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A group of children are shown from the chest up, looking down at their smartphones. The child in the foreground is a boy with brown hair, wearing a light blue and white striped shirt. To his right is a girl with blonde hair. In the background, another girl with blonde hair is visible. They are all holding and looking at their phones. The image has a soft, slightly blurred background, suggesting an outdoor setting.

RAISING DIGITALLY RESPONSIBLE YOUTH

a guide for parents and caregivers



SAFER
SCHOOLS
TOGETHER



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INTRODUCTION

Our current world climate is constantly connected to technology. What do we need to know as parents/caregivers to protect our children and teach them responsible and appropriate uses of technology? The parameters of rules and expectations that we put in place at home will undoubtedly guide our children's sense of digital responsibility.

Raising children in a digital era can seem overwhelming at times. Technology has entered our lives at a rapid pace over the past several years and continues to evolve. The reality is that apps and technological devices will change, but the behavior stays the same. Moderation is key to managing technology use in our homes. This does not need to be an "all or nothing" approach with either absolute prohibition or full unchecked usage.

It is beneficial to maintain an open, transparent, and ongoing dialogue with our children regarding the internet, technology, social media, and video games. Remaining approachable and being a trusted adult to the children in our lives could make the difference between whether our children come to us when issues or uncomfortable situations arise, rather than feeling alone in the process of going to their peers to seek comfort and advice instead.

Technology is here to stay, whether we like it or not. The digital reputation of today's students, or how they choose to represent themselves online, is being evaluated and assessed by future employers and/or admissions departments. The goal of this parent/caregiver guide is to help introduce the major social media platforms, video games, and relevant trends that are either being used already or have the potential to be used by our children.

Stay the course. We want to prepare our children for their tech-infused futures and walk down this digital journey alongside them by staying informed. Good luck!



Photo by Julia M Cameron.

GENERAL HOUSEHOLD SUGGESTIONS

There are some general parenting/caregiver tips that help navigate a household to respect digital boundaries. Some of these can include:

- Keeping phones and devices out of the bedroom. Sleep is important for growth and according to Dr. Ben Carter, 89% of adolescents have at least one device in their bedrooms – most of which are used around bedtime, doubling their chances of getting insufficient sleep.¹ Sleep disturbance in childhood is known to have adverse effects on health, including poor diet, obesity, sedentary behavior, reduced immune function, and stunted growth. It has also been linked to mental health concerns².
- If possible, have a central charging station for all portable digital devices. The kitchen table or island, living room, or another common area in your house is a great place to keep *all* household devices charged at night, including your own! By modeling digitally responsible behavior and setting an example for youth that you don't need to sleep with your device(s), it helps children understand that they don't need to either!



Photo by Driven by Décor.

- Know their passwords – it is your parental right. You paid for the device that you gave your child, which means...you guessed it! You own it! You have the right to spot-check devices that belong to you, including the ones that you gave your child.
- Stay educated. If your child comes to you and asks to download an app that you're unfamiliar with, download the app and try it out yourself first. Play around with it and do your research. If your child already has an app or game, ask them to teach you about it and how it works!

¹ [Bedtime use of media devices more than doubles the risk of poor sleep in children -- ScienceDaily](#)

² [Children and Sleep | Sleep Foundation](#)

- Put tape or a sticky note/sticker over the device camera when not in use.



Photo by ReviewGeek.

- Build a culture of openness and trust in establishing a two-way dialogue about technology and social media between you and your child. You want to be approachable to your children **when**, not if, a concern comes up in their digital lives.
- Technology isn't going anywhere – try to introduce technology into your home and your children's lives at a pace you feel comfortable with, relative to your child's age and emotional maturity.
- We are not our child's best friend. We are responsible for ensuring their safety in the online world just as much as we are responsible for ensuring their safety in the offline world!
- Google yourself and your family. Any names, addresses, emails, phone numbers, or social media usernames that are associated with your family can be searched online; see what shows up before others do.
- Remind your children of the permanence of anything posted online or sent electronically. Not everything we post online stays, but we don't get to decide what stays and what doesn't!

These tips are intended to be used in whole or in part alongside your personal parenting methods. You as a parent/caregiver know what is best for your child. It's important to put our children's well-being first and allowing yourself to have a strong understanding of digital responsibility will enable your child to as well so they can make better decisions online and offline on their own.

If you would like to attend a parent session on Raising Digitally Responsible Youth, how to keep our children safe online, and understanding current trends, please reach out to your school/school district or PAC and ask them to request a proposal from Safer Schools Together.³

³ [Request a Training \(saferchoolstogether.com\)](https://saferchoolstogether.com)

THE ESSENTIALS

There are many components to the online world that are generally known and understood by most digital users, however, here are three essential terms that we need to understand to take control of our digital responsibility:



Hashtag

A hashtag (#) is a symbol added before a word or phrase to create a searchable category indexed by social media and discoverable by other users. Instagram, X, and TikTok are the primary platforms where hashtags are used. Hashtags are a way of making it easier to find and follow other users/posts within a particular category or contribute to a conversation.



Username

A username is a unique online identity that is chosen to represent someone online. Most platforms make you choose a username when you create an account, and this username is typically unique to this individual user (may not be used by others, unless that username is no longer in use). Be mindful that many social media platforms will also ask for a display or vanity name, which can be replicated by any user on the platform.



Passwords

We all know the challenge of trying to remember our passwords for a website or an app and it's easy to fall into the habit of using the same passwords for all our logins. This is a dangerous habit, especially if it is something predictable such as a dog name or home address. We should remind our children ***not to share their passwords with their friends!*** This is a major source behind accounts getting "hacked". Use different passwords for each platform you have an account for and ensure they are strong with a mix of numbers, letters, and special characters (!@#\$%^&*).

TIP: Try a password manager! There are many free password manager apps available in the iOS app store, Google Play store, and in the form of browser extensions. Password managers store your passwords on a digital "keychain" and can help you to manage passwords (especially really strong ones), so you don't have to! Make sure to do your research before picking a password manager and always use it at your discretion. If you do not feel comfortable using an online password manager, we recommend having a book with your passwords kept in a secure location.



SEXTING VS. SEXTORTION

There is no doubt that smartphones are having a tremendous impact on our everyday lives. The use of instant messaging especially has skyrocketed since the introduction of smartphones and social media. Research suggests that over 41 million messages are sent out **every minute**,⁴ and this number is expected to continue to increase.

The term ‘sexting’ has emerged as the use of text messages and instant messages to send sexually explicit photographs, videos, and messages has become more prevalent. Sexting is also commonly found over popular apps such as WhatsApp and Instagram Direct Messages, but we have seen it widely popularized through Snapchat due to its ability to send photographs/videos and messages that can only be seen once for only a few seconds before it “disappears” into cyberspace – unless, of course, someone was to take a screenshot and distribute it to others...

Sexting has several dangers to acknowledge regarding how it can permanently impact the lives of our youth. One of the most dangerous scenarios that we see occur repeatedly, especially in teenagers, is sextortion. Sextortion is a form of exploitation that involves the threat of releasing shared intimate videos, images, or explicit messages online.⁵ Sextortion can happen to anyone who chooses to sext – it’s not always a stranger you’ve never met; it can also be someone close to you. It is crucial for our youth to understand that when they choose to engage in sexting, they are subjecting themselves to the risk of sextortion.

If you or someone you know is worried that their intimate images/videos are circulating the online space, there are resources available to support them.

[Take it Down](#) is a free service that can help you remove or stop the online sharing of nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit images or videos taken of you when you were under 18 years old. When using Take it Down, you would first select the image(s) or video(s) on your device that you’re concerned about. Then, Take It Down will assign a unique digital fingerprint, called a hash value, to the image or video. The hash will be shared with participating online platforms that can use it to detect copies of these images or videos on their services and take action to remove the content or limit the spread. This happens without the image or video ever leaving your device or anyone viewing it, and you don’t have to share any personal information.

For those over the age of 18, you may refer them to the [Stop Non-Consensual Intimate Images](#) website, which works the same way as Take It Down.

⁴ [Text, Don’t Call: Messaging Apps Statistics for 2024 \(kommandotech.com\)](#)

⁵ [Sextortion: A Definition](#)



Video by YouTube user FBI – Federal Bureau of Investigation.



SOCIAL MEDIA APPS TO KNOW

SOCIAL MEDIA APPS TO KNOW

Snapchat (“Snap”)

Since its release in 2011, Snapchat has remained one of the most popular social media applications that our youth are using to communicate and share their digital lives. With over 414 million daily active users worldwide and over 4.75 billion Snaps created every day,⁸ Snapchat is the de facto medium of communication for students in grades 6-12. The reason for its popularity is that it turned text communication into a visual experience that allows users to send disappearing photos that leave behind (almost) no evidence and for the most part, don’t become part of a youth’s digital footprint.

The foundational feature that makes Snapchat desirable to youth is the disappearance of photos/videos that vanish after they have been opened. Users can set a viewing time of as little as 1 second up to 24 hours after which, once viewed, it will be deleted from the recipient’s device and as the company claims, from Snapchat’s servers.⁹

Snapchat allows users to take still photos, record short videos, add text, and create drawings to send to a personalized, and typically private, list of friends. However, nothing stops the recipient from taking a screenshot or using a different device to take a picture or the image or screen recording of the video. **Note:** if you take a screenshot using the recipient device, Snapchat will notify the sender that you’ve taken a copy.

Despite news headlines that suggest Snapchat is “just a sexting app” or one that is *only* used to send nude photos, this is not the case and represents a very small usage of the app.



Video by YouTube user Simple Alpaca.

⁸ [Snapchat Demographic Stats: How Many People Use Snapchat in 2024? \(backlinko.com\)](https://backlinko.com/snapchat-demographic-stats-how-many-people-use-snapchat-in-2024/)

⁹ [Do Your Snapchats Really Delete After Being Opened? - PSafe Blog](https://psafeblog.com/do-your-snapchats-really-delete-after-being-opened/)

Snapchat Lingo

Snaps

A user takes a photo/video using their digital device/smartphone in real time. The user can select an amount of time between 1-10 seconds or choose infinite time for the receiver to view the photo/video. A user can elect to have the photo/video that they have just taken saved into their photo gallery, their 'My Eyes Only' folder, or simply sent via Snapchat without being saved on their device.

