”	OMW	On my way
Bop	A good hit, something you enjoy or can refer to someone who has had many sexual partners	Oof	Onomatopoeia when something bad happens
Bot	Cannot be trusted A gaming phrase used when someone is playing poorly	Owen	Refers to OCD (male version)
Brat summer	Term based on the singer Charli XCX’s 2024 album “Brat” but refers to an aesthetic trend of lots of partying and a “cool girl” lifestyle	Pat	Refers to Paranoia (male version)
Bri	Refers to Bipolar (female version)	Perry	Refers to Paranoia (female version)
Bruh	“Bro” but in a sarcastic way often	Ping/Pinging/Pingers	Slang referring to MDMA/ecstasy
BTW	By the way	Plug	Someone who can connect you to buying drugs
Bussin	Something is good or amazing	Pookie	A term of endearment as a nickname you call someone, or is used to describe something that is cute
Cake	Used to describe an individual with a large bottom	POS	Piece of s***
Cancelled	Bad publicity	POV	Point of view
Canon event	Moment in development that shapes an individual’s life	PPL	People
Cap	Lie	Pressed	Annoyed/Angry
Cat	Refers to self-harm (female version)	qq	A texting term for crying
Cat scratches	Epidermis cuts	Rex	Refers to Anorexia (male version)
CEO of [something]	Used to represent frequently doing something. Example: Leah is the CEO of sleeping in.	Rizz/Rizzler	To charm and woo a person
Cheugy	Used to describe something that is out of date/basic	RN	Right now

Crash out	A visible breakdown displaying erratic behavior	Roasted	To be dissed
Cray	Crazy	RT	Retweet
Cuffed	To be locked down in a relationship	Saints Culture	An extremist trend within the white supremacist movement where individuals who have committed extreme acts of hate-motivated violence are referred to as 'Saints'
CW	Current Weight	Salty	To be upset/bitter about something
Cyber	Sex online	Sam	Refers to self-harm (male version)
Dallas	Refers to suicidal (male version)	Scoom/Scoomer	Shooting/Shooter
Dan	Refers to depression (male version)	Selfie	Picture of yourself
Dead	Funny/Unbelievable	Sending Me	Something that is very funny
Deada**	Being serious	Sewerslide	Term to refer to suicide but is commonly used on TikTok to avoid content moderation
Deb	Refers to depression (female version)	SH	Self-Harm
Deepfake	A video of a person where their face or body has been digitally altered (almost always in a malicious way)	Shade	Disrespectful manner
Deets	Details	SHEDTWT	Self-Harm Eating Disorder Twitter
Delulu	Short for delusional and is used when someone has unrealistic ideas of things	Shook	Shocked/Surprised
Demure	Used on the internet to refer to a modest/reserved girl and associated activities	SHTWT	Self-Harm Twitter
DGAF	Don't give a f***	Sick	Crazy/Awesome
DM	Direct message	Sigma	Males who live outside of the hierarchy/are lone wolves but are very desirable
Drip	Good fashion sense	Simping	To have a crush on someone
DTF	Down To F***	Skibidi	Has multiple meanings of cool, dumb, or bad, and originated from meme culture through Skibidi Toilet which is a popular YouTube video
Ed	Refers to EDNOS (male version)	Skip	Refers to Schizophrenia (male version)
Edgelord	A poster on an internet forum – primarily 4chan – who expresses opinions that are nihilistic or refer to taboo topics to offend readers	Slay	Succeed

