



How to talk to your teen about apps, social media, and porn

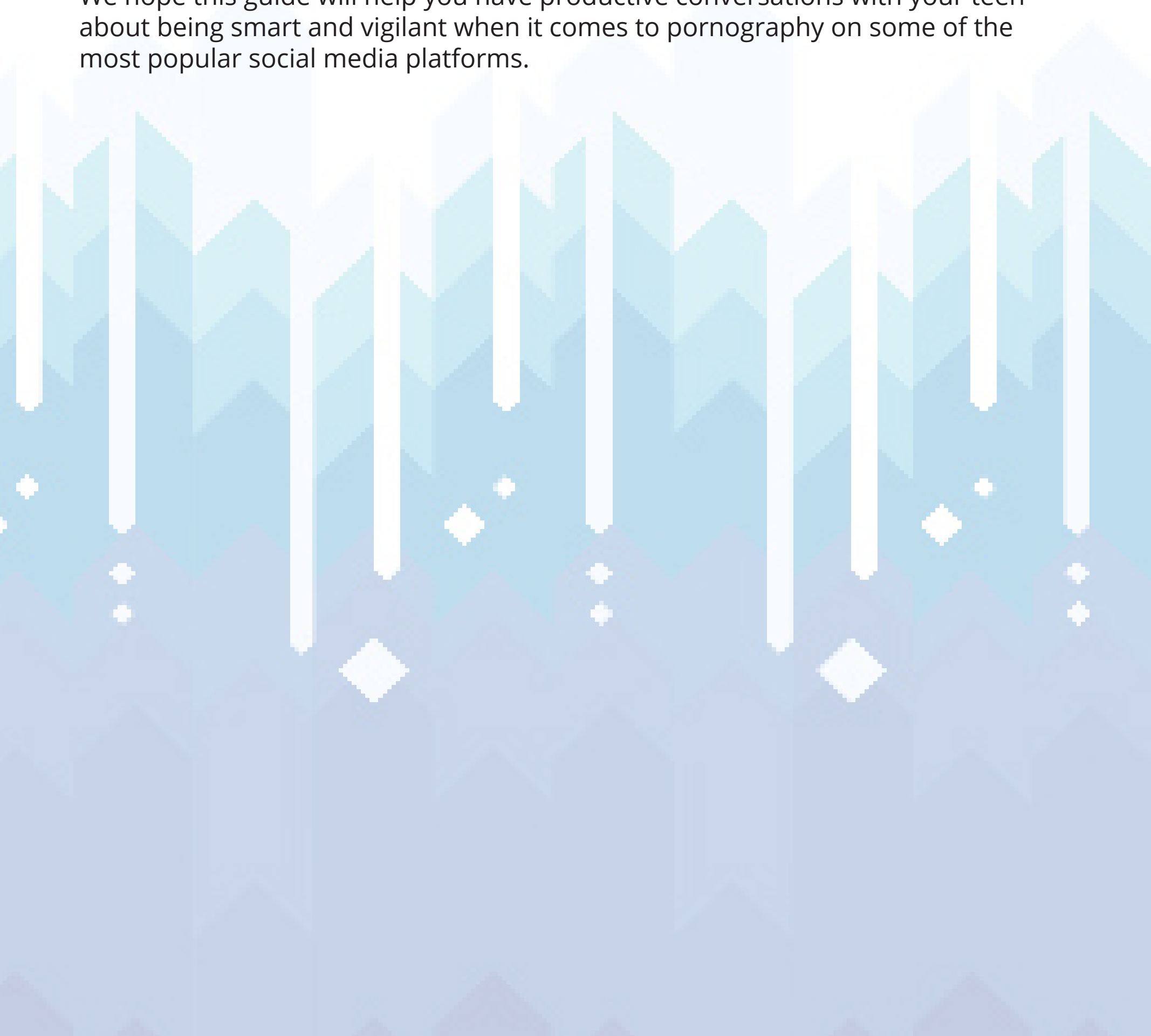
How to talk to your teen about apps, social media, and porn

Online porn is so prevalent that it's pretty obvious popular social media platforms would be unable to fully regulate it. Anti-porn filters and apps like Ever Accountable strive to stay ahead of how porn sneaks its way into social media, but unfortunately, pornographic content still finds its way in.

Therefore, it's important to understand what social media platforms are, how they work, and how kids and teens use them, so we can talk to them and help guide them toward healthy cyber activity.

After all, social media has become an important part of our daily lives. We use it to keep in touch with the people we know and as a space for self-expression. Social media has also become an essential part of teenage life and culture. As a parent, it feels like it is increasingly difficult to keep up with all of the trends, apps, lingo, and platforms our teens are exposed to.

We hope this guide will help you have productive conversations with your teen about being smart and vigilant when it comes to pornography on some of the most popular social media platforms.