Stories

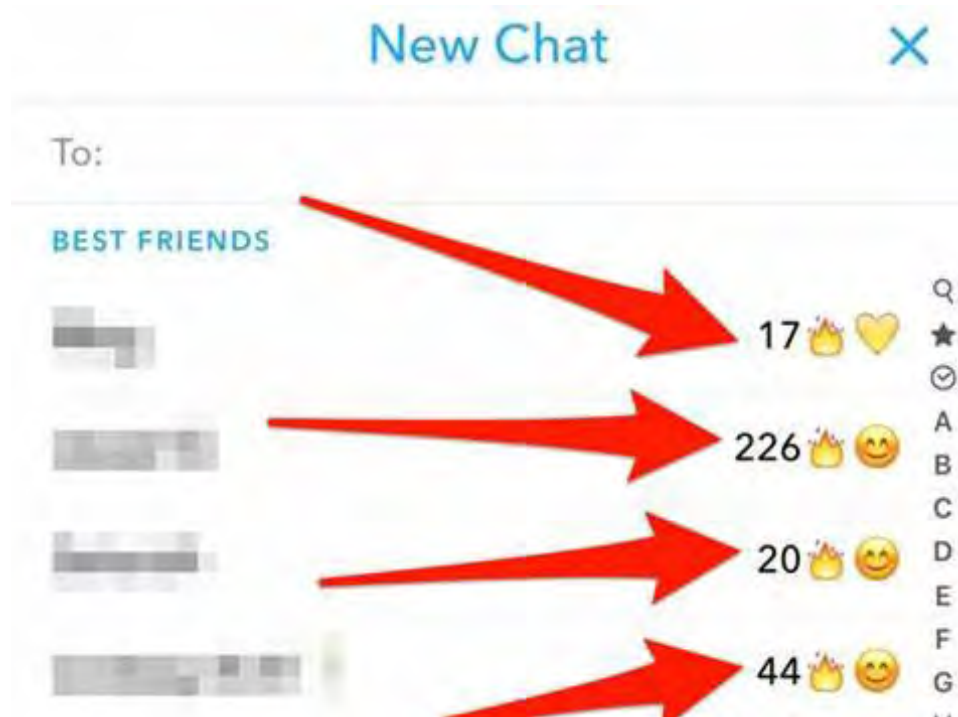
A user can add the photo/video to their 'Story'. Depending on the user's privacy settings, the photos/videos added to a story can be viewed by all Snapchat users or just those on their friends' list for up to 24 hours.

Chat

Users can type a text message, create a voice message, voice call, or video call within the Snapchat app to their friends using this feature. Once both parties have viewed the message, the message will vanish. The chat settings can also be manually changed within each conversation to be set to disappear after 24 hours instead. Additionally, users can save their chats from disappearing. Photos/videos from the camera roll or gallery of the user's device can be uploaded and sent within the chat. Group chats often exist between multiple friends.

Streaks

Seen within the chat log screen, a user's 'Snapchat Streak' is the number of consecutive days that the account owner and a friend have sent at least, but no less than, 1 snap per day to each other. If they do not snap with each other within 24 hours, they lose their streak with their friend (this is a huge deal to today's youth!)



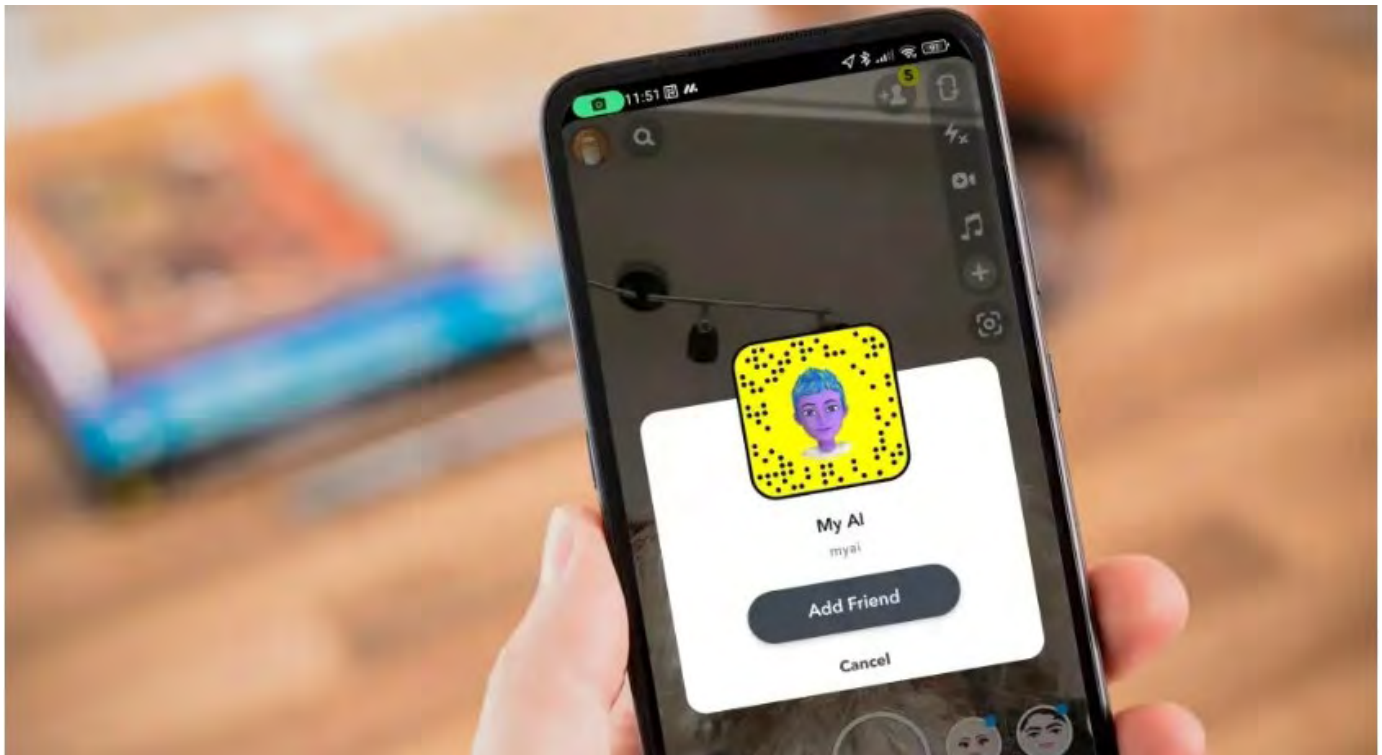
My AI

As the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) increases, we can expect to see a surge in the development of new AI services, specifically within social media. Most recently, Snapchat rolled out its own AI bot, called My AI. The new AI bot is powered by OpenAI's ChatGPT technology but has additional safety enhancements and controls that are unique to Snapchat.¹⁰ What differentiates Snapchat's AI from services like ChatGPT or Midjourney is a user can customize the bot's name as well as the way it looks, reducing the perception of interacting with an AI system.

With My AI, users can leverage a variety of AI capabilities. To access My AI, users need to access the Chat screen. From the Chat screen, users will then be able to select My AI and ask the AI bot a variety of questions. Some examples of how My AI can be used include asking for advice, requesting help to plan a trip or find directions, or even asking for simple suggestions such as 'What to make for dinner?'¹¹ If a user has shared their location with Snapchat, My AI will be able to provide specific information including nearby location recommendations.¹²

Users currently have the option to send feedback to Snapchat by pressing and holding any responses from the AI bot. This allows users to share more on what they'd like to see more or less of while Snapchat continues to train the My AI bot.¹³

Unless you sign up and pay for Snapchat+, there is no verified way, nor has SST found a way to permanently remove My AI from a user's Snapchat account.¹⁴ We encourage parents/guardians to talk to their children about the risks associated with having conversations with AI, and how AI should not replace a trusted adult, parent, or adviser if they are experiencing a difficult situation.



¹⁰ [What is My AI on Snapchat and how do I use it?](#)

¹¹ [What is My AI on Snapchat and how do I use it?](#)

¹² [What is My AI on Snapchat and how do I use it?](#)

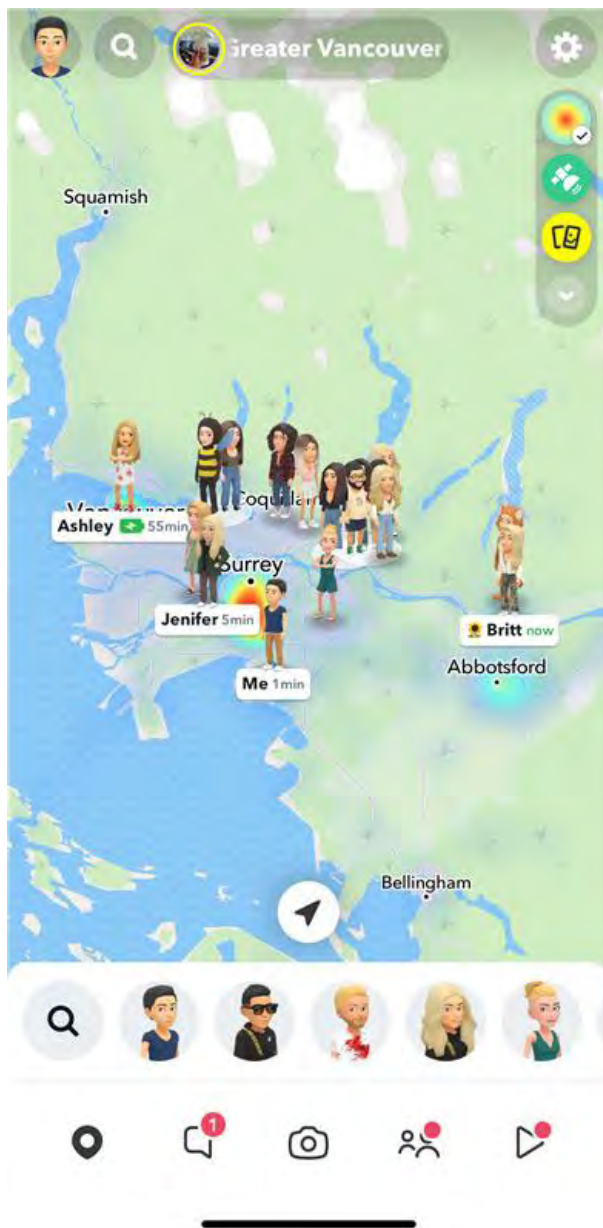
¹³ [What is My AI on Snapchat and how do I use it?](#)

¹⁴ [How do I Unpin my Snapchat AI?](#)

Snap Map

The Snap Map allows users to view Snaps of sporting events, celebrations, breaking news, etc. in their communities and around the world. This feature is only available within the application itself. Perhaps the most concerning content viewable from this map, however, is where your friends are...exactly where they are...in real-time. Users can share their locations with everyone on their “friends” list so they can see exactly where their friends are and what they are doing (driving, sleeping, listening to music, etc.) in real-time on a virtual map.

