SELF-DESTRUCTING/ SECRET APPS

Burn Note is a messaging app that erases messages after a set period of time. Users cannot send pictures or video. That may reduce issues such as sexting -- but words can hurt, too.
You need to know: It allows kids to communicate covertly. To discourage copying and taking screenshots, a spotlight-like system that recipients direct with a finger (or the mouse) only reveals a portion of the message at a time. **It may encourage risky sharing.** The company claims that its "Multi-Device Deletion" system can delete a message from anywhere: the device it was sent from, the device it was sent to, and its own servers. **You don't have to have the app to receive a Burn Note.** Unlike other apps users can send a Burn Note to anyone, not only others who have the program.

Snapchat is a messaging app that lets users put a time limit on the pictures and videos they send before they disappear.
You need to know: **It's a myth that Snapchats go away forever.** Data is data: it never truly goes away. (For example, the person on the receiving end can take a screenshot of the image before it disappears.) Snapchats can even be recovered. After a major hack in December 2013 and a settlement with the FTC, *Snapchat* has clarified its privacy policy, but teens should stay wary. **It can make sexting seem OK.**

Whisper is a social "confessional" app that allows users to post whatever's on their minds, with an image. Anonymous outlets give them the freedom to share their feelings without fear of judgment.
You need to know: Whispers are often sexual in nature. Eye-catching, nearly nude pics accompany secrets. **Content can be dark.** Common topics include insecurity, depression, substance abuse, and various lies told to employers and teachers. **Although it's anonymous to start, it may not stay that way.** The app encourages users to exchange personal information in the "Meet Up" section.

Yik Yak is a free social-networking app that lets users post brief, *Twitter*-like comments to the 500 geographically nearest *Yik Yak* users. Posts have come from a 1.5-mile radius (maybe even from the kids in front).
You need to know: **It reveals your exact location.** Each time you open the app, GPS updates your location. This app has cyberbullying, explicit sexual content, unintended location-sharing, and exposure to explicit information about drugs and alcohol**.** Some teens have used the app to threaten others.

CHATTING, MEETING, DATING APPS AND SITES

MeetMe: Chat and Meet New People -- Although not marketed as a dating app, *MeetMe* does have a "Match" feature whereby users can "secretly admire" others.
You need to know: **It's an open network.** Users can chat with whomever's online, as well as search locally. **Lots of details are required.** First and last name, age, and postcode are requested at registration, or you can log in using a Facebook account. The app also asks permission to use location services on your teens' mobile devices, meaning they can find the closest matches wherever they go.

Omegle is a chat site (and app) that puts two strangers together in their choice of a text chat or a video chat room. Being anonymous can be very attractive to teens, and Omegle provides a no-fuss opportunity to make connections. Its "interest boxes" also let users filter potential chat partners by shared interests.
You need to know: Users get paired up with strangers. That's the whole premise of the app. And there's no registration required. **This is *not* an app for kids and teens.** Omegle is filled with people searching for sexual chat. Some prefer to do so live. Others offer links to porn sites. **Language is a big issue.** Since the chats are anonymous, they're often much more explicit than those with an identifiable user might be.

Skout is a flirting app that allows users to sign up as teens or adults. They're then placed in the appropriate peer group, where they can post to a feed, comment on others' posts, add pictures, and chat. They'll get notifications when other users near their geographic area join, and they can search other areas by cashing in points. They receive notifications when someone "checks" them out but must pay points to see who it is.
You need to know: *Skout* is actually OK for teens if used appropriately. If your teens are going to use a dating app, *Skout* is probably the safest choice, if only because it has a teens-only section that seems to be moderated reasonably well. **There's no age verification.** This makes it easy for a teen to say she's older than 18 and an adult to say she's younger.

Tinder is a photo and messaging dating app for browsing pictures of potential matches within a certain-mile radius of the user's location. It's very popular with 20-somethings as a way to meet new people for casual or long-term relationships.
You need to know:It's all about swipes. Swipe right to "like" or left to "pass." If they swipe "like" on your photo too, the app allows you to message each other. Meeting up (and possibly hooking up) is pretty much the goal. **It's location-based.**
If teens are using these apps respectfully, appropriately, and with a little parental guidance, they should be fine. Take inventory of your kids' apps and review the best practices.

Great Sankey
Great in name, greatest together
High School

App Safety

Kik Messenger is free text app with no message limits, character limits, or fees if you only use the basic features. Because it's an app, the texts won't show up on your kid's phone's messaging service, and you're not charged for them (beyond standard data rates).
You need to know: Stranger danger is an issue. *Kik* allows communication with strangers who share their *Kik* usernames to find people to chat with. The app allegedly has been used in high-profile crimes, including the murder of a 13-year-old girl and a child-pornography case. There's also a *Kik* community blog where users can submit photos of themselves and screenshots of messages (sometimes displaying users' full names) to contests. **It's loaded with ads and in-app-purchases.** *Kik* specializes in "promoted chats" -- basically, conversations between brands and users. It also offers specially designed apps (accessible only through the main app), many of which offer products for sale.

ooVoo is a free video, voice, and messaging app. Users can have group chats with up to 12 people for free -- and it's common for kids to log on after school and keep it open while doing homework. Maybe they're using it for group study sessions?
You need to know: You can only chat with approved friends. Users can only communicate with those on their approved contact lists, which can help ease parents' safety concerns. **It can be distracting.** Because the service makes video-chatting so affordable and accessible, it also can be addicting. A conversation with your kids about multitasking may be in order.

