

Apps to Watch For

Shared Hope International
Internet Safety Series



SNAPCHAT

How it works:

Users share photos and videos with a specific recipient, or posting to a personal "story". Stories are a collection of the previous 24 hours' pictures/videos and are potentially available to any user with a Snapchat account, depending on the configuration of the privacy settings. Listed as appropriate for 12+ years old.

Specific Concern:

Since pictures and videos disappear immediately after viewing, sexting can be easily happen through the app. Although the photos disappear from the service, nothing prevents the receiver from taking a screenshot and continuing to use, share, or sell the image for a variety of purposes including profiting, grooming, and/or trafficking. This is also known sextortion, This app also contains a "map" feature that allows other users to track the current location of the user, depending on privacy setting configurations.

How it works:

Similar to Facebook, users can create, edit, and share photos or videos, stream live video content, and directly message one another. Direct messages have a photo disappearing feature in which the photo can only be viewed once. Listed as appropriate for 12+ years.

Specific Concern:

The live-stream feature may put teens at risk for being spotted or groomed by online predators as they tend to overshare personal information. Users can make multiple accounts, having one as a "real" account and another as their "fake" account, documenting content they want to keep more private. And although Instagram does have age requirements to join, it is possible to work around them.



INSTAGRAM



TIKTOK

How it works:

Users can create, edit and share 15 second to 3 minute long videos both privately and publicly. Users can sync videos to their favorite music and use filters to make content for current dance or lip-syncing trends. Listed as appropriate for 12+.

Specific Concern:

The algorithm that TikTok uses is complicated, but the easiest explanation is that clicking on a specific hashtag can identify other users using the same hashtag. This makes it easier for traffickers/groomers to identify vulnerable populations and use the instant messaging feature to make introductions and gain access.

How it works:

Users can text over Wi-Fi without a phone number and share photos and videos to individuals, private/public groups, themed chats, etc.

Communication exclusively over Wi-Fi creates a global community but also allows for an incredibly high level of anonymity. Listed as appropriate for 17+ years. This app has no parental control options.

Specific Concern:

This app has been publicly referred to by a convicted sexual predator as a, “Predator’s Paradise” by a convicted sexual predator and is known for its use in grooming and trafficking purposes. Law Enforcement has identified public groups on Kik involved in the active buying, sharing and trading of Images of Child Sexual Exploitation, (formerly referred to as Child Pornography). Although Kik was shut down for a short period of time in 2019 and brought under new ownership, these same problems still persist.

Similar apps:

Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Voxel, GroupMe

Researcher, posing as a 15-year-old girl, was sent a lewd picture of an adult man within ten minutes of creating a profile



KIK MESSENGER



ASK FM

How it works:

Users can ask and answer controversial, personal, or pertinent questions anonymously or publicly. Questions can include anything from wanting to know more about friends or crushes to advice on how to handle life's challenges. Listed as appropriate for 17+ years.

Specific Concern:

The anonymity of the site gives a false sense of security, prompting people to post content that is bullying, abusive, and sexualized. Users can choose whether they want their content to be private or public, although new accounts are automatically made public upon creation.

Similar Apps:

YOLO, Tellonym, LMK: Anonymous Polls

How it works:

Users can create images with text overlays and share with either the entire user base or specific curated groups. Users can also respond to posts through a private messaging feature in the app. Whisper is now owned by the same company as Kik Messenger. Listed as appropriate for 17+ years old

Specific Concern:

The perceived anonymity of the user base entices vulnerable populations to share explicit content, in addition to oversharing personal habits, behaviors, or life details. This allows traffickers/groomers to exploit this information and gain trust/access to younger or more naive users. Whisper also includes a "Nearby" tab, which allows users to find other users close to their location. Although this feature may not include a specific address it indicates the geographical distance between two users.



WHISPER

Researcher, who was posing as a 15 year old girl, was sent a lewd message of a sexual nature by an adult man within 2 minutes of posting on this app.



TINDER

How it works:

Tinder is a dating site that matches users with each other in the same area. After creating an account with personal photos and a brief description, users can swipe right to match with whom they're interested. After being matched, users can begin to privately message each other and meet up in person if they choose. Listed as appropriate for 17+ years old.

Specific Concern:

Since Tinder functions from a geotag feature, it is easy to know where others are located. Depending on the photos posted, predators may be able to find the exact location of other users or spots they might frequent (local restaurants, stores, etc.) Tinder has been used to identify, recruit, and groom potential victims.

Similar apps:

Blendr, Bumble, Hinge, Grindr, Coffee Meets Bagel, POF, Badoo, Skout

How it works:

Like Tinder for teens, users can view profiles, swiping right for someone they are interested in meeting or swiping left for someone they are not. Two users who swipe right on each other are then connected and can exchange pictures, videos, and direct messages. There is also a live feature which allows users to enter live video chat rooms.

Specific Concern:

Yubo is an app that has been used to identify, recruit, and groom potential victims just like Tinder as both apps emphasize quick judgements based on appearance. The live feature for Yubo also allows for recording video, audio, and text conversations which could be used for sextortion purposes.

Similar apps:

Tinder, ooVoo, Periscope, Houseparty, Holla, Tagged, Badoo, MeetMe

**Researcher, posing as a 15 year old girl, was sent a request for lewd images by an adult man within 5 minutes of joining the app*



YUBO

How it works:

This video-chatting website connects random users through text, video, or both. Once paired, names remain anonymous and users are labeled as “Stranger.” Listed as appropriate for 17+ years old.



OMEGLE

Specific Concern:

Omegle is known to be used by predators or for sextortion. During COVID-19, Omegle was advertised as “a great way to meet new friends, even while practicing social distancing” (Omegle: Talk to strangers!). This newfound popularity has increased the amount of child sexual abuse material found on its site. Users can record and distribute videos without the other user's consent on the app. There is little moderation on this site and no age verification requirement when signing up.

Similar apps:

ooVoo, Periscope, Houseparty, Holla, Tagged, Badoo, MeetMe, Yubo

How it works:

This secret calculator hides private photos or videos and can only be accessed through a passcode. According to the description on the app store there are three different passcodes for certain circumstances. First, there is the “genuine passcode” which opens up the genuine secret folder. Then, there is the “decoy password”, which opens up a fake folder if the user is threatened to disclose a passcode. Lastly, there is an “erase-all passcode” which deletes all secret folders. Listed as appropriate for 4+ years old

Specific Concern:

Traffickers/Groomers suggest this app in their recruiting process to store lewd or incriminating photos and videos that they send and/or request from their targets.

Similar apps:

Secure Private Calculator, Secret Photo Vault, Fake Calculator, Secret Calculator- Photo Album



PRIVAULT

For more information about online sex trafficking and how to keep yourself (and others) safe, visit [sharedhope.org/internetsafety](https://www.sharedhope.org/internetsafety)

**This research was conducted by Shared Hope staff in a controlled setting, with the knowledge of local law enforcement.*

Any suspected illegal activity was reported to appropriate channels.

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