TWEENS/TEENS AND APPS

Apps not only provide teens with entertainment (gaming, music, videos, etc.), they are also a primary way to communicate with other peers. Texting, messaging and other social media apps keep teens connected to friends and family 24/7 and provide them with prompt reactions from other users in the form of likes, followers and comments.

As a parent/guardian, it is important to remain informed about the spaces online where your child may be negatively impacted. The following tips are designed to inform any conversations you may wish to have with your tweens/teens regarding apps.

1. **USING PARENTAL CONTROLS CAN LIMIT WHAT YOUR CHILD CAN ACCESS.** Some devices allow parents to limit access to specific apps, social media sites, Internet content and features available within the device, in addition to restricting the ability to edit privacy settings. For example, on iPhones® and iPads® parents can enable restrictions under the Settings icon.

You may also want to create an account for your child rather than allowing your child to use your account. The birthdate entered for an Apple ID account, for example, restricts what a user can download based on the age ratings for the apps.

2. **MOST APPS ARE AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD FOR FREE.** The only requirement to download free apps is to have an account with an app service such as iTunes® or Google Play®. Paid apps are generally inexpensive, averaging between $0.99 and $5. However, there are also websites that allow for paid apps to be downloaded for free.

While some games are free to download, they may also feature in-app purchases (i.e., items that will aid in a game, etc.) that can add up quickly.

3. **MESSAGING, CHAT AND SOCIAL NETWORKING APPS ALLOW YOU TO EASILY CONNECT WITH RANDOM INDIVIDUALS.** There are messaging apps that come with the device (e.g., iMessage®) in addition to numerous apps that can be downloaded. Most allow you to connect with individuals using only a username (no identifying information). Some apps also have group chat features that allow three or more users to message together. Youth may be exposed to individuals who are not on their approved contact list depending on the settings within the app.

Also, some anonymous messaging apps allow teens to engage in conversations with strangers easily.

4. **THE HISTORY OF THE COMMUNICATION THROUGH APPS MAY NOT BE SAVED.** Some chat and social networking apps log the conversations but allow them to be easily deleted with the swipe of a finger. Other apps may log conversations by default or offer settings to save them; however, they can be difficult to navigate. Some apps may allow text/video/voice chat without any record of the messages sent between users.

5. **MANY MESSAGING, CHAT OR SOCIAL NETWORKING APPS ENCOURAGE USERS TO CREATE A PROFILE.**
When creating a profile, some services require certain fields be completed but allow users to choose the information entered into others. In most cases, there are no restrictions on what can be added to a profile, including personal information and photos/videos. Many also permit geo-tagged images to be saved and/or identified on a map which may allow other users to view the location the images were taken/posted. The information entered into a profile is made available to other users of the service, although some services provide privacy settings to limit what is shared.

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6. **GAMING APPS PROVIDE A METHOD TO RANDOMLY CONNECT WITH INDIVIDUALS.** Many apps provide a multi-player environment, allowing you to connect with other users to play games. Some even connect to social media such as Twitter® and Facebook® to play with individuals on these services. Many gaming apps have a chat component where users can talk to people they do not know in person. Teens can easily be exposed to inappropriate conversations or redirected to inappropriate content on others sites through the chat.

Some gaming apps utilize the device's GPS during gameplay, allowing the location of the user to be identified by other users.

7. **SOME APPS GIVE THE USER A SENSE OF SECURITY THAT THEIR INFORMATION IS ONLY SHARED TEMPORARILY.** These apps may provide an opportunity to share images or videos on a time-limited basis, however, these may not be as secure as the claims they make. Shared pictures and/or videos can be captured and forwarded to others.

8. **APPS CAN BE HIDDEN ON THE DEVICE.** Apps can be hidden on a device. Icons can be arranged discreetly, or placed into folder on a user's device so they are no longer visible at a quick glance.

Popular Apps Among Tweens/Teens

INSTAGRAM®
Instagram allows users to take images and videos, edit them with a choice of filters, add captions and post the photo/video to their profile. The app also recently added a live-stream component where users can stream video in real time to their Instagram Stories. Depending on the user's privacy settings, the content may be viewed, "liked" and commented on by only their followers or by any Instagram user. Hashtags (#) can be added to the caption for the image/video by the user who posted it. Words associated to a hashtag can be searched by other Instagram users to locate photos. Instagram users can also direct message (DM) other users.

SNAPCHAT®
Snapchat allows users to take images or videos, adjust them with a variety of settings, add text and drawings, and then send the "snap" (image/video) to other Snapchat users. If the snap is not sent as a direct snap to a specific user, it is made available to view by all of the user's followers. Within the app, the image is designed to disappear from the recipient's and sender's devices, as well as Snapchat's servers, after a set amount of time designated by the sender (to a maximum of 10 seconds). This however, does not prevent a user from capturing and saving the image/video prior to it disappearing from their device.

KIK®
Kik is an instant messaging app that enables the sharing of photos, sketches, voice messages, videos and text. It can be downloaded by most handheld devices, enabling more basic mobile phones to transfer photos and videos effectively.

FACEBOOK MESSENGER®
Messenger is a mobile app that allows users to message, make voice calls or video chat with their friends using their existing data plan. The app allows users to share photos, videos and include friends of friends (on Facebook) in conversations. Messenger users can send messages to friends who do not have the app; their messages will be received whenever they log into Facebook. Users can also message other users by entering their phone numbers.

WHATSAPP MESSENGER®
WhatsApp Messenger is used to send and receive instant messages (text, photos, videos, audio recordings) without the need for a phone service plan, operating through the user's Internet data plan. Users can only chat with other WhatsApp users who are existing contacts in each other's phones; however, the service records the phone numbers of contacts and retains these numbers.

For more information, please visit cybertip.ca/parents.

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