WhatsApp lets users send text messages, audio messages, videos, and photos to one or many people with no message limits or fees.
You need to know: It's for users 16 and over. Lots of younger teens seem to be using the app, but this age minimum has been set by *WhatsApp*. **It can be pushy.** After you sign up, it automatically connects you to all the people in your address book who also are using *WhatsApp*. It also encourages you to add friends who haven't signed up yet.

MICRO-BLOGGING APPS AND SITES

Instagram lets users snap, edit, and share photos and 15-second videos, either publicly or with a private network of followers. It unites the most popular features of social media sites: sharing, seeing, and commenting on photos. It also lets you apply fun filters and effects to your photos, making them look high-quality and artistic.
You need to know: Teens are on the lookout for "likes." Similar to the way they use Facebook, teens may measure the "success" of their photos -- even their self-worth -- by the number of likes or comments they receive. Posting a photo or video can be problematic if teens are posting to validate their popularity. **Public photos are the default.** Photos and videos shared on *Instagram* are public unless privacy settings are adjusted. Hashtags and location information can make photos even more visible to communities beyond a teen's followers if his or her account is public. **Private messaging is now an option.** Instagram Direct allows users to send "private messages" to up to 15 mutual friends. These pictures don't show up on their public feeds. Although there's nothing wrong with group chats, kids may be more likely to share inappropriate stuff with their inner circles.

Tumblr is a cross between a blog and Twitter: It's a streaming scrapbook of text, photos, and/or videos and audio clips. Users create and follow short blogs, or "tumblogs," that can be seen by anyone online (if made public). Many teens have tumblogs for personal use: sharing photos, videos, musings, and things they find funny with their friends.
You need to know: **Porn is easy to find.** This online hangout is hip and creative but sometimes raunchy. Pornographic images and videos and depictions of violence, self-harm, drug use, and offensive language are easily searchable. **Privacy can be guarded but only through an awkward workaround.** The first profile a member creates is public and viewable by anyone on the Internet. Members who desire full privacy have to create a *second* profile, which they're able to password-protect. **Posts are often copied and shared.** Reblogging on Tumblr is similar to re-tweeting: A post is reblogged from one tumblog to another. Many teens like -- and, in fact, want -- their posts reblogged. But do you really want your kids' words and photos on someone else's page?

Twitter is a microblogging tool that allows users to post brief, 140-character messages -- called "tweets" -- and follow other users' activities. It's not only for adults; teens like using it to share tidbits and keep up with news and celebrities.
You need to know: Public tweets are the norm for teens.

Though you can choose to keep your tweets private, most teens report having public accounts. Talk to your kids about what they post and how a post can spread far and fast. **Updates appear immediately.** Even though you can remove tweets, your followers can still read what you wrote until it's gone. This can get kids in trouble if they say something in the heat of the moment.

Vine is a social media app that lets users post and watch looping six-second video clips. This Twitter-owned service has developed a unique community of people who post videos that are often creative, funny, and sometimes thought-provoking. Teens usually use *Vine* to create and share silly videos of themselves and/or their friends and families.
You need to know: It's full of inappropriate videos. In three minutes of random searching, we came across a clip full of full-frontal male nudity, a woman in a fishnet shirt with her breasts exposed, and people blowing marijuana smoke into each other's mouths. **There are significant privacy concerns.** You *can* adjust your settings to protect your posts; only followers will see them, and you have to approve new followers.
Parents can be star performers (without their knowledge). If your teens film you, you may want to talk about whether they plan to share it.

LIVE-STREAMING VIDEO APPS

YouNow: *Broadcast, Chat, and Watch Live Video* is an app that lets kids stream and watch live broadcasts. As they watch, they can comment or buy gold bars to give to other users. Ultimately, the goal is to get lots of viewers, start trending, and grow your fan base. Note that there are other apps like this that are less popular with teens such as *Periscope*, but Facebook has just included live-streaming as a feature, so expect to see more and more personal broadcasting.
You need to know: Kids might make poor decisions to gain popularity. Because it's live video, kids can do or say anything and can respond to requests from viewers -- in real time. There seems to be moderation around iffy content (kids complain about having accounts suspended "for nothing"), there's plenty of swearing and occasional sharing of personal information with anonymous viewers. **Teens can share personal information, sometimes by accident.** Teens often broadcast from their bedrooms, with personal information visible, sharing a phone number or an email address with viewers, not knowing who's really watching. **It's creepy.** Teens even broadcast themselves sleeping, which illustrates the urge to share all aspects of life publicly and share even intimate moments with strangers.