Handy Handouts®

Hidden Dangers Inside the Apps Your Children May be Using
Online Safety Tips for Parents

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Understanding the ins and outs of apps for social media and related sites can be a daunting and never-ending task. Children and young adults are becoming more aggressive in using social media without truly understanding its potential dangers. Our children are constantly seeking interaction through social media, games, and sharing of personal information with people they may or may not know. While constantly posting their locations, activities, and photos, most young people are oblivious to just how vulnerable they are to the dark side of the World Wide Web. The *Family Online Safety Institute,* https://www.fosi.org/ recommends that parents engage in **"7 Steps to Good Digital Parenting"** in keeping abreast of their children's digital use. The following ideas and suggestions will help you work towards being a more informed digital parent.

1. **Talk with your children** openly and honestly about your concerns with social media and its hidden dangers. Discuss with your children what they can and cannot do regarding their interaction with others.
2. **Educate yourself.** If you do not have first-hand information of an app or website, download it and see for yourself what its function or purpose really is.
3. **Engage parental controls.** On ALL Android and Apple devices, you can create a password that allows you to enable/disable apps and phone functions. From there, you can create a pin that allows you to filter age-appropriate content and apps.
4. **Friend and follow your children on social media** so you can see everything that your children post, share, or receive. Respect their online space and refrain from commenting, but your goal and responsibility is to teach your children how to use social media appropriately and protect them from potential dangers.
5. **Explore and share the internet with your children** by finding apps and sites to use as a family. Take the time to teach them what you know about technology and, at the same time, learn what they know.
6. **Be a good digital role model.** Spend more time unplugged from your devices. However, when you do plug in, show your children how to use technology productively by seeking answers to questions, evaluating information, and solving problems.
7. **Set ground rules and the penalties for breaking them.** Create an internet safety contract as you would a chore chart or family job list. Its purpose is simply to establish ground rules for internet safety including (1) information children can and cannot share online, (2) how to be good digital citizens, and (3) the consequences if they violate the rules.

Monitor and manage your digital footprint. By visiting different sites and apps, you automatically create a passive digital footprint without even knowing it. It can reveal your internet history, IP address, location, and make accessible the information stored on your device. An active footprint is the information you share and control. The Family Online Safety Institute, https://www.fosi.org/ has suggestions for cleaning up your passive digital footprint by: checking privacy settings, using strong passwords, updating software, and consistently maintaining your device!

Be an app detective.

There are well over five million apps, but not all apps are equal in quality or purpose. Not all apps are genuine, and many apps hold dark 'secrets' parents need to know. Search the internet for "apps parents should know about" and prepare to be amazed at the list of apps that are inappropriate for any age! The underlying content of some of the most innocent-looking apps is shocking and hides serious dangers, as they promote cyberbullying, sexting, pornography, and references to drugs and alcohol consumption.

Even more upsetting is some of these apps allow users to (1) impersonate others, (2) access the app owner's contact list, (3) post comments or cyber threats anonymously, and (4) force users to view pornographic or disconcerting videos before progressing to higher levels inside the app. The most disturbing app found in conducting research for this article is one frequently monitored by child predators. These predators interact inappropriately with children and bully them into completing game levels where the final task is suicide!

Parents must also be aware that anyone can gain access to these the apps, regardless of age, because no one monitors the minimum age requirements. Apps claiming they are for younger ages may be also be a 'front' or disguise for child predators.

Apps change and update periodically. Frequently, however, app developers will discontinue apps that receive bad reviews or reports only to immediately replace them with new, equally inappropriate ones. Parents must keep an eye on *all* apps, regardless how innocent they appear! Many app icons are simple representations of their titles; however, some of them wear a "disguise", like the *"Calculator%"* app. It looks and functions like a calculator; however, after entering a passcode preceded and followed by a period, students can take and hide photos and videos they don't want their parents to see. Then, the user can upload these photos/videos to a hidden photo gallery that is accessible to everyone using the app.

Law enforcement and school districts officials are doing their best to keep these troubling apps out of schools, but it is a never-ending task. Parents are the best monitors of what their children are downloading and using to communicate with friends and strangers. Inspect your children's devices frequently. Stay on top of the applications they are downloading and the information they are sharing.

For comprehensive lists and explanations of the most dangerous and disturbing apps, go to http://foreverymom.com/mom-gold/parents-kids-10-dangerous-apps-time-hit-delete/ by Dr. Megan Maas and https://educateempowerkids.org/dangerous-apps-2017/ by Kyle Roberts.

Resources

EducateEmpowerKids.org. (2017) Roberts, Kyle. The Most Dangerous Apps of 2017. Retrieved June 2017 from https://educateempowerkids.org/dangerous-apps-2017/

Family Education®. (2017) 10 Apps for Parents to Monitor Kids' Mobile Use. https://www.familyeducation.com/fun/mobile-apps/10-apps-parents-monitor-kids-mobile-use

Spengler, Stephen. (June 2017) Tips toward a Safe and Positive social Media Experience. Retrieved June 6, 2017 from https://thejournal.com/Articles/2017/06/01/Tips-Toward-a-Safe-and-Positive-Social-Media-Experience.aspx?Page=1

Family Online Safety Institute. (2017) Good Digital Parenting. Retrieved online May 2017 from https://www.fosi.org/

Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have special needs. Visit www.superduperinc.com and type in the **item name or number in our search engine**. If you're viewing this Handy Handout on a computer, click the links below to see the product descriptions.

HearBuilder Online
www.hearbuilder.com