

8 Bully-Prone Apps Your Kids Should Avoid

Bullying has been around as long as there have been kids. And not just the hold-you-upside-down-for-your-lunch-money kind of bullying, either. Whispers in the hallways. Notes passed from desk to desk. Psychological bullying has been around from the beginning too.

Unfortunately, along with the explosion in social media, this type of emotional torture has also increased exponentially in recent years. And since most kids have smartphones and tablets these days, their avenues for receiving and dishing out mental torment have increased too.

So the next time you have access to your kids' mobile devices (and you should always have access!), check out the apps they're using. And if you see any of the following, you should remove them and discuss with your kids the reasons why.

1. Burnbook

This app, named for a rumor diary in the movie *Mean Girls*, allows users to post jokes, comments, etc. on anonymous message boards. Its anonymity makes it ideal for Cyberbullying.

2. Snapchat

This app has been a favorite of kids for a number of years now. The user sends images or video to a recipient after determining how long it can be seen before it self-destructs. The problem is, "snaps" can easily be recovered and used for nefarious purposes, including bullying.

3. Yik Yak

Unlike Snapchat, Yik Yak is based on the user's location, allowing other users in the same geographical area to see anonymous posts and to "upvote" or "downvote" them. Yik Yak has been described as a "virtual bathroom wall where users post vitriol and hate" and has been a cause for concern among parents and schools all across the country.

4. Whisper

This app allows users to write text over an image in order to confess thoughts or feelings anonymously. As with other anonymous apps, Whisper has been used as a cyberbullying tool. It has also been used by sexual predators to locate and communicate with victims.

5. Poof

Unlike other apps in this list, Poof isn't a social media network; rather, it is an app designed to hide other apps on your phone or tablet. If your child has Poof on his device, chances are he or she is hiding a dangerous social media app.

6. Kik

This instant messaging app is increasingly popular with kids. It allows users to exchange texts, videos, images and other media. Unfortunately, Kik messenger is known to be favored by sexual predators and has been used to lure children into illicit encounters.

7. Ask.fm

This social networking site allows anyone to post anonymous comments and questions to a person's profile. It has been linked to a number of teen suicides.

8. Tinder

This dating app designed for 20- and 30-somethings is increasingly being used by teens to rate profiles and "hook up" with each other. Its geolocation feature combined with its anonymity makes it a possible vehicle for cyberbullying and sexual predation. And though it is rated 17+, it allows users as young as 13 to register.

Facebook, Twitter and Instagram

While these three social networks are increasingly being ditched by teens because their parents are using them, they still represent forums for emotional abuse by bullies. And though their presence on your child's mobile device shouldn't necessarily raise alarm bells, you need to be aware of what your kids are posting and seeing on these apps. That being said, compared to many social media apps out there, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are relatively "safe," but it still may be a good idea to require your kids to be "friends" with you, so that you can see how they're interacting with their peers and others.

In the end, your kids need to know that access to a smartphone or other mobile device isn't a right – it's a privilege that can be taken away at any time. And as part of their agreement with you to allow them to use these devices, they need to understand that you have the right not only to see what they're doing on them, but also to prohibit the use of certain apps and activities.

In fact, teens' addiction to mobile devices represents a powerful tool for parents with which they can combat negative behavior. Whereas in the past, access or denial of access to the family car might've been an effective carrot and stick, today, access to smartphones and tablets carry even greater weight.

In the end, these gadgets aren't going anywhere. So it's up to parents to be vigilant and aware of how their kids are using them. And with new apps and networks popping up every day, parents need to stay abreast of the latest social media developments.

For more information on kids and technology, visit our Guide to Parenting in a Digital Age:
<http://www.boystown.org/parenting/guides/digital-age>.