

School Counseling Department

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Dear Parents,

As you all know, teens today are challenged with the ever-changing world of technology. Every day there is something better and more exciting than yesterday. Whether it is a funny blog, a picture on Instagram, or a post on Snapchat, there is always something new for them to discover. In doing our part to stay connected to the middle school world we have unveiled some social media sites that are important for parents know about as well.

The information may seem overwhelming but please do not be alarmed. The purpose of this is to inform you about the newest trends so that you can keep an open dialog with your children. We encourage you to take the extra step and ask for account passwords, Google your child's name, and continually monitor their internet behavior. Please remember that even though you are talking to your children it does not mean they are telling you everything!

New and updated apps:

****Presently popular among teens/tweens.**

Periscope- is a "live video streaming platform". It transmits a live recording of you to your Persicope and Twitter followers. It is similar to skype but you are not linked to just one person but rather a whole community. In addition, whoever's watching you or your recording can comment and ask questions. Any comments show up on your screen while broadcasting making it easy to answer and interact. It is also connected to your twitter account with the point of increasing followers. Our students are aware of this app but do not use it that often. The dangers could be that they are periscoping in their bedroom or giving out their location so others can find them.

Tinder- is a free, location-based mobile dating app that simplifies the process most dating websites require. You simply download the app to your smart phone, link to your Facebook account, choose up to six photos of yourself, and write a brief bio. The app shows you photos of singles based on your preferences. You swipe left if you don't like them and swipe right if you do. If someone you like also swiped right on your photo, the app immediately informs you, "It's a Match!" and urges you to begin chatting. Our students are aware of this app but do not tend to use it as a dating site. Some students are curious about it and/or find it funny. It is location based so any user can find your child very quickly!

Whatsapp- is a cross-platform mobile messaging app which allows you to exchange messages without having to pay for SMS. WhatsApp Messenger is available for iPhone, BlackBerry, Android, Windows Phone and Nokia and yes, those phones can all message each other! You can also connect to anyone overseas free of charge! This app is similar to Kik. If you are a parent that monitors texting be sure to see if they have this app on their phone!

Omegle- is a free online chat website that allows users to communicate via text or video with others without the need to register. The service randomly pairs users in one-on-one chat sessions where they chat anonymously using the names "You" and "Stranger" or "Stranger 1" and "Stranger 2" in the case



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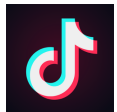
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of Spy mode. At the end of an Omegle chat, users have the option to save the chat's log and share the link. Therefore your conversation is not really private, and the contents of the chat including any personal information you might share can be sent to anyone without your knowledge. This site can be very dangerous for obvious reasons. Please make sure they are not on this site talking with strangers!



Instagram- is an online photo/video- sharing social networking service that enables its users to take a picture, apply a digital filter and share it on a variety of social networking sites, including its own and other leading sites such as Facebook or Twitter. There is a new feature that allows for users to send personal messages or videos to individual users called a direct message or P.M. Another feature is Flipagram which allows users to tell stories with the photos, videos, and music on their phone. It plays like a short movie on their Instagram Account. Instagram has the right to sell users' photos to third parties without notification or compensation. Please make sure the photos your children post are appropriate, and if they post a picture of someone else, make sure they have that person's consent. We have seen many student Instagram accounts with over 400 followers and accounts in which students are following over 400 people! Make sure you know with whom they are interacting.



Tik Tok is an app that allows short one-minute videos, mainly dancing and lip-syncing to music, to be uploaded. There are only two privacy settings on the app (Private: only the creator can see their videos, or Public: anyone on the app can access the videos). By default, videos are public, unless the privacy settings are changed.

Kik- is a mobile app that people can use to text with friends at high speed and with more of a "face-to-face feel" than regular texting. Users' profile pictures appear in a little bubble next to their text, and they can quickly text photos, sketches, or even pre-designed greeting cards to individuals or groups. The app is rated ages 17+, but there is no age verification so anyone can download it. Like some other instant messenger apps, Kik allows your teen to connect with others using just a username rather than texting from a phone number. The app also been connected with cyber bullying. **This app does not need a phone number so there is no way to monitor if your child is texting.**

***OoVoo-** is a video chat and messaging app, and it is available for iPhone/iPod/iPads and Androids. You can also use OoVoo on a computer (PC or MAC). With OoVoo you can video chat with up to 12 people at a time; you can see four people at once on a screen during these video chats. This app is popular among teens because it is a way for friends to "hang out" via the internet. Teens have also been known to video chat late at night with their peers and it can lead to poor decision making.



