

7 Dangerous Apps That Parents Need to Know About

A look into the some of the scariest Apps for your kids

I work in public relations at Cook Children's. It's my job to be on social networking sites, peruse the internet and keep up with the latest Apps offered on smartphones. It's a great job and I love what I do, but over the last couple years, I have learned so much about the dangers of Smart Phone Apps. It's downright scary.

Technology, especially if you're a little behind the times, can be very deceptive. Your kids may be downloading Apps that you think are innocent and just a simple way for them to keep in contact with their buddies, but unfortunately, this isn't always the case.

To keep your children safe, it's best that you monitor their phone. Look through their apps, texts and pictures. They may feel that you're invading their privacy, but let's be honest... You're paying the phone bill, so you can do whatever you want! So, as you monitor your kid's phone, keep an eye out for these 7 apps you may not be aware of, that in my opinion are very dangerous:

- **Yik Yak** - This App is one of the newest and one of the most dangerous. It allows users to post text-only Yaks of up to 200 characters. The messages can be viewed by the 500 Yackers who are closest to the person who wrote the Yak, as determined by GPS tracking. Users are exposed to - and contributing -sexually explicit content, abusive language and personal attacks so severe that schools are starting to block the App on their Wi-Fi. Although the posts are anonymous, kids start revealing personal information as they get more comfortable with other users.
- **SnapChat** - This App allows users to send photos that will disappear after 10 seconds. Once the recipient opens the picture, the timer starts. Then it's gone. From both the sender's phone and the recipient's phone. However, the recipient can take a screen shot of the photo and have it to share with others. This App enables kids to feel more comfortable "sexting" with peers.
- **KiK Messenger** - This is a private messenger app and is coveted by those under 18 for a number of reasons. The App allows kids to send private messages that their parents can't see. There is very little you can do to verify the identity of someone on Kik, which obviously poses the risk of sexual predators chatting with your child. And again, this is an easy tool for sexting.
- **Poof** -The Poof App allows users to make Apps disappear on their phone with one touch. Kids can hide every app they don't want you to see on their phone. All they have to do is open the App and select the ones they don't want you to see. Very scary! The good news

THE FATHER KNOWS BEST

about this App is it is no longer available, which isn't uncommon for these types of Apps. But, if it was downloaded before it was deleted from the App store, your child may still have it. Keep in mind that Apps like this are created and then terminated pretty quickly by Android and Apple stores, but there are similar ones being created constantly. Some other names include: *Hidden Apps*, *App Lock* and *Hide It Pro*.

- **Omegle** - This App has been around since 2008, with video chat added in 2009. When you use Omegle you do not identify yourself through the service - chat participants are only identified as "You" and "Stranger". You don't have to register for the App. However, you can connect Omegle to your Facebook account to find chat partners with similar interests. When choosing this feature, an Omegle Facebook App will receive your Facebook "likes" and try to match you with a stranger with similar likes. This is not okay for children. There is a high risk of sexual predators and you don't want your kids giving out their personal information, much less even talking to strangers.
- **Whisper** - This is a meeting App that encourages users to post secrets. You post anonymously, but it displays the area you are posting from. You can search for users posting within a mile from you. A quick look at the App and you can see that online relationships are forming constantly on this App, but you never know the person behind the computer or phone. One man in Washington was convicted of raping a 12-year-old girl he met on this App just last year.
- **Down** - This application, which used to be called "Bang with Friends," is connected to Facebook. Users can categorize their Facebook friends in one of two ways: they can indicate whether or not a friend is someone they'd like to hang with or someone they are "down" to hook up with. The slogan for the App: "The anonymous, simple, fun way to find friends who are down for the night." If that alone doesn't scare you, I don't know what will!

I know it's overwhelming to keep up with your kids and their online habits. But just remember to check their phones often, and even more importantly have real life conversations with them. Discuss the dangers of the Apps and make sure they understand the need to keep personal information private.

Kristin Peaks