EDNOS	Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified	SMH	Shaking my head
EDTWT	Eating Disorder Twitter	Snack	An attractive person
Ellie	Refers to EDNOS (female version)	Snack/Meal	An attractive person
Emo	Emotional	Snap	Snapchat
Extra	Over-the-top	Snatched	Looking good
F4F	Follow for follow	Sophie	Refers to Schizophrenia (female version)
Faded	Drunk/Intoxicated	Squad	Group of friends
Fanum Tax	Forcefully deriving any unknown property from its rightful owner	Stan	A crazed fan
Fav/Fave	Favorite	STFU	Shut the f*** up
Fierce	Awesome/Positive Spirit	Stoked	Excited
Finsta/Spams	A secondary social media account	Story	Social media feature where you can add photos/videos that are viewable for 24 hours
Fire	Cool/Awesome	Styro	A self-harm cut that reaches the dermis
Fit	Outfit	Subway surfing	Trend of teens riding on top of moving trains and partaking in dangerous stunts in reference to the popular mobile game
Flex	Showing off	Sue	Refers to suicidal (female version)
FML	F*** my life	Suiclid	Term to refer to suicide but is commonly used on TikTok to avoid content moderation
FWB	Friends with benefits	Sus	Suspicious
Gas	Used to describe something that is cool	Swag	Being or having something cool
GG	Good game	Taking a L	Taking a loss
Ghosted	The relationship ended by someone disappearing and ending all contact	TBH	To be honest
GOAT	Greatest of all time	Tea	Gossip/interesting news
Go-Off/Pop-Off	To hype someone up	Terrorgram	Used to refer to a specific section of Telegram that is based on spreading propaganda to recruit members and coordinate violent activities that align with neo-fascist and militant accelerationist ideologies (White Supremacist focused group)
Griffrule	Defines how you should only express your true feelings online and not to anyone in person, and includes a subreddit for people to talk about their deepest secrets	Thicc	A sexualized term for a desirable body

GTFO	Get the f*** out	Thirsty	A synonym for someone who is sexually eager
GTG/G2G	Got to go	Tho	Though
Gucci	Something is good/cool	Thot	Used to negatively refer to someone with multiple sexual partners (that h** over there)
GW	Goal Weight	TJD	Anti-Semitic phrase representing “Total Jewish Death”
HBD	Happy Birthday	TOR	The Onion Router (browser used to access the dark web)
HBU	How about you	Troll	Internet bully
Hella	A lot/really	TTYL	Talk to you later
High key	Very interested in something	TW	Trigger Warning
HundoP	100% sure about something	TXT	Text
IDC	I don’t care	UGW	Ultimate Goal Weight
IDK	I don’t know	VSCO Girl	Girls that use VSCO
IG	Instagram	W/E	Whatever
ILY/ILU	I love you	WDYM	What do you mean
IMO	In my opinion	Weak	Amused
IMU	I miss you	Weimerica	Term used by white supremacist groups to represent a turn towards the United States aligning with the Weimer Republic ideologies
Isaiah	Refers to insomnia (male version)	Winter arc	Trend to promote positivity during wintertime
It’s Giving	Connecting someone or something's look or vibe with an ironic connotation	WYA	Where are you at?
Izzy	Refers to insomnia (female version)	Yeet	To discard an item at a high velocity
JK	Just kidding	YOLO	You only live once
Karen	Used to refer to an entitled mom	Zaza	Marijuana
KMS/KYS	Kill myself/Kill yourself	Zip bomb	A compressed file on a computer that takes up little space, but once it is unzipped it takes up a lot of space, causing computer systems to become overwhelmed and disrupted

If you have any questions about lingo or slang and their respected translations, please contact Safer Schools Together toll-free at 1-866-554-0848 or info@saferschoolstogether.com.