This is an example of what the Snap Map looks like to a user from the mobile application while logged into their account.



These are all of Tyler’s friends who have Snap Map enabled. They are represented by a Bitmoji¹⁵ they designed for themselves.

This is why it is so important that our children are only communicating with close friends and family that they know and trust in real life on Snapchat.

Within the Snapchat Settings, users can turn off the ability for others to see their location by enabling something called Ghost Mode or only allowing their location to be viewed by certain friends (i.e. their best friend) and/or parents/caregivers or other trusted adults.

Ghost Mode is a full privacy mode that makes a user’s presence on the Snap Map visible to the user alone. This disallows other users from viewing their location, including users on their friend list.

The Snap Map is often used by SST Threat Analysts and law enforcement to find missing students by asking their peers to share their Snap Map with us.



¹⁵ [Bitmoji](#)

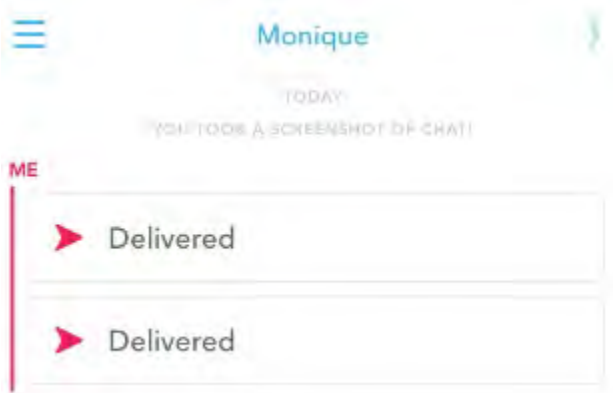
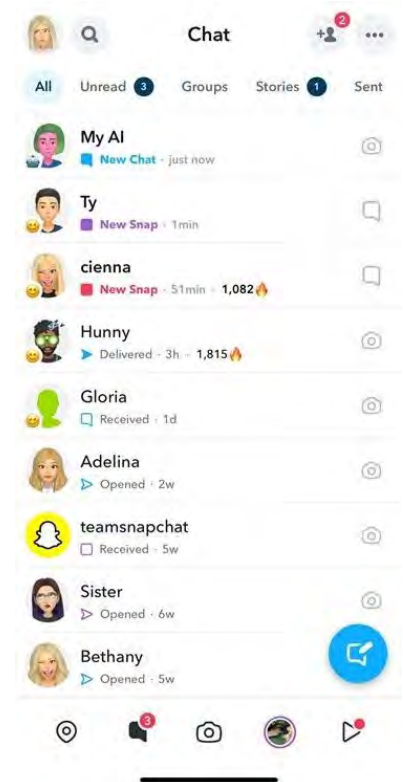
Message Screen

Here is an example of what the Snapchat Chat screen could potentially look like within a Snapchat account.

Use the Chat Screen Icon Guide and the Friend Emoji charts on the following pages to see whom this user interacts with the most.

To test your knowledge, try answering the following questions (answers in footnotes at the bottom of this page):

- What does a blue-colored notification mean?¹⁶
- What does a pink-colored notification mean?¹⁷
- What does a purple-colored notification mean?¹⁸
- Who is this user's best Snapchat friend?¹⁹
- What is a Snapchat best friend?²⁰
- Who has the longest Snap Streak with this user and how many days has this Snap Streak lasted?²¹
- Who was the last person this user sent a message to and when?²²
- Does this user currently have a Snap Story? How do you know?²³



- Are the Snaps to Monique incoming or outgoing?²⁴
- What type of Snaps were sent to Monique (Photo, Video, or Text)?²⁵
- At the top of the Snapchat with Monique, there is a notification that a screenshot was taken of the chat – who can see this?²⁶

¹⁶ Text or audio communication.

¹⁷ Photo communication.

¹⁸ Video communication.

¹⁹ Dsasu (indicated by yellow heart).

²⁰ The person this user has sent and received the most amount of Snaps to/from.

²¹ Jonny Wanyanga (273 days).

²² Jessica (5 minutes ago).

²³ Yes; indicated by the round photo in the upper left-hand corner of the screen.

²⁴ Outgoing as they say 'Delivered' rather than 'New Snap' or 'New Chat'.

²⁵ Photo.

²⁶ Both the user who took the screenshot and Monique.

Chat Screen Icon Guide

Sent Icons

-  You sent a Snap without audio
-  You sent a Snap with audio
-  You sent a Chat
-  Depending on privacy settings, a gray pending icon may appear if someone has not accepted your friend request

Opened Icons

-  A friend opened a Snap without audio
-  A friend opened a Snap with audio
-  A friend opened a Chat

Received Icons

-  You have an unopened Snap (or group of Snaps) without audio
-  You have an unopened Snap (or group of Snaps) that includes audio
-  You have an unread Chat

Viewed Icons

-  Your Snap sent (without audio) has been viewed
-  Your Snap sent (with audio) has been viewed
-  Your Chat has been viewed
-  A Snap or Chat is pending and may have expired

Screenshot Icons

-  A screenshot has been taken of your Snap without audio
-  A screenshot has been taken of your Snap with audio
-  A screenshot has been taken of your Chat

Replay Icons

-  Your Snap sent without audio has been replayed
-  Your Snap sent with audio has been replayed

Photo courtesy of Snapchat

Friend Emoji Guide

Friend Emojis are determined by Snapchat to keep track of the status of a user's friends. These can change over time based on the interactions between users. Friend Emojis can also be altered in the settings of Snapchat.²⁷

💖 **Super BFF**

You have been each other's #1 [Best Friend](#) for two months in a row. This is getting serious!

❤️ **BFF**

You have been each other's #1 Best Friend for two weeks in a row. Aww!

💛 **Besties**

You are each other's #1 Best Friend. You sent the most Snaps to this Snapchatter, and they sent the most Snaps to you, too.

😊 **BFs**

They're one of your Best Friends! You send a lot of Snaps to this Snapchatter, but they're not your #1 Best Friend.

👀 **Mutual Besties**

Your #1 Best Friend is also their #1 Best Friend.

👁️ **Mutual BFs**

One of your Best Friends is also one of this Snapchatter's Best Friends!

🔥 **Snapstreak!**

You're on a [Snapstreak](#)! This appears next to the number of days that you and a friend have continually Snapped each other.

⌚ **Snapstreak is ending**

Your Snapstreak is going to end soon! Both you and your friend need to send a Snap to each other within 24 hours, or you'll lose your Snapstreak. Chats and Snaps sent in Groups don't count!

🎂 **Birthday**

It's your friend's [birthday](#)! This appears next to your friend's name on the date they entered as their birthday on Snapchat.

²⁷ [How to change Snapchat Friend Emojis](#)

Instagram ("IG")

Owned by Meta,²⁸ the popular photo- and short video-sharing app Instagram has over 500 million+ daily active users.²⁹ If you see a youth scrolling up with their thumb on their smartphone looking at photos, chances are they are looking at Instagram.

**#love #instagood #beautiful #fun #smile
#photooftheday #instagramers
#selfie #pretty #lol
#picoftheday #instalove
#bestoftheday #best #beauty
#fashion #nofilter #pamper #cute
#salonselfie #selfie #throwbackthursday**

Hashtags (#) are used often on this platform. This gives people a way to be introduced to and follow other users with similar interests.



Video by YouTube user Simple Alpaca.

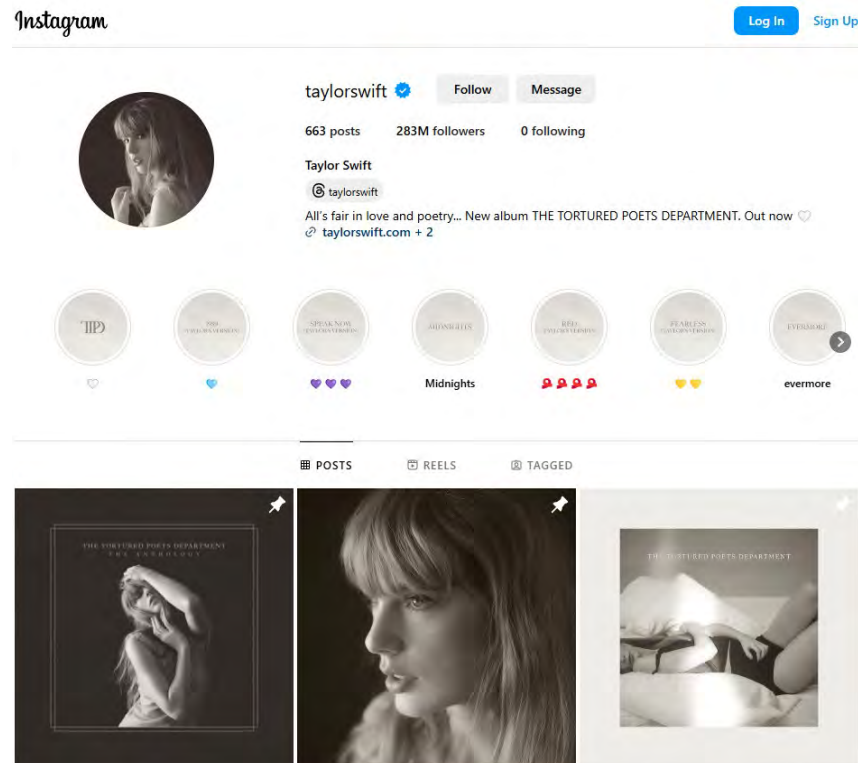
²⁸ [Meta Platforms](#)

²⁹ [How Many People Use Instagram? 95+ User Statistics \(2023\) \(backlinko.com\)](#)

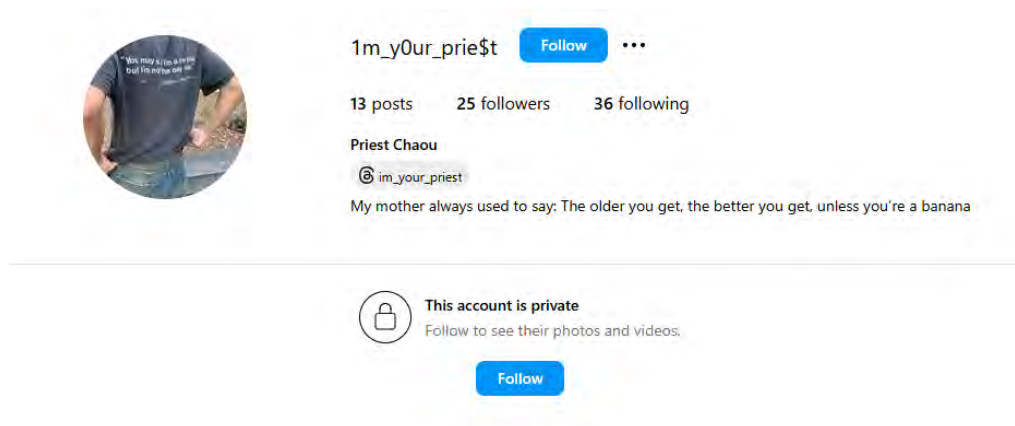
Privacy Settings on Instagram

On Instagram, users either share posts with everyone by having a public profile or only share posts with people they have approved to follow them with a private profile. SST strongly suggests children have private profiles until they are ready to start using their profile as a portfolio for prospective jobs, admission to post-secondary institutions, and other personal/professional projects.