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Snapchat- is an app that has become one of the most popular apps for smart phone users. It is a photo messaging application. Using the app, users can take photos, record videos, add text and drawings, and send pictures to friends. Users set a time limit for how long recipients can view their photos, up to 10 seconds, after which it will be deleted from the recipient's device and the company's servers. There are new features all the time but most recently a feature called Lenses was added. It allows you to add real-time special effects and sounds to any picture or video. Another feature allows for users to instant message, live chat, turn on geolocator, and send “stories” to one another. A Snapchat “Story” is a group of images that the user has captured and would like to share over the span of 24 hours. The user can choose who can access the “Story”, whether it’s friends only, a custom list or the public. The intent of Snapchat for fun pictures to be sent, but this app is becoming most popular for sexting. Please remember that nothing can be deleted forever. Your child might think that the picture has been deleted but an iPhone can take a screen shot (a screen shot is a way of taking a snapshot, or picture of your computer screen/smart phone) which will allow any picture to be saved and sent to anyone!



Roblox- is an app with games that targets children typically ages 8-12. Within the games, there is a chat feature where children can “chat” with their friends, whom they have connected with and accepted. If the user accepts a friend request from a stranger, they are then able to interact with that stranger within the game and within the messenger feature. Parents have access to the chat history, and there are parental controls within the game.

Other important social media sites:

(Listed alphabetical)

Email- Many students have come to us with concerns about “Chainmail”. Students have received email with threats such as “if you do not send this to 10 people in 10 minutes you will have bad luck forever”. Please explain to your children that “Chainmail” is not real and they should delete it rather than send or repost out of fear.

Facebook- is a social media site that allows you to connect with friends and family by uploading pictures, chatting with friends, and posting on profiles. There are many security settings and ways to monitor your child’s profile. Please make sure privacy settings are enabled!

****Facetime/ Skype-** is a way to make video calls with friends using the iPhone (4, 4s, 5, 6), iPod touch, or from your Mac over any WiFi access. Skype is also video chatting but can be accessed through any computer that has a camera and internet. Teens have been known to video chat late at night with their peers and it can lead to poor decision making.



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Formspring/ASK FM- Formspring, and ASK FM are similar sites. Formspring and ASK FM are interest-based social Q&A website created to allow users to relate their ideas and opinions on any topic. The site allows its users to set up a profile page, follow other users and ask questions. The questions and their given responses are then published on the user's profile page. Formspring and ASK FM is a place to share your perspective on anything. It can be anonymous which can lead to many hurtful comments. Please monitor your child's page!

Google + (plus) - integrates social services such as Google Profiles, and introduces new services identified as Circles, Hangouts and Sparks. Google+ is available as a website and on mobile devices. Google + is just like facebook! They have video chatting, instant messaging, friends, and profiles! Do not be fooled if your children tell you they are on Google.

Spillit.me- is a social media website with the purpose of finding out what others really think of you. It is an anonymous way to find out things about others or have people leave hurtful messages on you profile or friends' profiles. There is no way to control what people say or find out who said it. This site can be a form of cyber bullying!

****Tumblr**- is a microblogging platform and social networking website. It allows users to post text, images, videos, links, quotes and audio to their Tumblelog. Users can follow other users' blogs, as well as make their blogs private. Students have been known to use Tumblr as a self-expression website in both positive and negative ways. Make sure to check their blogs!

****Twitter**- is a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting. Simply find the accounts you find most compelling and follow the conversations. Make sure your children are following appropriate people because you never know what they are learning!

tbh

TBH App- is the largest anonymous app sweeping the teen world at the moment. It allows users to answer questions anonymously, and is heavily moderated to avoid harassment. Superlatives submitted by users are vetted by the TBH team.



The "Calculator +" App- is available for iPhones, Android phones, and tablets. This "ghost app" looks almost identical to the calculator you would find standard on these devices, and it even functions as a calculator. A user must type in the app's correct passcode to access the app's secret function, which is to hide pictures and videos.



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House party- A group video chat app, you are notified as soon as your friends are on and you can have a group or private, live conversation. Where this opens up an entire new circle of communication and online safety is that if one person in the chat happens to be connected to a user and the others are not friends, those connections are still able to join the conversation because of the mutual connection. This means that kids who do not know each other have the opportunity to chat with people they do not know. Also of concern is the ability to take a screenshot of the people you are chatting with, without them knowing about it.

YOLO

Yolo App- This is a free social media app popular with teens that enables them to link the app to their Snapchat account, and create “ask me anything” stickers on their Snapchat Stories. It allows you to gather questions from other users, then share your answer, usually along with a selfie. The anonymous Q&A nature of this app makes it similar to several other apps (Yik Yak and Sarahah) which have been removed from the App Store due to bullying.



You Now is a live-stream broadcasting (aka live-casting) site-slash-app, which lets users perform for viewers all over the world, via the cameras on their computers, tablets and smartphones. You Now encourages long-form streaming, for hours at a time, even while the broadcaster is asleep.