VIDEO GAMING

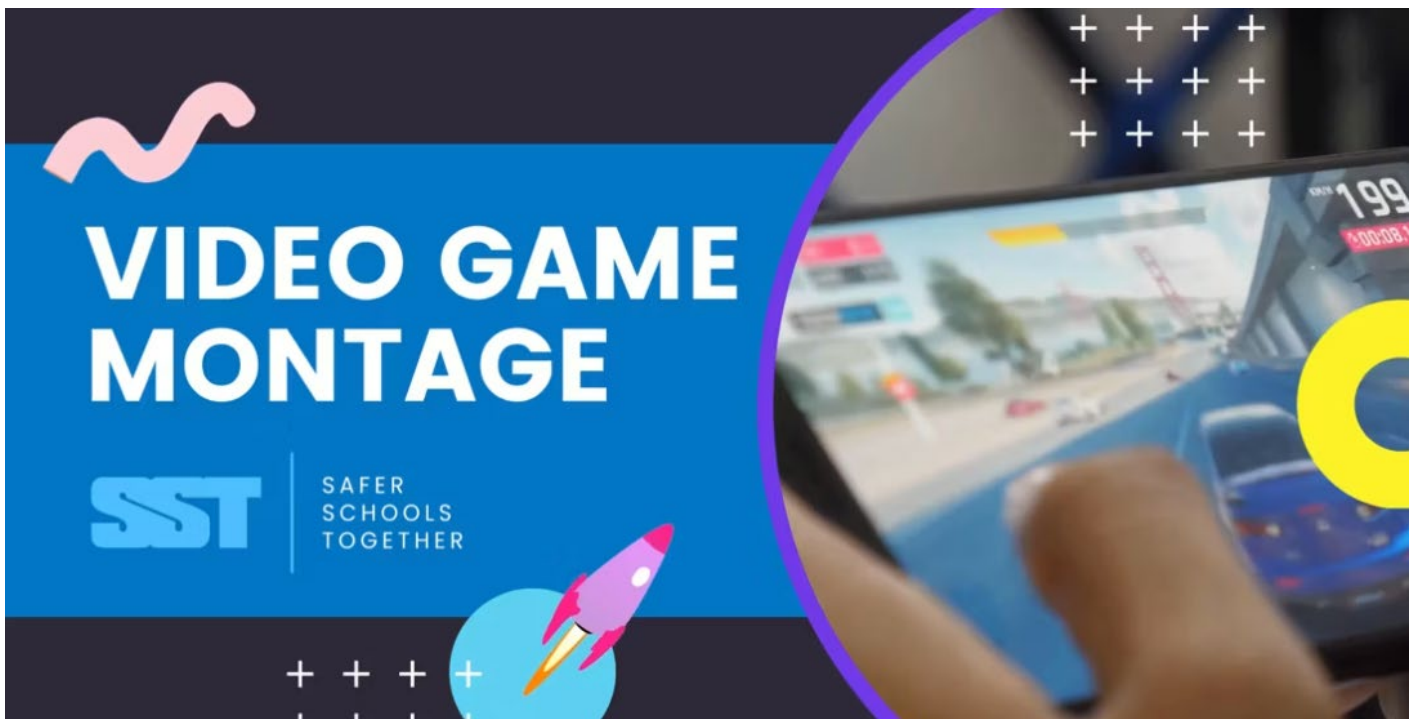
VIDEO GAMING

Video games with mature content advisories were once tightly policed by retailers across the continent using the ESRB Ratings Guide,⁶⁸ similar to age restrictions on R-rated movies. Unfortunately, alongside the proliferation of technological growth and unlimited access to video content, enforcement of these ratings has become non-existent. It is not uncommon to hear of some parents and caregivers deciding to purchase Grand Theft Auto for their elementary school-aged child! If you are unfamiliar, Grand Theft Auto V has in-game exposure to graphic violence, sexually explicit content and reenactment, alcohol and drug use/abuse, and strong language.

Top 10 Most Violent Video Games of All Time:⁶⁹

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Mortal Kombat (2023) | 2. Manhunt (2003) |
| 3. Postal (1997) | 4. Doom (2016) |
| 5. Gears of War (2006) | 6. Grand Theft Auto (2013) |
| 7. God of War (2005) | 8. Splatterhouse (2010) |
| 9. Dead Space (2023) | 10. Dishonored (2012) |

Watch our video below to receive an overview of what some of these video games look like:



⁶⁸ [ESRB Ratings Guides, Categories, Content Descriptors](#)

⁶⁹ [Top twenty most violent video games](#)

The Bad News

Research generally suggests that prolonged exposure to violent video games can make people more aggressive, desensitized to violence, and less empathetic. Experts also suggest that due to the global pandemic, online gaming and gambling addictions are on the rise.⁷⁰ In addition, video games have an increasingly adverse impact on our children in comparison to when our frontal lobes fully develop, and we play video games as adults. We must monitor the frequency to which our children are playing video games, as well as the content they are consuming within these games.