Snapchat

What is it:

Snapchat is a picture taking platform for teens to share photos and videos with friends. The illusion of Snapchat is that content posted will disappear forever. Snapchat's mission includes "empowering people to express themselves, live in the moment, learn about the world, and have fun together." Your teen can take pictures or videos to add to their "stories" to show their friends what they are doing throughout the day. Celebrities and pop culture influencers are also on Snapchat to interact with fans. Snapchat is the equivalent of a pocket photo album but has new pictures everyday.

What to be aware of:

One of the major misconceptions about Snapchat is how images or information seemingly disappear. Snapchat doesn't have a content filter because users willingly upload, send photos, and consent to follow accounts. Teens have been known to use Snapchat to send each other explicit photos because Snapchat appears safer than texting. However, this doesn't prevent the receiver from taking a screenshot in the app. Also, Snapchat collects a lot of information from their users such as device information, location, login information (how and when the app was interacted with), and the user's photos. Disturbingly, back in 2013, nearly 4 million accounts had information taken and posted for public viewing.

Teen talking points for Snapchat:

- Snapchat collects information from devices including pictures. Talk to your teen about managing their privacy settings on their phone.
- Information has been taken from Snapchat in the past and used publicly—this could easily happen again.
- Receivers of your teen's photos can take screenshots and share them with whomever they want.
- While people think sending nude photos via Snapchat is safe, it isn't. Remind your teen that someday, those images could resurface. Ask them to only send images to others that they would be comfortable having plastered across social media, at any point in their lives.

tumblr.

What is it:

Tumblr is a blogging platform where users can share just about anything they want — art, writing, music, photography, voice acting, fanart, cosplay, basically anything and everything possible to experience online. Users can make blogs and follow other blogs to collect, like, and share whatever they like. Tumblr has something for just about everyone and users love it because they can freely express themselves.

What to be aware of:

Because Tumblr's content policy is so lax, a good portion of users can find or accidentally see porn easily. Tumblr users can post and share porn with ease through pictures, gifs, and video. Also, a major problem with Tumblr since 2011 are their "Spam Porn Bots" that lure users with the promise of porn but spread computer viruses instead. However, this lack of restriction caused Tumblr to lose their app privileges and it was removed from the app store forcing the site owners to change their policy. On December 17th, 2018 Tumblr purged any blog that had nudity or explicit imagery. But this only kind of solved the porn problem and porn blogs still exist on Tumblr by hiding themselves under the guise of SFW (Safe for Work) content which indicates to users that the content is safe for viewing. The worst part about this is that no one is reporting on it. The only people who seem to care enough are individuals who are using Tumblr and posting screenshots of pornographic images with SFW to various forum pages like Reddit.

Teen talking points for Tumblr:

- Malicious porn bots (which spread computer viruses) are a danger on Tumblr. Have your teen pay attention to the validity of any link they click on by noticing grammar, spelling, and profile pictures. Never click on links that are sent to them by someone they don't know.
- Tumblr may have updated their policies but it did not eliminate all of the pornography accounts. There is porn on Tumblr.
- Although a search term, or tag, may sound harmless always check usernames to make sure it is a page you really want to visit.



What is it:

Instagram, like Snapchat, is a picture sharing platform. The main difference is that Instagram posts stay on profiles until deleted. Instagram follows a more traditional social media platform (like Facebook) where users have a profile and share their content for followers to see and like. Instagram users can also follow their friends or favorite famous icon. Instagram also supports video sharing and live broadcasts.

What to be aware of:

Instagram's policies prohibit explicit, pornographic imagery but this doesn't seem to prevent how easy it is to find porn on Instagram despite their claims of porn being against their policy. Even searching for seemingly harmless things like "babe" or "sexy" can result in porn. Additionally, Porn Stars also have their own Instagram profiles where some of them post pornographic pictures of themselves which Instagram does not prohibit. There is also a problem with porn accounts using specific emojis to tag their content making it easy for people to search for porn via emoji rather than words.

Teen talking points for Instagram:

- Instagram's policy against pornographic content is not well enforced and it is easy to find.
- Porn Stars have their own Instagram accounts. Not all of them share pornography on their page but they often post softcore porn.
- Specific emojis can be used to search for porn.



Twitter

What is it:

Twitter is one of the biggest social media platforms used by teenagers, adults, celebrities, and pop culture icons. The site identifies itself with this tagline: “Twitter is happening. Follow everything from breaking news and entertainment, to sports, politics, and everyday interests. Then, join the conversation.” And that’s exactly what it is. People can share their thoughts, interests, pictures, videos, and gifs — as long as it is all 280 character or less.

What to be aware of:

It wouldn’t be unreasonable to think a social media platform as big as Twitter would have some degree of content policy. And they do—but not to prevent porn. This came more into light in 2017 when Senator Ted Cruz “liked” a hardcore porn video via his political Twitter account. Likes, contrary to popular belief, are public. When it comes down to it, it appears Twitter loves porn and porn loves Twitter because there is no limitation to posting “hardcore pics, gifs, and trailers.”