A public profile will show the account's content publicly on Instagram, even without logging in:



A private profile will show the account but not the content they post:



Having a private account on Instagram requires users to go to their account settings. There, under 'Account Privacy', users can toggle the Account Privacy switch.



Account privacy

Private account



When your account is public, your profile and posts can be seen by anyone, on or off Instagram, even if they don't have an Instagram account.

When your account is private, only the followers you approve can see what you share, including your photos or videos on hashtag and location pages, and your followers and following lists.

Instagram Stories

Instagram users have the ability to post photos/videos to their “Stories” for the public, their followers, or a list of “close friends” to see. These stories are only visible for 24 hours. This concept was copied from Snapchat, which quickly gained traction among youth. Users can see who has watched their Instagram Stories and can receive poll questions, messages, and reactions from other users.



Photo by NapoleonCat.

Instagram Reels

Instagram Reels were added as a feature in 2020 and were originally 15 seconds long.³⁰ These are short videos with music included, very similar to the style of TikTok videos. Instagram Reels can now be up to 90 seconds and can also be cross-shared on Meta's other platform, Facebook. Instagram Reels are the fastest-growing feature worldwide and are expected to have over 2.35 billion users each month.³¹

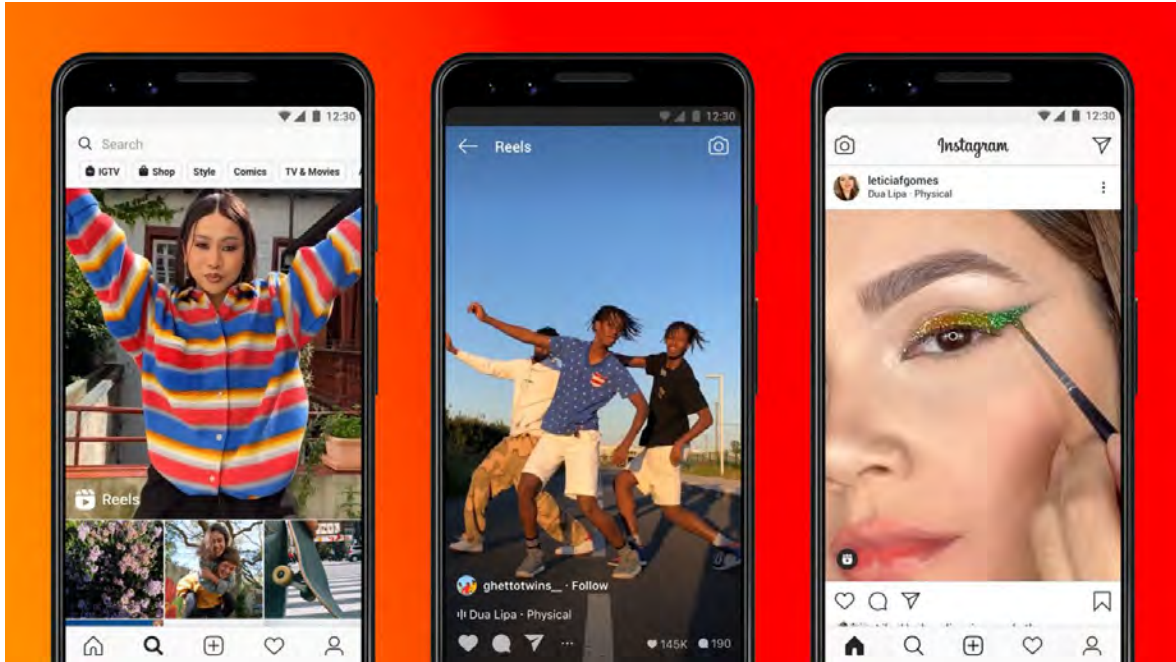
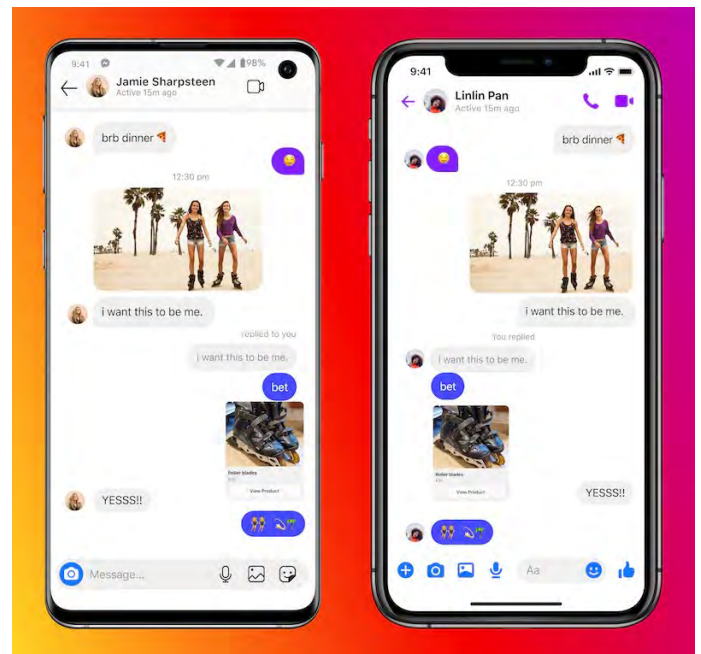


Photo by BuddyMantra.

Direct Messaging (“DMs”)

Direct Messaging, or ‘DMs,’ is a private message inbox within the Instagram app. This is a feature that allows users to privately communicate, like text messaging. This is where youth can receive private messages from their friends, participate in group chats, or even receive messages from strangers. There is currently no way to disable Instagram DMs.

It is important to note that photos, videos, and voice recordings can be sent through Instagram DMs, including from accounts that aren't mutual (doesn't follow the user/the user doesn't follow them). Additionally, users can enable “Vanish Mode,” similar to Snapchat's feature, deleting chats after a recipient has read them.³²



³⁰ [Instagram Reels - BrandMentions Wiki](#)

³¹ [Instagram Reels Stats](#)

³² [Instagram Vanish Mode](#)

TikTok

Formerly known as Musical.ly, TikTok is currently one of the world's most popular video-sharing social networking applications and is centered around short videos with popular songs or sounds added. TikTok reigned as the most downloaded app globally in 2023 with over 1 billion downloads.³³ Despite several incidents of data breach allegations³⁴ and being banned in several countries,³⁵ TikTok is not going away anytime soon.

TikTok has strategically marketed to younger audiences, and although users must be 13 years of age to sign up, the content isn't being filtered. However, TikTok does offer some form of parental control under their Family Pairing feature.³⁶ However, age-inappropriate content is inevitably reaching 37.3% of its estimated audience that is under the age of 18,³⁷ as well as audiences who are potentially younger than the required 13 years of age, as it is quite easy for younger app users to lie about their age.

The average time a user spends on TikTok is 95 minutes per day;³⁸ this is an increase of 49 minutes per day from 2022's statistic of 46 minutes.³⁹ This time is spent either creating and sharing short videos or watching the existing plethora of TikTok videos uploaded to the platform already. Either way, it's being done for nearly 100 minutes every day. This time exceeds the amount of time spent on other social media platforms such as YouTube (48.7 minutes), Snapchat (30 minutes), and Instagram (33.1 minutes).⁴⁰



Video by YouTube user Simple Alpaca.

³³ [TikTok App Downloads 2023](#)

³⁴ [TikTok sued for billions over use of children's data - BBC News](#)

³⁵ [Which countries have banned TikTok? | Mashable](#)

³⁶ [How to Use TikTok's Parental Controls \(howtogeek.com\)](#)

³⁷ [TikTok User Statistics \(2023\) \(backlinko.com\)](#)

³⁸ [9 Stats About Average Time Spent on Tiktok 2024 \[New Data\] \(businessdit.com\)](#)

³⁹ [10 TikTok Statistics You Need to Know in 2022 \[New data\] \(oberlo.com\)](#)

⁴⁰ [Average Time Spent On Social Media in 2023 \(by Platform\) \(oberlo.com\)](#)

There is also a growing number of adults on TikTok. More than 44% of users are between the ages of 20-39⁴¹ years old. Adults joining the app are not necessarily there to create a safe space for TikTok's younger audiences and may not even realize that potentially children of all ages, if not just ages 13 to 18, can see the content they choose to post.

Although TikTok states in its Terms of Service⁴² that any inappropriate content will be taken down by moderators, it may take hours, days, or even not happen at all. This is something to consider when keeping in mind that more than 1 billion TikTok videos are viewed every day.⁴³



With the increasing popularity of video-sharing apps, there are a couple of different apps to look out for that are similar to TikTok such as Triller⁴⁴ - an American-based app with over 250 million downloads⁴⁵ and the ability to share videos with added music or sounds similar to TikTok.

YouTube has also followed this trend with YouTube Shorts, which can be found on [Page 23](#) of this guide.