The Good News

Video games can provide several possible cognitive benefits including increased response time performance and hand-eye coordination, practice in visual-spatial skills, stronger visual memory, improved pattern recognition, and using trial and error to problem-solve more often. Moreover, platforms like Discord further allow for increased connection between video game players, and video games allow for more social interaction in general.

Moral of the Story

Content and context matter! As parents/caregivers, we need to be involved in which games our children are playing. It is important to enforce time limits and self-regulation while minimizing exposure to inappropriate and violent content. We want to reinforce pro-social games that can test and grow our children's creativity and enhance cognitive skills while remaining age-appropriate for our children's emotional maturity.

SST encourages parents to do their research on any video game before allowing children to play them. A detailed description of most games can be found through a Google search. Two of the most popular games played by our youngest children (aged 4-13) are Roblox and Minecraft, which have online multiplayer modes that include chat and messaging features which parents should be aware of and monitor at their discretion.

The Ratings Guide from the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)



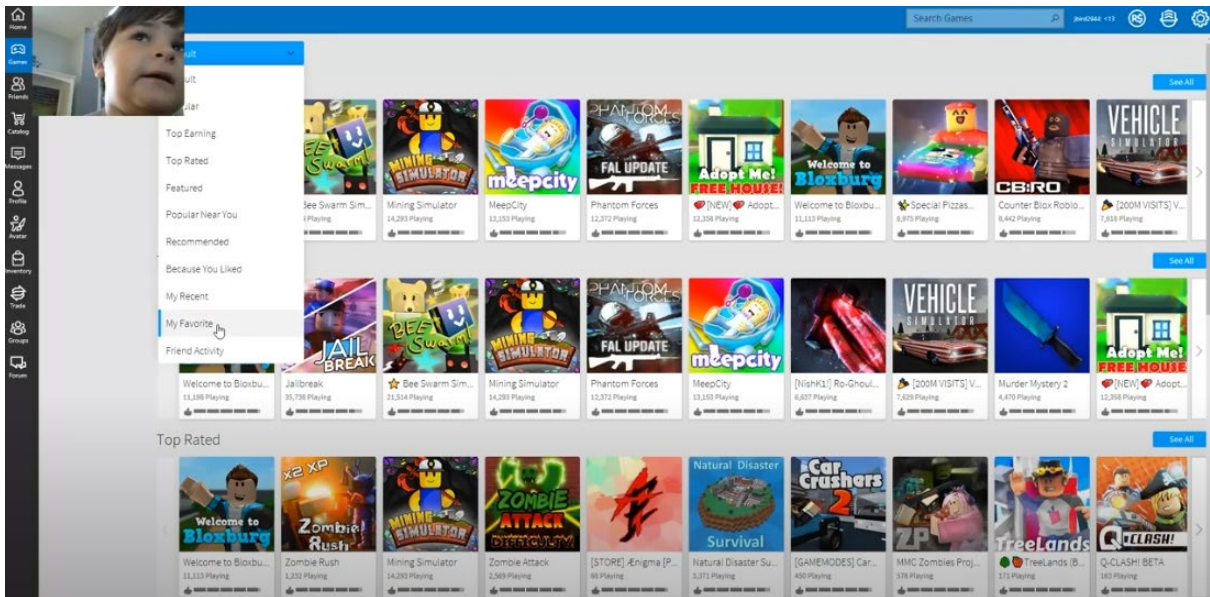
ESRB ratings are categorized into three parts:

- Rating Categories: suggested age appropriateness.
- Content Descriptors: indicates content that may have triggered a particular rating and/or may be of interest or concern.
- Interactive Elements: informs about interactive aspects of a product, including the users' ability to interact, the sharing of users' location with others, if in-app purchases of digital goods are completed, and/or if unrestricted internet access is provided.

