

Parenting, Media, and Everything In Between

Apps to Watch Out for in 2019

Stay on top of the popular titles teens are already using. By [Christine Elgersma](#) 1/11/2019

Topics: [Privacy and Internet Safety](#), [Social Media](#)



It's a new year, and that means new apps on your tweens' and teens' phones. While the old standbys like [Snapchat](#) and [Instagram](#) are still going strong, there's no shortage of social media, video-sharing, and homework-help apps that are popular but not necessarily household names. Of course, it's nearly impossible to keep up with every hot new app, which makes knowing the [risky features](#) -- like interaction with strangers, anonymity, privacy concerns, and iffy content -- a solid first step. But it's still important to know the specifics of what's on your kid's device and whether or not you'll allow it to

stay there.

Check out the titles below so you have a sense of what your kid -- or your kid's friends -- may be using and what you need to know about each app. And since all of these are free, be aware that the developers make money on them through in-app purchases, ads, selling user data, or [all of the above!](#)

BIGO LIVE - Live Stream

Kind of like [Twitch](#) and [YouTube](#), BIGO LIVE lets teens stream live video of themselves that other users can see and comment on in real time. You can also receive and send "Beans" -- BIGO's term for virtual gifts -- that cost real money. You can level up and improve your ranking by logging in every day and sending gifts. The platform is designed for people who supposedly want to get famous, but it seems to be filled mainly with people competing for gifts.

What parents need to know

BIGO has a lot of mature content, including sexy talk and clothing, and users' comments are often predatory and explicit. Also, its focus on status and spending money, as opposed to creativity and talent, makes it feel shallow.

BitLife

In this simulation game, you're assigned an identity to play through the entire game, from infancy to death. As you play -- and your character gets older -- you can make text-based choices about how to make money, spend time, and develop relationships with pretend profiles (which aren't connected to real people). Those choices determine your levels of happiness, health, smarts, and appearance. When you die, you can start all over.

What parents need to know

While kids can't engage in actual risky behavior, BitLife exposes them to mature ideas. As your character gets older, you can choose to "hook up" with the pretend profiles, drink, do drugs, gamble, and commit crimes. (On the other hand, you can make healthy choices such as going to the gym and meditating.) It's also easy for players to become [overly fixated](#) on the idealized world of sim games. Because you can start over when your character dies, there's the promise of endless free play, which could be a concern if your teen is really into the game.

Discord

Discord is an app and site that allows gamers to connect via text, voice, and video. It's similar to a discussion board like [Reddit](#), but the conversations are hosted on various servers -- which anyone can

create -- and each server can have multiple channels. The main purpose of the platform is to be able to chat with your team while playing an online game, but people also use it as straight-up social media, even if they're not playing.

What parents need to know

Easily viewable adult content and the ability to chat privately with strangers make Discord risky for young teens. Mature areas are supposed to be labeled "NSFW" (not safe for work) and age-gated for under-18-year-olds. But you just need to click through to access. And while there's a privacy setting to control who can send your teen private messages, they can easily go in and change those settings.

HOLLA: Live Random Video Chat

This app is all about connecting with strangers. Once you sign up using a phone number or your Facebook account, you can get matched instantly with a stranger -- and both you and they appear on camera. Or you can swipe Tinder-style until you like someone and they like you (by tapping a heart). You can also enable location tracking to be paired with someone nearby.

What parents need to know

Video-chatting with strangers can be risky for teens. When it's paired with location, it's a no-go. Also, while HOLLA supposedly bans iffy content -- like nudity and violence -- user reviews indicate that masturbation, fake identities, and negative comments are common. The app's age-matching is a red flag, too. It was easy for our tester to pose as a 13-year-old and get paired with 16- and 17-year-olds.

IMVU: 3D Avatar Creator & Chat

Using the [website](#) or the app, users interact through elaborate 3D avatars. You can dress them up, place them in public or private rooms, and follow other users and chat with them. You can also buy a wide variety of objects using virtual coins -- earned primarily through taking surveys or watching ads or through buying outright with real money. There's no game or goal other than acquiring outfits, rooms, furniture, and other items or chatting with other users.

What parents need to know

Virtual sex and user privacy are the main issues for teens in IMVU. The avatars sport highly [stereotypical body types](#) with big muscles or breasts, and many of the outfits are skimpy. It also appears that users generate a following on other platforms by sharing their IMVU usernames, which invites more contact with people they don't know. Finally, the search term "IMVU sex" results in lots of advice about how to have (virtual avatar) sex and where to find it in IMVU.