⁴¹ [Global TikTok user age and gender distribution 2024](#)

⁴² [Terms of Service | TikTok](#)

⁴³ [33+ Amazing TikTok Statistics You Should Know in 2023 \(techjury.net\)](#)

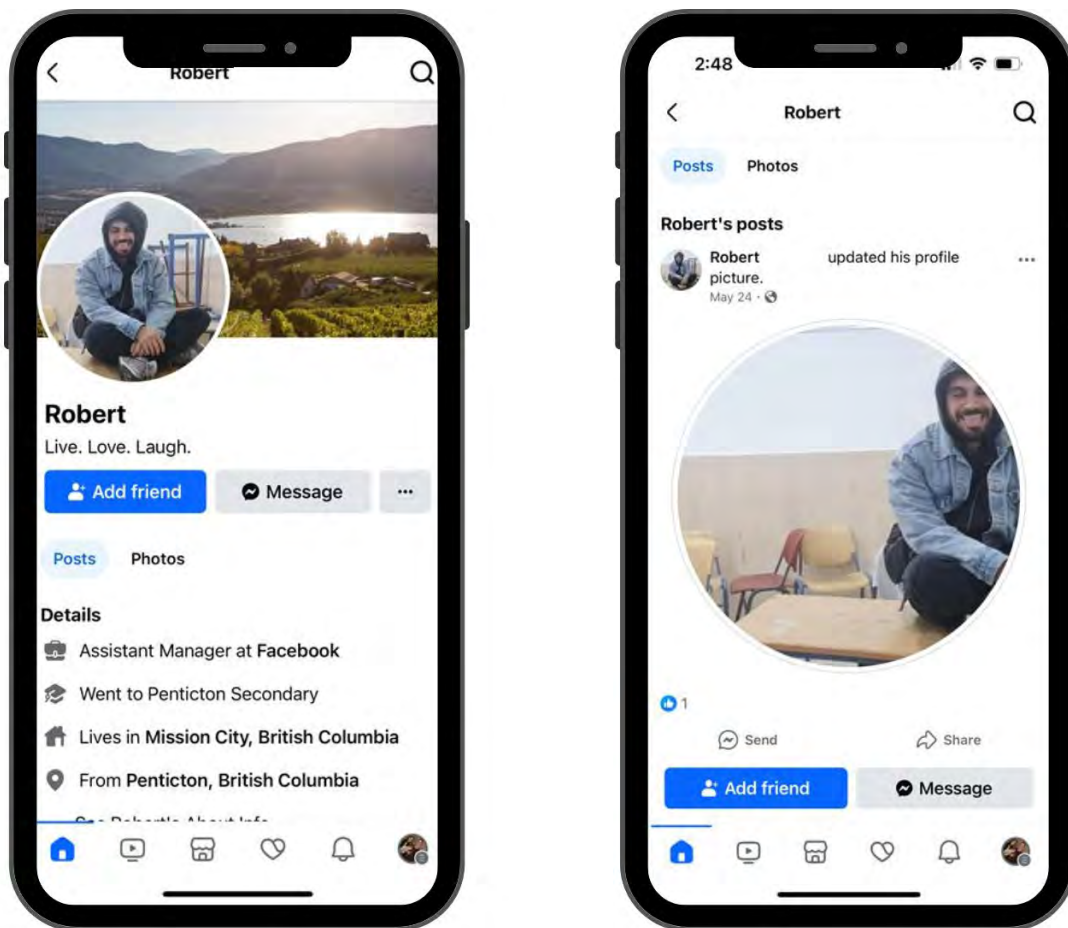
⁴⁴ [Home | Triller](#)

⁴⁵ [15 Triller Statistics, Facts, and Figures to Get to Know the Platform \(influencermarketinghub.com\)](#)

Facebook & Messenger

Although less popular among youth in comparison to other social media apps, Facebook and Messenger are still very active and important to note. Both owned by Meta, Facebook and Messenger can be used together under Facebook's web browser platform, or separately in their own respective apps from the iOS App Store or Google Play store.

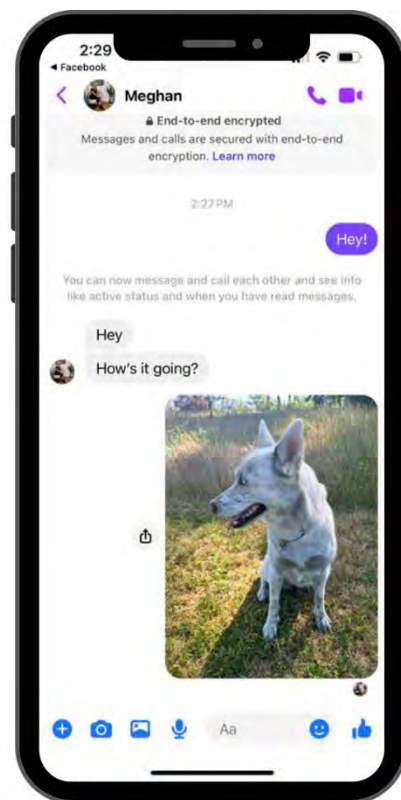
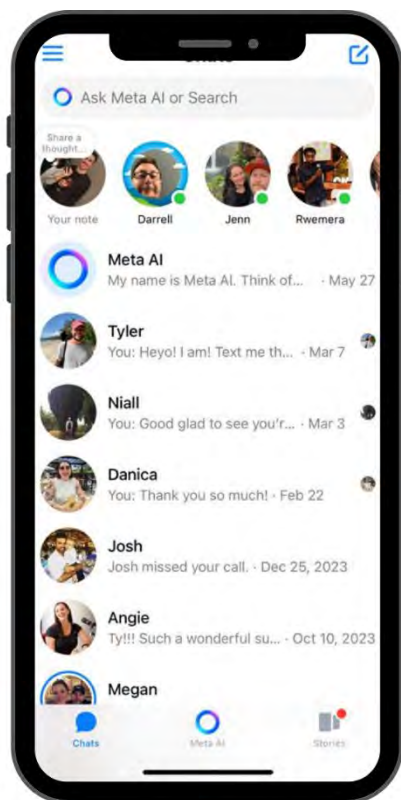
Facebook is a social media platform that allows users to stay connected with friends and family online. Since its creation in 2004, Facebook stands at over 5 billion downloads⁴⁶ and is now operated under the umbrella company Meta, which also owns Instagram.



Messenger is a separate app exclusively instant and direct messaging service, which automatically connects with a user's Facebook friend list. Because Messenger is integrated into the desktop version of Facebook but not the mobile version, the separate Messenger app had 262.5 million downloads in 2023.⁴⁷ and is used on mobile more frequently than the standalone Facebook app. Similar to Snapchat and Instagram, Facebook also has the option to view "Stories" which are posts made to share with your social media friends that last for 24 hours.

⁴⁶ [Facebook Revenue and Usage Statistics \(2023\) - Business of Apps](#)

⁴⁷ [Facebook Messenger - Statistics & Facts | Statista](#)



In 2017, an application called Messenger Kids was released. Messenger Kids is an application for children to communicate with pre-approved friends and family through their parents' Facebook accounts. Messenger Kids features include:

- Recent contacts and chat history; allows parents to see whom their child is chatting with, whether they are video chatting or sending messages, and how frequently those conversations happened over the past 30 days.
- Log of images in chats; allows parents to see the most recent photos and videos their child has sent and received in their inbox.
- Reported and blocked contacts; allows parents access to a list of the reporting and blocking actions their child has taken in the app.
- Remote device logout; allows parents to see all devices where their child is logged into Messenger Kids and log out of the app on any device through the Parent Dashboard.
- Download your child's information; allows parents to request a copy of their child's data.

YouTube

PewDiePie, MrBeast, Markiplier, DanTDM, and Logan Paul: these names may or may not be familiar to you, but if your child spends time on YouTube, they have likely come across videos by these YouTube “famous” creators before.

The over-the-top humor, outrageous pranks, and clickbait⁴⁸ video thumbnails have made these YouTube creators extremely popular and influential. Owned by Google, consider YouTube the Google of video. Created in 2005, YouTube is currently the second most visited website in the world⁴⁹ (second to Google) with over 2.49 billion monthly active users⁵⁰ and approximately 5 billion videos are watched every day.⁵¹

YouTube can be used as a way for users to pass the time, express themselves, learn new skills, and watch content they enjoy such as sports, video games, etc. However, it can also be very easy to cross over into watching less-than-appropriate topics and content. Parents should set parameters on video watching and moderate access to age-appropriate videos.



Video courtesy of YouTube user Creator Brain.

⁴⁸ [What is Clickbait? - Definition from Techopedia](#)

⁴⁹ [Top Website Ranking \(similarweb.com\)](#)

⁵⁰ [How Many People Use YouTube in 2023? \[New Data\] \(backlinko.com\)](#)

⁵¹ [How Many YouTube Videos Are Watched A Day in 2024? - EarthWeb](#)



TOP 500 FUNNIEST FAILS IN GTA 5

1M views • 6 months ago



TOP 500 FUNNIEST FAILS IN GTA 5 // (BEST GTA V Funny Moments Compilation) ⇄ Welcome back to a new episode of GT...



MY GIRLFRIEND FOUND MY SIDE CHICKS UNDERWEAR...

7.7M views • 3 years ago



CHECK OUT MY COURSE ON BEING A YOUTUBER = www.edfluence.com! TURN ON MY POST NOTIFICATIONS FOR ...



100 ACCURATE LIFE HACKS

37M views • 5 years ago



Most life hacks don't REALLY help in real life situations. That's why I set out on a journey to find the most efficient life hacks.



11 Easy ways to kys w/common household items

132K views • 4 years ago



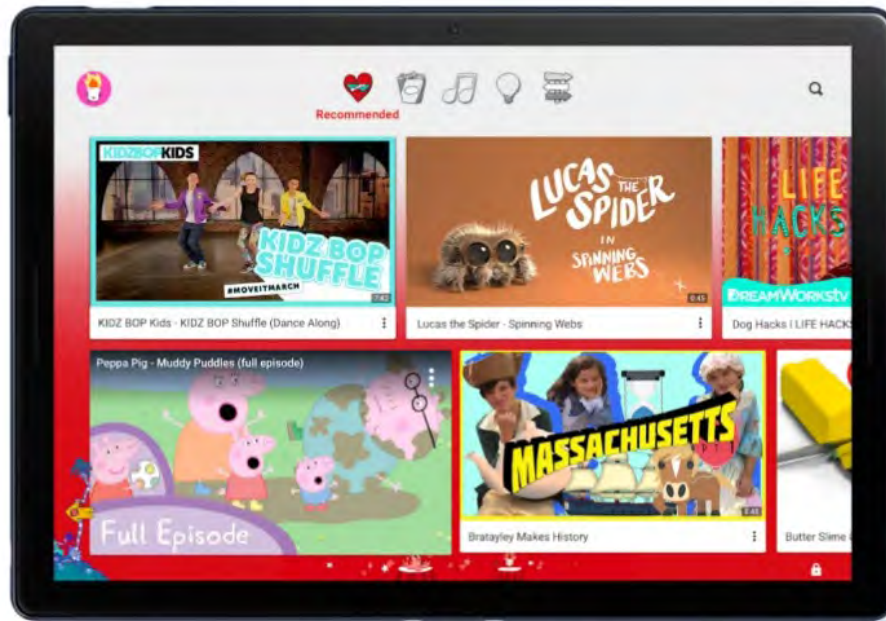
This video is for comedic purposes only. I do not take responsibility for any harm you may cause to yourself or anyone else.