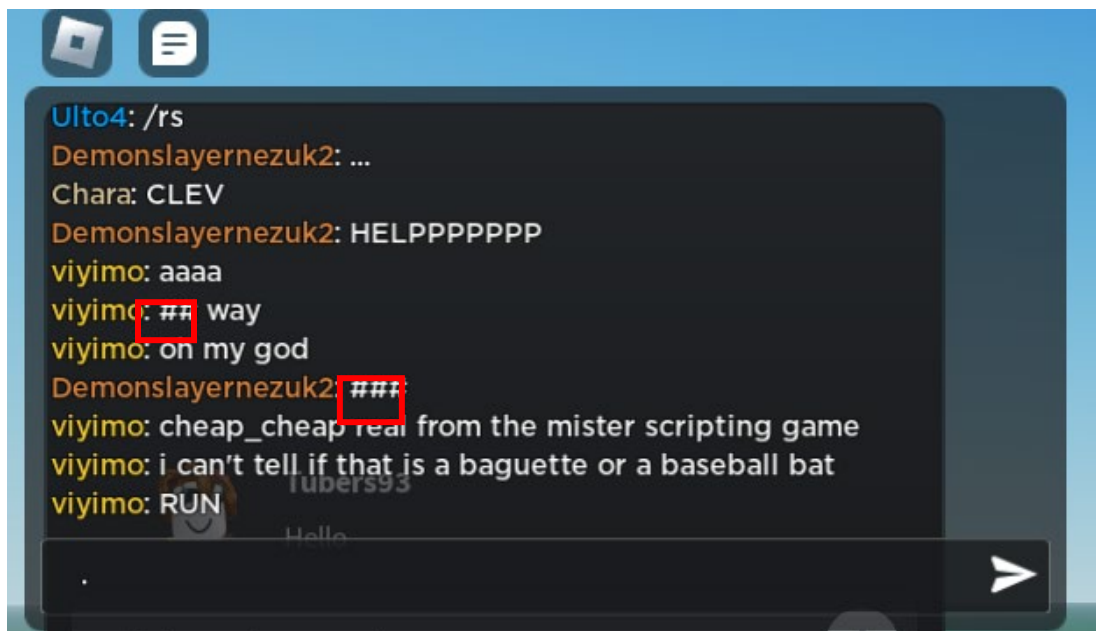
⁷⁰ [Online Gambling, Gaming Addiction Has Increased During COVID-19](#)

Roblox

Roblox is a downloadable interactive game platform that allows users to play multiple types of games inside the Roblox world. It is a creative, Lego-style sandbox environment for playing and creating games.



Roblox has built-in capabilities for friends lists, messaging users, and in-game chat. The chat function works differently depending on the users' age. For users 13 and under, the chat is built off a list of "whitelisted" words, preselected by the developers as safe for children to use. If the user is over 13 (or sets their birthday so it appears they are), then chat is more open-ended. However, there is still a built-in "blacklist" function that attempts to keep curse words and derogatory terms out of the chat.



Roblox privacy settings also permit parents/caregivers to control who is allowed to interact with their children. The user can adjust whether everyone, friends, or no one has access to communicate both inside games and using the platform's messaging system. By setting the appropriate age category and ensuring privacy settings are updated, parents/caregivers can limit interactions with other users.

Minecraft



Minecraft is one of the most accessible video games available, as it has sold more than 300 million copies across PC, game consoles (Xbox, Playstation, and Nintendo Switch), and smart devices.⁷¹ It is very easy to learn and can be played anywhere. Minecraft can be played either in the online world or offline as a single-player. Minecraft and Roblox are popular games with large audiences, as they are sandbox games where you have an endless possibility of worlds you can create, effectively meaning you play games *within* the actual game. Minecraft is an older generation game, and is, therefore, more popular with teenagers and older audiences compared to Roblox and Fortnite that are largely played by younger children.