Like - Magic Music Video Editor

Similar to the video lip-synching service [Tik Tok](#), Like lets you create short videos that often involve lip-synching. You can also follow other users, climb a leaderboard (based on how many likes you've gotten), send direct messages, and send virtual gems -- that cost real money -- to other users.

What parents need to know

Also like Tik Tok, Like features mature music and dancing and allows strangers to interact. The leaderboard motif encourages kids to post frequently and gather likes -- basically to keep kids on the app longer and increase their circle of friends (which only benefits the company). So while it can be creative and fun, it's best used with strict privacy settings by teens who are savvy about keeping themselves safe online.

Lipsi

Lipsi is yet another anonymous "feedback" app that lets users tell others what they think of them without revealing their own identities. The twist here is that users can get a Lipsi link to post in their Instagram profiles so the comments appear in their Instagram feeds. It's possible to identify yourself if you wish or to stay in "ghost mode" to hide out for a while.

What parents need to know

Like the short-lived [Sarahah](#), lots of posts are positive, but anonymous feedback services are generally a recipe for bullying and trolling. If your kid uses Lipsi with a public Instagram account, all of their Instagram followers can read the comments written by other people. While Lipsi is supposed to be for users over 17, there's no real barrier to downloading.

Socratic Math & Homework Help

This app lets you take a picture of a homework problem or question and get an answer and explanation in return, similar to [Photomath](#). Because it's more focused and filtered than an open internet search, the results are more targeted and helpful (in other words, it gives you the answers).

What parents need to know

The biggest concern is cheating: If your kid decides to use this app as an easy way out of homework, they'll lose a lot of learning. Secondly, since the answers come from the internet, they aren't always right. Used with good judgment (and monitoring by a parent), a teen could legitimately use Socratic Math to dig into tough concepts, but it's pretty easy to use for cheating.

Tellonym

This is an anonymous messaging app that invites users to follow contacts to get and give anonymous

feedback. You can also link your Tellonym account to other social media accounts.

What parents need to know

Though the developers claim comments are moderated and users have to be 17 to use it, neither of those efforts are preventing bullying and online drama. Comments about users being ugly and that they should kill themselves pepper app store reviews, and connecting the app account to a wider pool of social media users only intensifies the risk.

Zepeto

Zepeto is a combination avatar-maker and social media platform. The main draw is the ability to create your own likeness and have your avatar interact with your friends' avatars so you can create cute posts for social media. In a section of the app called "Zepeto town street," you can text with people you don't know.

What parents need to know

Zepeto's texting format is less risky than the video-chatting of HOLLA, but any interaction with strangers is iffy (especially for younger teens who might be interacting with grown-ups). User privacy is probably a bigger problem, though. Zepeto doesn't use location-tracking, but it does collect plenty of information on its users. And like some others on this list, there's a focus on image and appearance as well as lots of opportunities to spend money.

About Christine Elgersma

Christine Elgersma wrangles learning and social media app reviews and creates parent talks as Senior Editor, Parent Education. Before coming to Common Sense, she helped cultivate and create ELA curriculum for a K-12 app... [Read more](#)

Comments (6)

Adult written by jbeyer@iaoschool.org

January 30, 2019

Is it possible to get this article in a PDF that doesn't have all the graphics? I would like to pass it out at a parent night. Thanks!

Parent of a 9 year old written by [Christine Elgersma](#)

January 30, 2019

Unfortunately, you can't print it from the site without any images, but you can print as a PDF by clicking the three dots under the sharing options.

Parent of a 2, 7, and 9 year old written by [bunlibelearning](#)

January 21, 2019

Thanks for great article Christine. I wasn't aware of most of those Apps. I have came across "Discord" and thought I'd add that it has a feature called "Nearby" which may present some privacy concerns too: <https://support.discordapp.com/hc/en-us/articles/360014894392> Users can search for new friends that a nearby geographically with this feature.

Parent of a 9 year old written by [Christine Elgersma](#)

January 23, 2019

That's really helpful info -- thanks! I've added it to the review.

Parent of a 13 and 14 year old written by [maddox121](#)

January 19, 2019

Discord is 0 problem, just ground your kid if he turns it off

Parent of a 8 year old written by [codysartony](#)

January 17, 2019

very interesting)