These are just a few examples that could potentially appear as 'Suggested Videos' on the front page upon visiting YouTube. Users can watch YouTube passively without being logged into an account or can sign in to track the type of videos they watch and like, subscribe to channels, and upload their own videos.

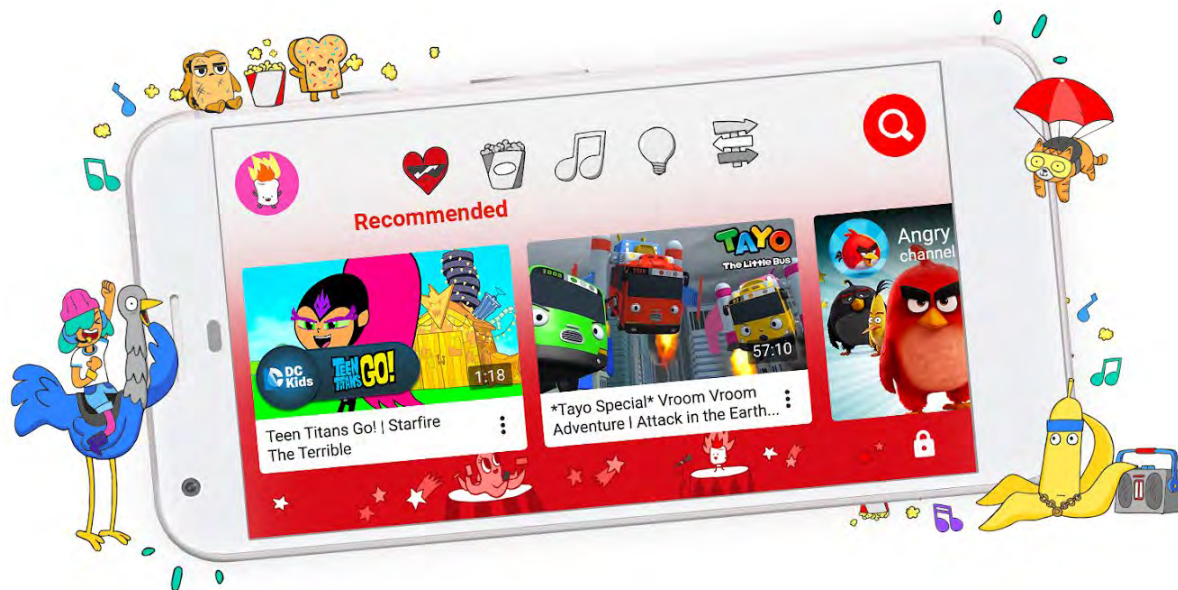
Although YouTube does offer features such as Restricted Mode,⁵² it is best practice to download YouTube Kids for children under 13 years of age. This version of YouTube (explained in further detail on the following page) only displays content that is tagged as 'Kid-Friendly' by YouTube and their trusted 'Kid-Friendly' creators and advertisers.

⁵² [Turn Restricted Mode on or off on YouTube - Computer - YouTube Help \(google.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/help/turn-restricted-mode-on-or-off)

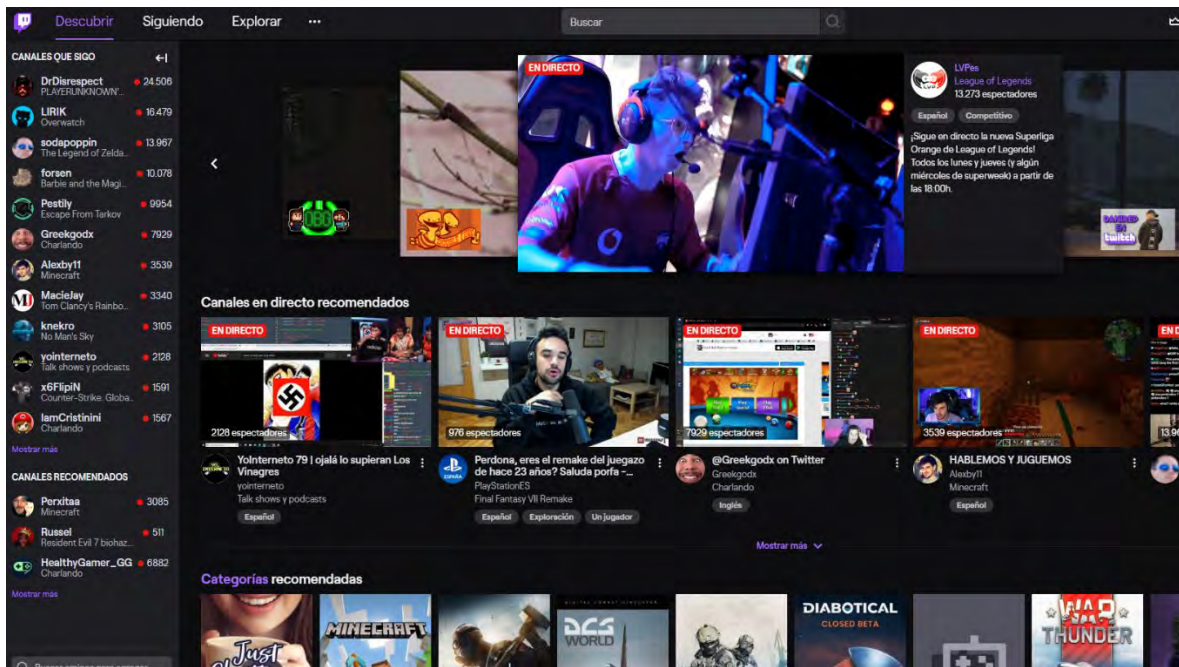
YouTube Kids



For younger audiences, YouTube has created an app that is specifically aimed at children between the ages of 3-8. The videos on YouTube Kids are heavily censored and focus more on family-friendly entertainment and learning. YouTube Kids is a separate application from YouTube and must be set up using an adult's email address. From there, the adult user can set up profiles for their children and even control in-app searching. Parents/caregivers can also set viewing timers to help monitor and control app usage. YouTube Kids can be a good alternative to YouTube as it introduces our youngest to digital media on our terms and with specific, child-friendly boundaries.



Twitch



Twitch is a live video streaming service that primarily focuses on video games. During a stream, there is a streamer who is the person conducting the broadcast with or without live webcam footage and is typically playing a video game while engaging with their live audience in the live chat.

Viewers can chat with the streamer and other users in the stream's live chat log, in which other viewers can type back or the streamer may respond by voice. Twitch users have sent more than 14.2 billion chat messages since the streaming service's inception in 2011.⁵³ The average Twitch user can be found using Twitch for 95 minutes per day,⁵⁴ which can include watching and/or streaming.

Twitch is generally free to watch, and following streamers is also a free feature. However, there are certain paid subscriptions that users can use to give streamers a set amount of money per month to support their stream called Subscriptions, as well as single-time payments called Donations/Tips and Bits. These can be purchased for real-world currency through the Twitch platform and spent within the website/app towards any streamer who has this feature enabled.

Because Twitch is owned and operated by Amazon, any user with an Amazon Prime account is eligible for Twitch Prime and is given one free Subscription pass (worth \$4.99 USD) per month. This can be used in the same way a regular Subscription is used.

Although gaming is still the most popular topic on Twitch, there are also other topics such as 'Just Chatting', 'Art', and 'Pools, Hot Tubs, & Beaches'. It's important to note that although some channels may restrict viewers to ages 18+ (monitored only by a button confirming you are over 18, no actual age verification occurs), many streams that do not have an age restriction still broadcast inappropriate content.

⁵³ [Twitch by the Numbers: Stats, Users, Demographics & Fun Facts \(muchneeded.com\)](https://muchneeded.com/twitch-by-the-numbers-stats-users-demographics-fun-facts/)

⁵⁴ [Twitch by the Numbers: Stats, Users, Demographics & Fun Facts \(muchneeded.com\)](https://muchneeded.com/twitch-by-the-numbers-stats-users-demographics-fun-facts/)

Discord

Discord is a free voice and text messaging application that is available as a desktop, browser, and mobile application (iOS and Android) with over 150 million monthly active users.⁵⁵ Typically, Discord is used as a space for gamers to chat either by instant message, voice chat, or video chat. Discord is now being used for many different types of online communities such as YouTuber/Influencer chat channels, art communities, and a place to meet new people. It is estimated that 960 million Discord messages are sent every day.⁵⁶

Within Discord, users can create or join 'Servers' where they can invite as many people as they would like to engage in a chat together. Voice chat can be used as either an open mic or push-to-talk – a feature that only allows others to hear you by enabling voice via the designated button set by a user on their keyboard or mouse. Users can also share their computer screens with Discord.

Discord also offers a paid subscription service called Discord Nitro⁵⁷ that allows users to have Discord upgrades such as increased upload limits, customized emojis within servers, HD video streaming, access to games and activities to play within the platform with friends, Server Boosts, custom profiles, and more.



Video courtesy of YouTube user Discord.

⁵⁵ [Discord Statistics 2024: Valuation, Revenue & Market Share \(earthweb.com\)](https://earthweb.com/discord-statistics-2024-valuation-revenue-market-share/)

⁵⁶ [Discord Revenue and Usage Statistics \(2024\) - Business of Apps](https://businessofapps.com/discord-revenue-usage-statistics-2024/)

⁵⁷ [Nitro Benefits and Features | Discord](https://discord.com/nitro)

Vault Apps

Vault apps are mobile applications designed to hide private photos, videos, files, or other applications on a device, usually by using the icon of another app such as a calculator, camera, or notes. Vault apps are popular amongst teens in order to protect their mobile privacy by using app locking, private bookmarks, incognito browsing, cloud backup, and more. However, teens should be reminded that using technology is a privilege and they are not entitled to full privacy on their devices for their own safety.



The “Rules” (That No One Follows)

Although many social media platforms and apps have a User Minimum Age Agreement⁵⁸ either to sign up or outlined in their Terms of Service, these are typically bypassed by younger users to bypass this effort.

A screenshot of a social media age verification pop-up. The pop-up has a white background with a grey border and a close button (X) in the top right corner. The title is "Enter your age". Below the title, it says "To follow this account, you must meet minimum legal age requirements. Please supply your date of birth." Underneath, it says "Select your date of birth:" followed by three dropdown menus for "Year", "Month", and "Day". At the bottom left, there is a link for "Privacy policy" in red text. At the bottom right, there is a blue button with the word "Done" in white.