Game Modes

- Survival: the player can level up, search for resources, and craft different weapons, tools, and structures. Players must fight hunger and monsters during the night.
- Hardcore: same as Survival Mode but the player only gets one life. If they die, the game is over, and they must start fresh.
- Creative: the user cannot die and has access to all the blocks and items available. With this game mode, users can create whatever they want without restrictions. The player can also fly to get from place to place faster.

Online Play and Chat

The multiplayer option allows players to play alongside friends. Players can build, mine, create, and even fight each other on some servers. All game modes and difficulties that exist in single player also exist in multiplayer.

Minecraft has child-friendly servers available, which you must request to join. This ensures random players will not come into the servers as they will not have access. Single-player mode is the safest option for our children as no one can join or chat with a single-player user.

⁷¹ [Minecraft Revenue and Usage Statistics](#)

Fortnite

Amongst one of the most popular video games available today, since its release in 2017 by Epic Games, is Fortnite. Fortnite has accumulated over 650 million players globally.⁷² Fortnite is available to download for free on PC, game consoles (Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch), and as a mobile game on iOS and Android. Fortnite should not be played by children who are not equipped to handle unmoderated text or voice chat, simulated gun violence, or high-stress situations.



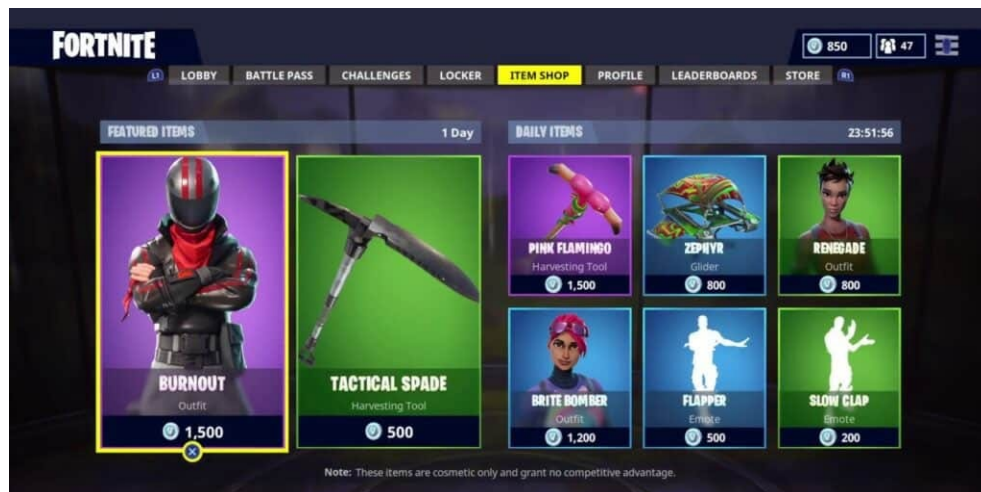
Game Modes

- Fortnite: Battle Royale – a Battle Royale (BR) Game Mode allows up to 100 players to compete in a player-versus-player (PVP) setting. Players can play alone (Solo), with a friend (Duo), or in a group of four (Squad). The objective is to pick up weapons, ammunition, and bandages to kill off other players and be the ‘last man standing.’ Players can hide in buildings and collect resources to build their structures and traps.
- Fortnite: Creative—Fortnite's Creative mode is similar to other Creative Modes. It is a sandbox-style game that allows players to build maps with free reign on what to put in their game, different types of game modes, and game time.
- Fortnite: Save the World – This game Mode allows four players to work together towards a common objective on various missions against zombie-like husks. Some of the objectives include fighting off the computer-generated “zombie husks,” saving survivors, and defending equipment.

Microtransactions

Although Fortnite is technically ‘free-to-play,’ it is important to note that Fortnite is a game that includes microtransactions. Players can opt-in to purchase a game pass that gives them special items, allows them to earn certain achievements, and gives them ‘loot boxes’ (boxes to open that include in-game items such as special emotes, dances, and gun skins). The currency in this game is called ‘V-Bucks’ and can be purchased with real-world currency.