Teen talking points for Twitter:

- Twitter has no filter when it comes to pornography and any content your teen views, then likes or shares, is public.
- Twitter is a great place to follow news, sports, friends, and popular culture — but be aware of what search terms can produce.
- Communicate the adverse effects of viewing pornography especially because Twitter makes it completely accessible.

YouTube

What is it:

YouTube is one of the most used video sharing platforms worldwide. People have used it for nearly a decade to share animation, short films, vlogs (video blogs), news, information, etc.

What to be aware of:

YouTube is owned by Google and the policy on adult content is “Sexually explicit content like pornography is not allowed on YouTube.” The video platform also puts age-restricting filters on videos that contains sexual content. These images may not be porn but sometimes heavily imply sex is happening. Youtube is at least being proactive enough to put these restrictions on videos, however, they are easy to get around. One way around these filters is a user changing their birth year or simply inserting a false birth year. Youtube can’t exactly check their IDs to verify and teens can have access to age restricted content.

Teen talking points for Youtube:

- Age restrictions are placed for a reason on content from sexual, graphic, or violent images. Remind them of the consequences they will face if they decide to go around the filter. I.E. they may be upset by what they see or it could lead them to search for more pornographic material.
- Be vigilant of video titles, who posted them, and the thumbnail for the video. If any of them appear to contain sexual content, avoid those videos to begin with.



Honorable Mentions

What is it:

Kik is a messaging app designed to connect users from all over the world. Kik thinks that people, especially teens, are slowly moving away from social media and turning to chat based communication for information. A visit to their site shows that Kik's primary audience are teens connecting with friends and informational chatbots.

What to be aware of:

Users have to be 13-years or older to sign up with Kik. Even if your teen doesn't have a cell phone, they could use their I-Pod or Tablet to connect with anyone via Kik. Although Kik is designed with teens in mind, that doesn't prevent anyone of any age using it. Kik has had a serious issues with child exploitation and distribution of child pornography despite having policies prohibiting pornography in general. Kik makes it easier for strangers to reach out to teenagers which is troubling on its own. Even though this app does not have easy to access pornography sources, it does open the door to a different set of problems, such as making it simple for online predators to target children.

Teen talking points for Kik:

- Kik's Help Center has helpful guides about how to block unwanted users and how to report content. Ask your teen if they have overviewed these guidelines.
- Have an open conversation with your teen about what are appropriate conversations to have with strangers on the internet. Remind them that if anything makes them uncomfortable, they are not under any obligation to keep talking with this person. A good strategy to discuss is to simply not connect with strangers online on any platform—period.
- Report. Block. Delete. Move-on.

What is it:

TikTok, previously known as Musical.ly, describes itself as, “A destination for short-form mobile videos.” Basically, it’s a platform for users to create and upload their own short videos. TikTok is similar to Vine which was discontinued in 2016. The short videos uploaded to TikTok are designed to only last up to 60 seconds in length and can be edited with effects. The content in these videos vary from user-to-user.

What to be aware of:

TikTok has the same concerns most social media platforms have which gives predators more opportunity to find and exploit teens. One of the most alarming features of TikTok is that, by default, accounts are public—meaning anyone can see your teen’s profile and directly message them. TikTok does have a policy against explicit sexual content as well as nudity; however, users have found a way around these filters by using hashtags such as “nudez” or “twerk” and these are frequently searched for on most sites to prevent content from being found out by the domain.

Teen talking points for Tiktok:

- At the moment there is no way to filter the content on TikTok without the help of a 3rd party app.
- Be aware of trends happening on TikTok that your teen might partake in to receive views. One of the recent trends was the “Birdbox Challenge” where people were blindfolding themselves to perform dangerous tasks.
- Use any available parental controls that are available on TikTok and also talk to your teen about dangers of sharing information with strangers.
- Remind your teen that not all content can be filtered.

But wait — there’s more.

Conclusion

There is no easy solution to protecting your kids and what they might encounter using social media platforms. It can feel overwhelming knowing that popular social media sites contain easy access to porn. But the best way to prevent your teen from seeking it is opening up a dialogue with them about their social media usage. Being aware of the dangers can help them make informed decisions before they click on a link or share a photo. Information is power and hopefully this guide has aided you on how to best approach this tough topic.

Social media is constantly evolving and so are the ways people try to sneak in porn onto public sites. Fortunately, Ever Accountable is also evolving to help prevent active searches for porn. Ever Accountable works because it tracks the words that are typed or scroll across the screen — so even coded phrases such as “nudez” or “p0rn” can indicate that the user was trying to search for it.

Empower your teens with information and an open dialogue about social media. We know that when anyone watches porn they hide it due to fear and/or shame. The way to eradicate fear and shame is to bring the conversation into the open. In this way, you can be a pillar of support for your teen as they learn to navigate this growing digital world.