⁵⁸ [Age Limitation in Terms and Conditions Agreements - TermsFeed](#)

Internet, Texting, and Social Media Lingo/Slang

LINGO	TRANSLATION	LINGO	TRANSLATION
2 man	Double Date	Molly	MDMA
AMA	Ask me anything	Mood	Relatable
ASL	Age/Sex/Location	NBD	No big deal
ATM	At the moment	NM	Not much/Nothing much
Bet	I agree	No Cap	No Lie
BF/GF	Boyfriend/Girlfriend	Noob	Inexperienced
BFF	Best friend forever	NP	No problem
Bop	A good hit, something you enjoy	NVM	Never mind
Bot	Cannot be trusted	OMW	On my way
BTW	By the way	Oof	Onomatopoeia when something bad happens
Bussin	Something is good or amazing	POV	Point of view
Cancelled	Bad publicity	PPL	People
Cray	Crazy	Pressed	Annoyed/Angry
Cuffed	To be locked down in a relationship	qq	A texting term for crying
Cyber	Sex online	Rizz/Rizzler	To charm and woo a person
Dead	Funny/Unbelievable	RN	Right now
Deada**	Being serious	Roasted	To be dissed
Deets	Details	RT	Retweet
DGAF	Don't give a f***	Salty	Being upset over nothing
DM	Direct message	Scoom/Scoomer	Shooting/Shooter
DTF	Down To F***	Selfie	Picture of yourself
Emo	Emotional	Sending Me	Something that is very funny
Extra	Over-the-top	SH	Self-Harm
F4F	Follow for follow	Shade	Disrespectful manner
Faded	Drunk/Intoxicated	Shook	Shocked/Surprised
Fanum Tax	Forcefully deriving any unknown property from its rightful owner	Sick	Crazy/Awesome
Fav/Fave	Favorite	Sigma	"Alpha Male"
Fierce	Awesome/Positive Spirit	Simping	To have a crush on someone
Finsta/Spams	A secondary social media account	Slay	Succeed

Fire	Cool/Awesome	Snack/Meal	An attractive person
Fit	Outfit	Snap	Snapchat
Flex	Showing off	Snipe	Took a photo
FML	F*** my life	Squad	Group of friends
FWB	Friends with benefits	Stan	A crazed fan
GG	Good game	STFU	Shut the f*** up
Go-Off/Pop-Off	To hype someone up	Stoked	Excited
GTFO	Get the f*** out	Story	Social media feature where you can add photos/videos that are viewable for 24 hours
GTG/G2G	Got to go	Sus	Suspicious
HBD	Happy Birthday	Swag	Being or having something cool
HBU	How about you	Taking a L	Taking a loss
Hella	A lot/really	TBH	To be honest
HundoP	100% sure about something	Tea	Gossip
IDC	I don't care	Thicc	A sexualized term for a desirable body
IDK	I don't know	Thirsty	A synonym for someone who is sexually eager
IG	Instagram	Tho	Though
ILY/ILU	I love you	Troll	Internet bully
IMO	In my opinion	TTYL	Talk to you later
IMU	I miss you	TW	Trigger Warning
It's Giving	Connecting someone or something's look or vibe with an ironic connotation	TXT	Text
JK	Just kidding	VSCO Girl	Girls that use VSCO
KMS/KYS	Kill myself/Kill yourself	W/E	Whatever
Lit	Cool/Awesome	WDYM	What do you mean
LOL	Laughing out loud	Weak	Amused
Low-Key	Quiet/Modest	Wig	Cool/Awesome
Maxxing	Improve one's physical appearance	WYA	Where are you at?
Merch	Merchandise	Yeet	To discard an item at a high velocity
Mewing	Face Exercise to improve Jawline	YOLO	You only live once
MOFO	Mother f*****		

If you have any questions about lingo or slang and their respected translations, please contact Safer Schools Together toll-free at 1-866-554-0848 or info@saferschoolstogether.com.



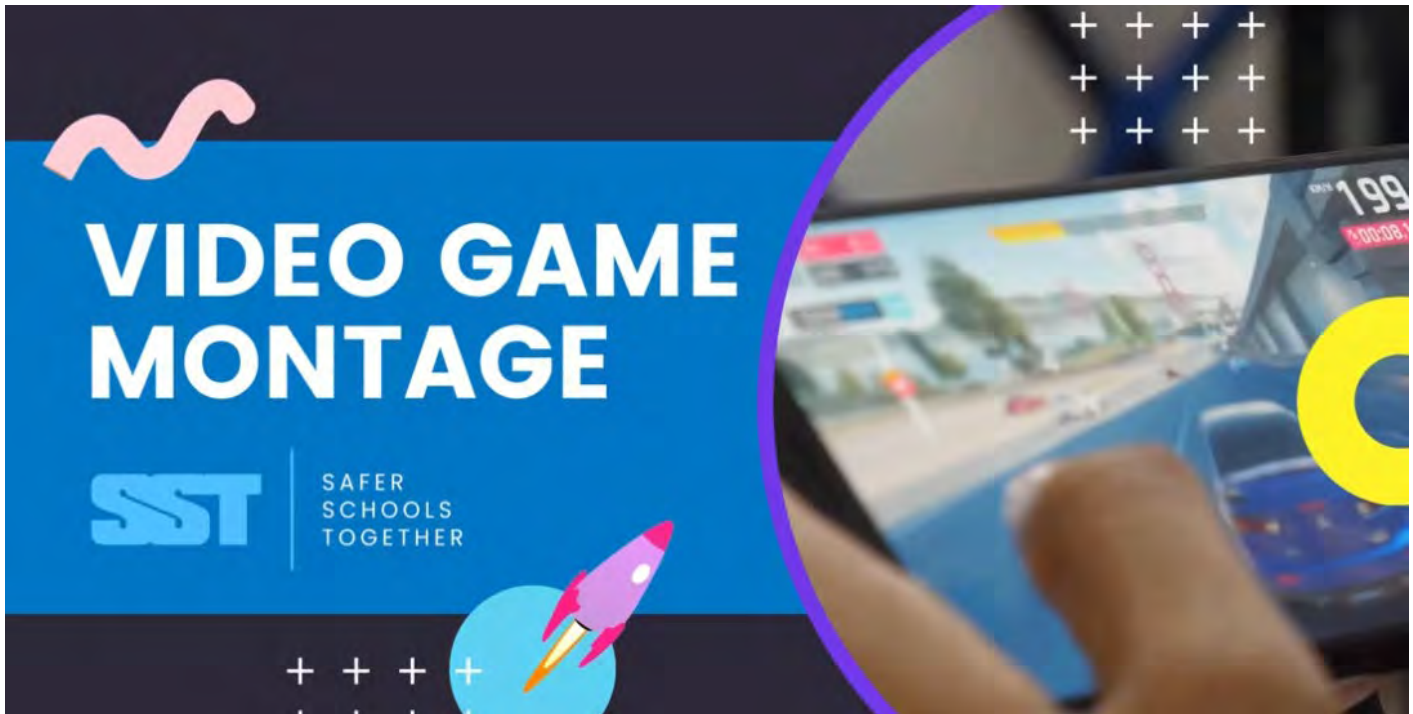
VIDEO GAMING

VIDEO GAMING

Video games with mature content advisories were once tightly policed by retailers across the continent using the ESRB Ratings Guide,⁵⁹ similar to age restrictions on R-rated movies. Unfortunately, alongside the proliferation of technology growth and unlimited access to video content, enforcement of these ratings has become non-existent. It is not uncommon to hear of some parents deciding to purchase Grand Theft Auto for their 12-year-old! If you are unfamiliar, Grand Theft Auto V has in-game exposure to graphic violence, sexually explicit content and reenactment, alcohol and drug use/abuse, and strong language.

Top 10 Most Violent Video Games of All Time:⁶⁰

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Mortal Kombat (2023) | 2. Manhunt (2003) |
| 3. Postal (1997) | 4. Doom (2016) |
| 5. Gears of War (2006) | 6. Grand Theft Auto (2013) |
| 7. God of War (2005) | 8. Splatterhouse (2010) |
| 9. Dead Space (2023) | 10. Dishonored (2012) |



⁵⁹ [ESRB Ratings Guides, Categories, Content Descriptors](#)

⁶⁰ [Top 20 most violent video games 2024](#)

The Bad News

Research generally suggests that prolonged exposure to violent video games can make people feel more aggressive, desensitized to violence, and less empathetic. Experts also suggest that due to the global pandemic, online gaming and gambling addictions are on the rise.⁶¹

The Good News

Video games can provide several possible cognitive benefits including increased response time performance and hand-eye coordination, practice in visual-spatial skills, stronger visual memory, improved pattern recognition, and using trial and error to problem-solve more often.

Moral of the Story

Content and context matter! As parents/caregivers, we need to be involved in which games our children are playing. Enforcing time limits and self-regulation while minimizing exposure to inappropriate and violent content is important. We want to reinforce pro-social games that can test and grow our children's creativity and enhance cognitive skills while remaining age-appropriate for our children's emotional maturity.

SST encourages parents to do their research on any video game before allowing children to play them. A detailed description of most games can be found online through Google search. Two of the most popular games played by our youngest children (aged 4-13) are Roblox and Minecraft which have online multiplayer modes that include chat and messaging features which parents should be aware of and monitor at their discretion.

The Ratings Guide from the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)



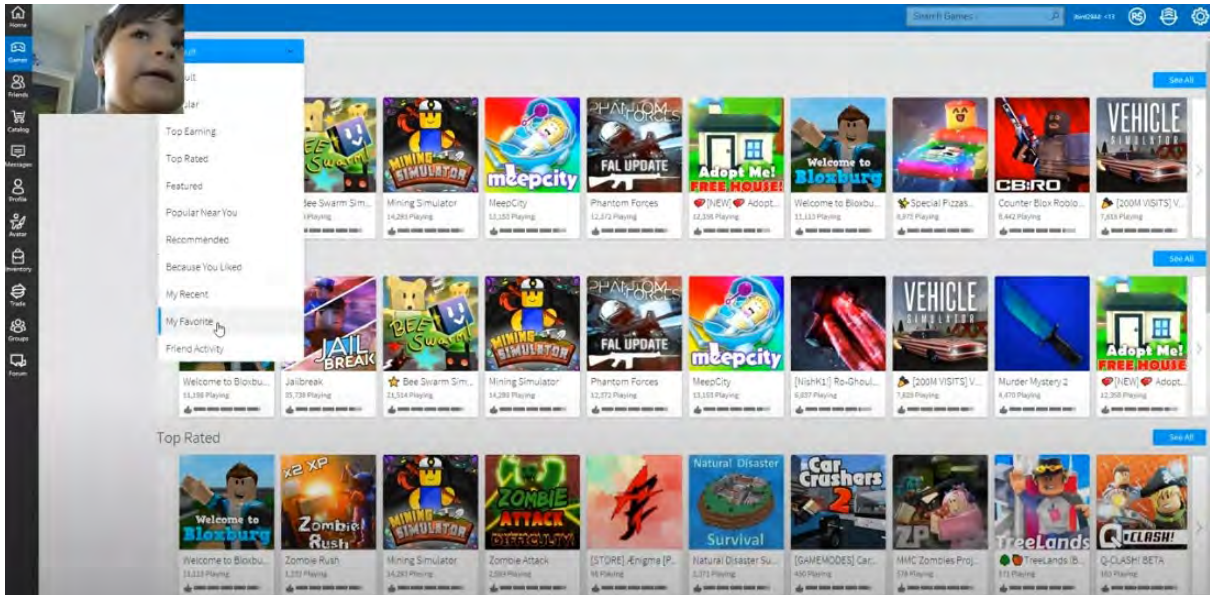
ESRB ratings are categorized into three parts:

- Rating Categories; suggest age appropriateness.
- Content Descriptors; indicate content that may have triggered a particular rating and/or may be of interest or concern.
- Interactive Elements; inform about interactive aspects of a product, including the users' ability to interact, the sharing of users' location with others, if in-app purchases of digital goods are completed, and/or if unrestricted internet access is provided.