⁷² [Fortnite Statistics](#)



Online Play and Chat

Players can communicate in-game through both text chat functions and a voice chat function. Players can mute other players if they do not wish to hear from them or can mute themselves if they do not wish to be heard. There is no moderation in either the text chat or the voice chat functions; however, users can report these interactions to the Fortnite moderation team for review at a later date.



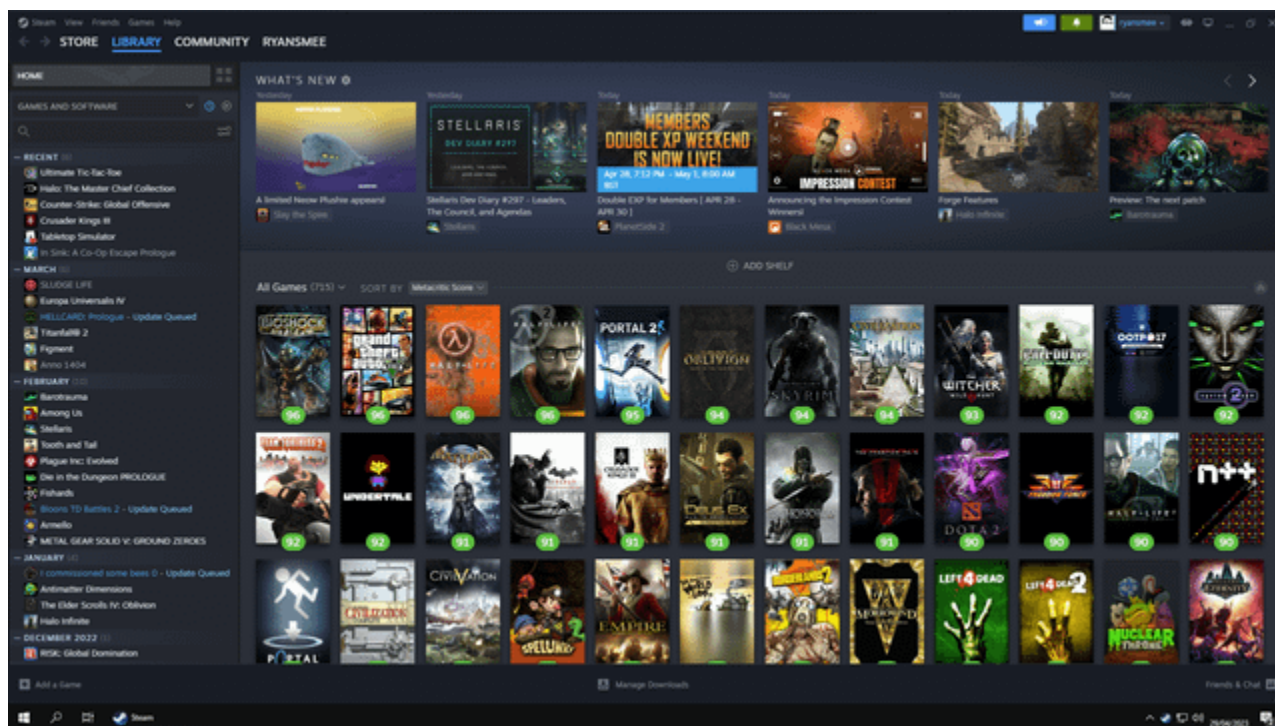
Steam



Steam is a free, downloadable software where users can purchase and download both paid and free games online. Steam acts as a cloud-based gaming library where games are stored and can be downloaded on any device that is associated with the user's Steam account.

Steam was initially released in 2003 by developer Valve and has over 132 million monthly users today after seeing a 10% growth in the past year alone.⁷³

Although gaming communications and ratings are based on the individual games downloaded, Steam also has its own community where users have profiles and can be identified by individualized usernames and profile photos. Much like social media, Steam profiles can be public or private. Users can also leave comments on Steam profiles and utilize Steam's private messaging service, which includes both voice and text chatting. Furthermore, users can also hide games on Steam⁷⁴ – something essential for parents and caregivers to know.



