

ARE YOUR KIDS SAFE ONLINE?

Unsafe Phone Applications to Look Out For



Introduction

There are many social media applications that play a powerful role in how teenagers access information, communicate with others, and express themselves. All social media platforms have features that can be dangerous without parental guidance and supervision. While many apps are designed for entertainment and connection- some of these apps can expose users to risks. These applications are driven by a specific algorithm to keep users continuously engaged. It is important to understand which apps are safe or why they are unsafe.

1. SnapChat: This app can be safe if monitored by a parent/guardian and with supervision. Pictures and messages can disappear if one or both parties decide to save the content. "Disappearing" messages can appeal to kids and can encourage them to share explicit and risky photos, but these photos can still be screenshotted and saved by the receiver.
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SnapChat also has a feature, known as "Snap Map," which can share your child's location to others.

2. Discord: Discord is designed for adult gamers. Discord can be unsafe because it can expose kids to cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and predators due to its public servers. Oftentimes, there is a lack of age restriction verification on most of its servers and can lead to direct messaging capabilities that allow strangers to contact children easily. Strangers can easily access children through its public servers which can potentially lead to manipulation or grooming attempts. It can lead to cyberbullying as conversations and interactions can be difficult to monitor.
3. Roblox: While there are features for safety and parental controls, Roblox can be difficult to monitor and is considered unsafe due to its exposure to inappropriate content, online predators, and financial exploitation. Predators are known to use Roblox to groom children and there are themes or materials that are inappropriate and not suitable for children. Users create and publish their own games, and some of these games have themes that are violent or sexual. There have been reports of inappropriate sexual content that appear in Roblox games and certain game rooms.
4. Instagram: While Instagram can help the younger generation remain connected to one another, however, Instagram continues to pose serious risk due to its high exposure to harmful content. Instagram's algorithm promotes an unrealistic perception, unhealthy behaviors, and body image issues. Instagram rolled out a new feature called "Teen Accounts" which should prevent teenagers under the age of 18 from being exposed to harmful content online, but this feature does not work if children and teenagers are signing up with fake accounts and inaccurate birthdays. Children and teenagers can still be exposed to predators, exploitations and normalize self-harm and eating disorders.

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5. Tik Tok: Tik Tok is an application that has been engineered to keep our brains stimulated constantly. It can be highly addictive. It promotes endless scrolling by showcasing endless videos in short bursts. The algorithm is based on the user's viewing habits which can quickly spiral if the user is spending too much time scrolling. Tik Tok is known to cause sleep disruptions due to its excessive screen time which can correlate to poor academic performance.