



Keeping Kids Safe: Apps That Should Be On Our Radar by Amy Williams



We all know that raising children can be difficult, especially when technology is involved. Suddenly, we are fretting and agonizing over what is considered too much screen time or skyrocketing costs of data plans. **However, entangled in all the charge cords and upgrades, lies a more sinister problem that many parents fail to consider when we hand over a device to our sons and daughters: predators.**

Unfortunately, predators and pedophiles go where the children are and today that is online. In the past, this used to be in arcades or parks, but as our kids trade in swing sets for social media, online predators have changed their tactics and adapted to the digital age. It is frightening to realize that our kids' favorite technology might be introducing them to harm. **However, by taking a few minutes to understand the popular apps our kids are downloading, we can empower them to make smart choices and learn ways to protect themselves online from predators.**

The Online Predator Threat

Inadvertently, the Internet has opened up an entirely new victim pool for predators who are actively seeking new victims. First, we need to consider that a majority of our children turn to their devices for networking and socializing, instead of face-to-face contact. According to the PEW Internet Research Center, [57 percent](#) of teens have made new friends online. While this isn't immediately concerning, we do need to comprehend that over [50 percent](#) of sexually exploited victims are between the tender ages of 11 and 15.

Online predators and pedophiles are able to take advantage of the anonymity of the Internet and social media apps to create new or false identities. They often design profiles and usernames that are appealing to children, which in turn, allows them to make contact in a variety of ways without appearing to be scary or frightening.

This allows them to blend in and look for profiles of other users that suggest the user is a child. Predators typically target a victim and make contact by initiating a conversation about a hobby or common interest. After a relationship has been established, the predator may begin asking a child to send nude photos, elicit texts, or to even meet in real life. **At first glance, this sounds like something out of a movie, but we need to realize that back in 2011, the [FBI estimated that 500,000](#) predators were perusing the Internet in search of new prey.**



Apps Parents Need To Be On The Lookout For

Over the years, with multiple advances and an increased reliance on technology, [authorities believe that the number of predators using apps](#) and technology in their pursuits to find new children to exploit is growing larger. This only compounds our fears when we consider that studies have found [70 percent](#) of our children actively look for ways to shield their online activity from our eyes. **As our children find new apps and social media platforms, our job to keep them safe becomes even harder.**

To help us on this journey, we have compiled a list of apps that should be on our radar:

Kik. This app uses a “chat messaging” format. However, one of the [major areas of concerns for parents and authorities with Kik](#), is users don’t need to have a phone number to create an account. Users can create accounts that are practically untraceable or anonymous, making this app a perfect vehicle for predators to hide their true identities. If a child uses this app, please make sure he or she only friends people they actually know.

Omegle. We constantly warn our kids to avoid talking to strangers, but this app promotes it! Omegle is designed to connect strangers with similar interests and hobbies. While this app is a great way to find others who share passions, it also is connecting users with complete strangers who may or may not be telling the truth about their identity. Predators can make contact and groom their targets easily on this app. Children who use this app should never share personal information or agree to meet in person.

Line. This app is a combination of the major social media apps, making it a great one stop shop. Users can use texting, disappearing messages, videos, photo sharing, and more in one convenient app. While this is a fun outlet for kids, we need to know that there are “hidden chats” and Line’s privacy policies aren’t as strict as other platforms which can expose a child’s photos and information to prying eyes. Children who frequent Line should have a good understanding of social media etiquette and permanence before downloading.

Amy Williams is a free-lance journalist based in Southern California and mother of two. As a parent, she enjoys spreading the word on positive parenting techniques in the digital age and raising awareness on issues like cyberbullying and online safety.