⁷³ [Steam Usage and Catalog Stats](#)

⁷⁴ [Hidden Games](#)

Doxing

Doxing (or 'Doxxing') is most commonly known in association with our children with video games that have online multiplayer capabilities; however, doxing has also become popularized among other subcultures of the internet such as forums, live streaming sites, and mainstream social media. It is important to be aware of doxing when using any form of the internet and understand how it can be prevented.

Doxing is a form of online abuse where identifying/sensitive information of an individual is released online with malicious intent. Typically, information such as one's first and last name, home and/or work address, family members, or even banking information is revealed to the internet in an attempt to intimidate the victim or subject them to dangerous and vulnerable positions both online and in the real world. Motivations of doxing can include personal, competitive, or political reasons. Doxing does not discriminate and web users of all ages, genders, and internet experiences can be targeted. Doxing is also one of the few forms of cyberattacks that can cause direct, serious, and lasting harm to its victims.

Searching and obtaining an individual's publicly available information and re-posting it online is not technically considered a cybercrime or attack; however, doxing can become illegal if this publicly available or private information is obtained through illegal methods such as hacking or extortion. Other factors that may cause doxing to cross the line into illegality are harassing or intimidating the victim, invading their privacy, or having the victim assaulted.

In order to avoid having your information or your child's information doxed, it's important to follow a few best practices for using the internet, including any video games that your child may be playing:

- Do not use legal or identifying first, middle, or last names as usernames.
- Do not post photos/videos of the interior/exterior of your home that may include identifiers such as your address, where your doors/windows/bedrooms are located within the property, license plates, mail, or locks.
- Do not post photos or videos with any identifying factors to your child's school such as the school name, class schedules, or classmate's faces that have not given permission for their photo/video to be shared; this includes online learning.
- If you are going to leave your home for an extended period of time such as a vacation, be cautious about who you share this information with including the dates that no one will be home.
- Do not list the day, month, or year of a birthday publicly.
- Do not post photos/videos of your computer screens, desk stations, or any other personal area where you may expose sensitive information such as mail, email, bank statements, contracts, or personal photos/videos.
- Be cautious of identifying factors to the clothing you wear in photos/videos you choose to share such as school hoodies or uniforms, work uniforms, after-school programs, or local causes.
- Always set accounts to private when possible in order to control whom you are allowing to view your photos/videos, views, and other information you choose to share online.
- Remember that your child's digital footprint begins when *you* post them – not just when they get their own social media account(s).

If you feel you or your child have been doxed, be sure to document the evidence and report the doxing to the platforms they happened on, as well as the appropriate authorities for cybercrimes in your area. Remember to frequently google yourself, as well as utilize [have I been pwned](#) to review if you and/or your children have been doxed. If you need assistance with this, please reach out to your local school district and they can follow up with us.

PARENT/CAREGIVER RESOURCES

As parents/caregivers, it can be hard to keep up with all the new social media websites and applications, video games, movies, music, and everything else our children have exposure to when given access to the internet. There are resources, including Safer Schools Together and Common Sense Media, that can be a huge help when trying to understand current trends in the online world.



Safer Schools Together

[Safer Schools Together](#)'s Parent Resources include a library of many constantly updated resources such as Raising Digitally Responsible Youth, [Sexting Safety Agreement](#), [Protect your Privacy](#), [Social Media Checklist for Parents/Caregivers](#), [Family Media Agreement](#), and more.



Common Sense Media

[Common Sense Media](#) is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to helping kids thrive in a rapidly changing world. Their valuable resources include detailed explanations and reviews of movies, books, video games, TV shows, social media, apps, and more from experts as well as contributing parents and students. If you are unsure if your child is emotionally mature enough for a movie, book, video game, TV show, social media platform, etc. it is worth checking out Common Sense Media to review the content and age recommendations alongside the ESRB discussed within the Video Games section of this guide.



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Digital Threat Assessment