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| |  | | --- | | **10 Dangerous Apps**  **That Parents and Teachers Should Know**    **By: Tony Tramelli, MA, PLPC** | |
| |  | | --- | | Social media has become one of the main methods of socialization among young people. Parents may feel at a loss about how to manage and supervise this very significant world in which their children spend so much time.  Parents may even be unaware of what apps their children are using.    Last year, West County Psychological Associates created a list of apps that we believed parents and school professionals needed to be aware of.  In the ever-changing landscape of social media, some of these apps have lost their popularity, while new ones have been created and become widely popular.  Facebook, for example, is no longer popular among children and teens (largely because their parents are using it).  For that reason, we have updated our list and included three new apps that have recently become very trendy.  We have also included a new parental control app that can be used with Apple products.  Not all of the apps on this list are inherently dangerous, but they do all have the potential to be used in inappropriate ways.  We encourage parents to talk to their children about these apps, to find out if they are being used, and if so how they are being used.  Parents can then decide whether or not they are appropriate for their children and adolescents.    **#1.  Whisper:**Whisper is an anonymous social network.  Users are able to post comments and pictures without sharing any identifying information.  It has been called an "online confessional." Much of the content on Whisper tends to be dark; topics include depression, insecurity, substance abuse, and gossip.  There is also a great deal of sexual content on Whisper.     **#2.  Hot or Not:**"Hot or Not. Get In. Get Seen. Get Fans!"  This is an app that allows its users to rate pictures of other people.  When a user rates another as "hot" they become connected. After the connection is made, they are able to chat with that person.  Users also receive a "hotness rating" between 1 and 10 based on the number of people who rate them as hot vs. those that do not.    **#3.  Oovoo:**  Oovoo is a free messaging, voice, and video chat app that has become very popular among teenagers.  The most popular feature of this app is the free group video chats.  Users can video chat with up to twelve people at a time.  Because the service is free and many parents are unaware of it, sexting and other inappropriate behavior have become very popular on it.     **#4.  Vine:**Vine is a mobile app that one can think of as an online video diary. The video clips can be viewed by anyone with a Vineaccount, and can also be shared via Twitter, Facebook, and other social media apps.  Shortly after the Vine app debuted, pornographic videos started appearing on the service.  Pornography, as well as other inappropriate and dangerous content, is now common on Vine.  Because the service allows video postings to remain anonymous, there have been allegations of underage pornographic videos being shared.    **#5.  ask.fm:** This is a question-and-answer site that thrives on anonymity.  Participants create profiles (real or not) so that anyone, not just site members, can ask them questions.  These questions are frequently sexual and/or aimed at humiliation.  The questions and their answers can be screen shot and sent to friends for embarrassment.  Today, ask.fm has ballooned into a parent-free digital space where kids go to escape the built-in accountability of Facebook.    **#6.  Secret Phone:** Secret phone is a phone within a phone, completely hidden in every way.  There will be no icon in the application list, and no trace of the app ever being opened.  Secret phone provides users with a private phone book and allows users to make and receive phone calls and texts as if they never took place. It provides an internet browser, which allows the user to search the internet without any trace of what they have viewed.  The app has a feature called "The Vault," which is a security password protected safe in which the user can store notes, pictures, videos, etc.  Secret Phone allows users to delete all data on the app by sending a text code from any cell phone.    **#7.  ihookup:**  A "casual" hookup site for "hot guys and girls."  This app is being used by teens to find "singles" who are geographically close.  The app uses global positioning software and allows users to find other members on the app who are looking for a "quick hookup."  The site's capabilities appear to encourage casual sex with strangers.    **#8.  KiK Messenger:** A relatively new text messaging app similar to iChat or Google Chat. KiK uses a smartphone's data plan or a Wi-Fi connection to transmit and receive messages, which allows the user to avoid text messaging rates. Although this app may appear to be a great way for people to keep in touch without the cost of text messaging, it has become very popular among teenagers for the purposes of flirting and sexting. The app allows users to talk to multiple people and also allows the user to upload pictures and files. Because it is impossible to verify someone's identity on KiK, it has the potential to attract online predators.    **#9.  snapchat:** Often called "the sexting app," snapchat allows users to send a photo or short video that is viewed by the recipient for a maximum 10 seconds, after which it self-destructs.  No evidence remains that the photo or video was ever sent.  This app is often used for self-portraits ("selfies,") or pictures of others.  Teens and tweens use this app with a false sense of security for pictures they believe cannot be saved.  However, the recipient can capture the images using a screenshot or by taking a picture using another device, making copying and sharing easy.    **#10.  Omegle:**The website's tagline is "Talk to Strangers."  The website and app allow users to communicate with total strangers without any sort of registration.  The service randomly pairs users with one-on-one chat sessions where they can chat anonymously.  There is an option for video chat sessions as well.  Omegle has been widely criticized as a service that has the potential to harbor sexual predators.  In 2013, the transmission of nude photos and videos via Omegle from a teenage girl to a school teacher resulted in child pornography charges.    ***And a couple of more...***    With the widespread availability of such potentially dangerous and sophisticated apps, it has become more and more challenging for adults to monitor what young people do on their devices.  There are a number of apps available to assist adults in this seemingly insurmountable task.  MMGuardian and TeenSafe are two very good parental control apps; MMGaurdian is only for Androd users, and TeenSafe works on the Iphone and Androids. Both apps provide a wide range of services to help ensure that minors are using their devices safely and responsibly.    MMGaurdian allows parents to pre-configure the times when their child's phone will be locked down, except for emergency calls and texts to the parent's phone.  The app allows parents to block selected apps or allow only selected apps to be used.    MMGuardian also allows parents to prevent children from using their phone while driving; if the phone is moving above 10mph, it is disabled except for emergency 911 calls.  In addition, the app allows parents to instantly see where their child is and to monitor their child's calls and texts, as well as block certain individuals from contacting their child.    TeenSafe is not as sophisticated as MMGaurdian, and that is because Apple products have always been more difficult to monitor. Although not as sophisticated, TeenSafe does offer a number of good features. TeenSafe allows parents to monitor their children's location, view text messages (even deleted ones), review browsing history, and monitor contacts and call logs. One very nice feature of TeenSafe is their Instagram service. TeenSafe for Instagram allows parents to access their children's Instagram page, view comments and activity logs, monitor photos, and keep track of who they are following and who is following them.    MMGuardian and TeenSafe are two good examples of the type of software that is available for parents as they strive to supervise their children in the age of the internet.  Considering the ten applications described in this list, and the countless others like them that have been or will soon be developed, parents and other responsible adults are urged to take every opportunity to help children make wise, safe, and moral choices online.                https://exchange.archstl.org/OWA/8.3.213.0/themes/base/clear.gif  Tony Tramelli, M.A. received his Masters in Counseling from Webster University with a focus in mental health counseling.  Tony works with individuals including children, adolescents and adults on a number of issues. These issues include depression, anxiety, bullying, grief, behavioral issues, academic problems and issues surrounding marital concerns, divorce and family transition.  In addition to working with children and families, Tony provides counseling to older adults, and when applicable their caregivers, specifically around issues such as grief, depression, anger and life transitions.  Tony uses a systems approach, working closely with parents, family members, caregivers, educators and other involved professionals to effectively treat his clients.  Tony also provides consulting services in elementary and secondary schools. | |