Blindr is a dating app geared toward forming romantic encounters based on appearance and location of users. The app uses the phone’s location services to see the faces of other nearby users. Blindr keeps the user informed as to whom they have bumped into throughout the day, and which individuals are close by. A picture of their face appears and underneath the picture sits a convenient map with ping radar indicating where the others users are in proximity to your location. It even indicates the time in which you have crossed paths with the other users. This feature gives internet predators free range.



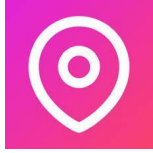
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Mappen- Otherwise known as “Make it happen.” This app allows other app users to see your child’s GPS location 24/7, unless your child turns it off (but they can only turn it off for a maximum of 8 hours, then the GPS tracking turns itself back on). The app describes its core purpose this way: "See where friends are and meet up. Mappen is the simplest way to know what your friends are doing and get together with them." However, many teens and pre-teens accept friend requests from strangers (especially when that person looks like a “nice” person close their age, which may or may not be true). And, once accepted, that user then has 24/7 access to a child’s GPS location.



The [Tellonym app](#) is a new dangerous app that allows students (and strangers) to receive feedback anonymously online from others. The Tellonym app can be linked to a user’s Instagram, Snapchat, or Twitter account, allowing students to get inbound anonymous messages from their friends (and strangers). When teens connect anonymous apps to their Instagram or Snapchat they open themselves up to being targeted by strangers across platforms (and bullying/threats from people they may not know).



Facebook’s Lasso App allows users to create and share short videos. The privacy controls are extremely limited, though, so all Lasso users have access to your child’s videos.



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Online Resource for Parents:

“Common sense media is a great resource for parents to receive up-to-date information about social media sites and applications. They provide unbiased information, trusted advice, and innovative tools to help parents harness the power of media and technology as a positive force in all kids’ lives.” <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

The Cyberbullying Research Center is a constantly updated list of contact information for social media apps, gaming networks, and related companies – so you know where to get help for bullying, harassment, threats, and other forms of misuse. <https://cyberbullying.org/report#A>

Parental Controls Apps

We encourage you to have open and honest communication with your child about safe internet behavior. The below applications will help monitor online behavior.

- **MamaBear:** Install the parent app on your phone, the child app on your teen’s and get custom alerts every time he posts on social media and every time the app recognizes risky language or signs of bullying. Free–\$24.99/six months, depending on plan
- **TextGuard:** The family edition allows parents access to their child’s text messages without their knowledge. \$9.75/month–\$89.75/12 months, depending on plan
- **My Mobile Watchdog:** This app offers 20 parental controls for your teen’s smartphone that allow you to see text messages and contact history, block websites, turn off apps and more. \$4.95/month
- **TeenSafe:** Allows parents to monitor texts, phone calls, social media activity, Internet browsing history, Whatsapp messages, Kik Messenger texts and more. \$14.95/month
- **Bark:** Allows parents to monitor their child’s texts, email, YouTube usage, and over 30 other apps and social media platforms for signs of issues like cyberbullying, sexual content, online predators, depression, suicidal ideation, threats of violence, etc. Parents can sign up to get email and text alerts when Bark detects potential issues so you can talk to your child and make sure everything is OK. Parents can set up screen time limits, bedtimes, and block certain content. Prices start at \$5/month or \$49/year.

Sources:

Commonsensemedia.com
fun.familyeducation.com



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SAMPLE Family Contract for Online Safety

1. I will not give out personal information such as my address, telephone number, parents' work address/telephone number, or the name and location of my school without my parents' permission.
2. I will tell my parents right away if I come across any information that makes me feel uncomfortable.
3. I will never agree to get together with someone I "meet" online without first checking with my parents. If my parents agree to the meeting, I will be sure that it is in a public place and bring my mother or father along.
4. I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents.
5. I will not respond to any messages that are mean or in any way make me feel uncomfortable. It is not my fault if I get a message like that. If I do I will tell my parents right away so that they can contact the service provider.
6. I will talk with my parents so that we can set up rules for going online. We will decide upon the time of day that I can be online, the length of time I can be online, and appropriate areas for me to visit. I will not access other areas or break these rules without their permission.
7. I will not give out my password to anyone (even my best friends) other than my parents.
8. I will check with my parents before downloading or installing software or doing anything that could possibly hurt our computer or jeopardize my family's privacy.
9. I will be a good online citizen and not do anything that hurts other people or is against the law.
10. I will help my parents understand how to have fun and learn things online and teach them things about the Internet, computers and other technology.

I agree to the above

Child sign here

I will help my child follow this agreement and will allow reasonable use of the Internet as long as these rules and other family rules are followed.

Parent(s) sign here



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