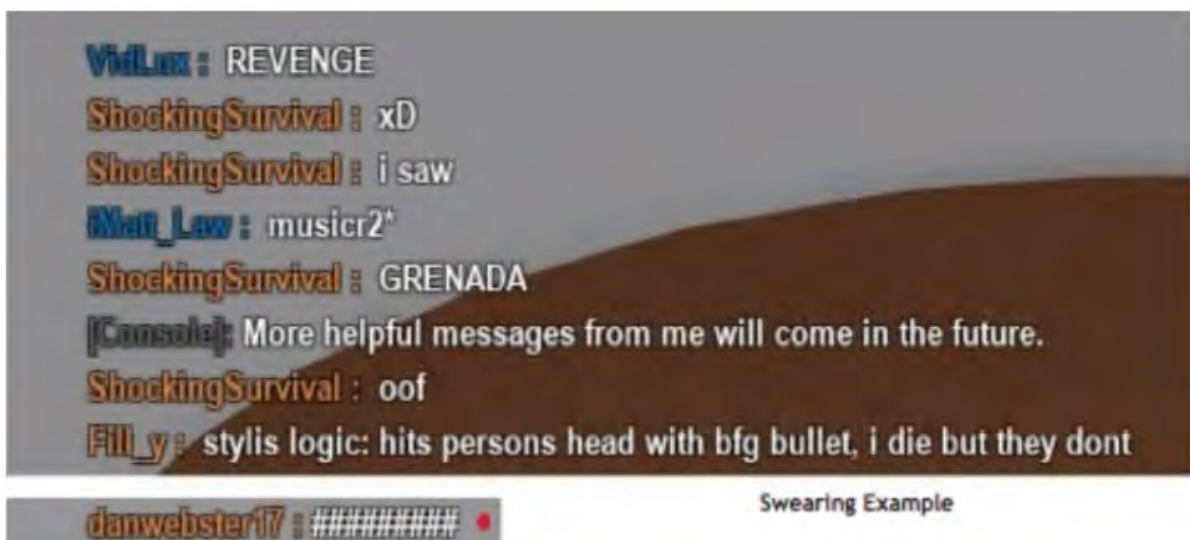
⁶¹ [Online Gambling, Gaming Addiction Has Increased During COVID-19](#)

Roblox

Roblox is a downloadable interactive game platform that allows users to play multiple types of games inside the Roblox world. It is a creative, Lego-style sandbox environment for playing and creating games.



Roblox has built-in capabilities for friends lists, messaging users, and in-game chat. The chat function works differently depending on the users' age – for users 13 and under, the chat is built off a list of “whitelisted” words, preselected by the developers as safe for children to use. If the user is over 13 (or sets their birthday so it appears they are), then chat is more open-ended. However, there is still a built-in “blacklist” function that attempts to keep curse words and derogatory terms out of the chat.



Roblox privacy settings also permit parents/caregivers to control who is allowed to interact with their children. The user can adjust whether everyone, friends, or no one has access to communicate both inside games and using the platform's messaging system. By setting the appropriate age category and ensuring privacy settings are updated, parents/caregivers can limit interactions with other users.

Minecraft



Minecraft is one of the most accessible video games available, as it has sold more than 300 million copies across PC, game consoles (Xbox, Playstation, and Nintendo Switch), and smart devices.⁶² It is very easy to learn and can be played anywhere. Minecraft can be played either in the online world or offline as a single-player.

Game Modes

- Survival; the player can level up, search for resources, and craft different weapons, tools, and structures. Players must fight hunger and monsters during the night.
- Hardcore; same as Survival Mode but the player only gets one life. If they die, the game is over, and they must start fresh.
- Creative; the user cannot die and has access to all the blocks and items available. With this game mode, users can create whatever they want with no restrictions. The player can also fly to get from place to place faster.

Online Play and Chat

Multiplayer allows players to play alongside friends. They can build, mine, create, and even fight each other in some servers. All game modes and difficulties that exist in single-player also exist in multiplayer.

Minecraft does have child-friendly servers available, which you must request to join. This ensures random players will not come into the servers as they will not have access. Single-player is the safest option as no one can join or chat with a single-player user.

⁶² [Minecraft Revenue and Usage Statistics \(2024\) - Business of Apps](#)

Fortnite

Amongst one of the most popular video games available today, since its release in 2017 by Epic Games, Fortnite has accumulated over 500 million players globally.⁶³ Fortnite is available to download for free on PC, game consoles (Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch), and as a mobile game on iOS and Android. Fortnite should not be played by children who are not equipped to handle unmoderated text or voice chat, simulated gun violence, or high-stress situations.



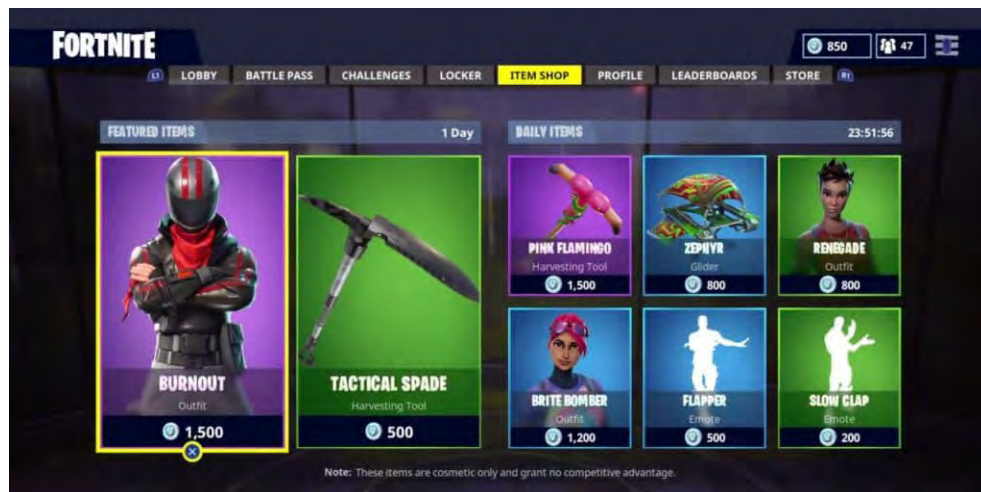
Game Modes

- Fortnite: Battle Royale; a Battle Royale (BR) Game Mode allows up to 100 players to compete in a player-versus-player (PVP) setting. Players can play alone (Solo), with a friend (Duo), or in a group of 4 (Squad). The objective is to pick up weapons, ammunition, and bandages to kill off other players and be the 'last man standing'. Players can hide in buildings and even collect resources to build their structures and traps.
- Fortnite: Creative; Creative mode in Fortnite is much like other Creative Modes which act as a sandbox-style game that allows players to build maps with free reign on what to put in their game, different types of game modes, and game time.
- Fortnite: Save the World; this Game Mode allows 4 players to work together towards a common objective on various missions against zombie-like husks. Some of the objectives include fighting off the computer-generated "zombie husks", saving survivors, and defending equipment.

Microtransactions

Although Fortnite is technically 'free-to-play', it is important to note that Fortnite is a game that includes microtransactions. Players can opt-in to purchase a game pass that gives them special items, allows them to earn certain achievements, and gives them 'loot boxes' (boxes to open that include in-game items such as special emotes, dances, and gun skins). The currency in this game is called 'V-Bucks' and can be purchased with real-world currency.

⁶³ [Fortnite Stats 2024 \(Active Players, Revenue\) \(Demandsage\)](#)



Online Play and Chat

Players can communicate in-game through both text chat functions and a voice chat function. Players can mute other players if they do not wish to hear from them or can mute themselves if they do not wish to be heard. There is no moderation in either the text chat or the voice chat functions, however, users can report these interactions to the Fortnite moderation team for review at a later date.



Valorant

Since its release by Riot Games in June 2020, Valorant has accumulated approximately 23 million players.⁶⁴ Valorant is currently available on PC and is now beta testing on game consoles or smart devices.

Valorant is a 5-player vs. 5-player team First Person Shooter (FPS) game where precise gunplay meets unique character abilities. Although technically 'free-to-play', much like its competitor Fortnite, the game includes micro-transactions where players are enticed to purchase a battle pass that gives them special items, allows them to earn certain achievements, and makes purchases for gun skins and effects with real-world currency.



⁶⁴ [Valorant Player Count, Rank Distribution, Revenue \(2024\) \(headphonesaddict.com\)](#)



Steam is a free, downloadable software where users can purchase and download both paid and free games online. Steam acts as a cloud-based gaming library where games are stored and can be downloaded on any device that is associated with the user's Steam account.

Steam was initially released in 2003 by developer Valve and has over 132 million monthly users today after seeing a 10% growth in the past year alone.⁶⁵

Although gaming communications and ratings are based on the individual games downloaded, Steam also has its own community where users have profiles and can be identified by individualized usernames and profile photos. Much like social media, Steam profiles can be public or private. Users can also leave comments on Steam profiles and utilize Steam's private messaging service, which includes both voice and text chatting.



⁶⁵ [Steam Usage and Catalog Stats for 2023 \(backlinko.com\)](#)

Doxing

Doxing (or 'Doxxing') is most commonly known in association with video games that have online multiplayer capabilities but has also become popularized among other subcultures of the internet such as forums, live streaming sites, and mainstream social media. It's important to be aware of doxing when using any form of the internet and understand how it can be prevented.

Doxing is a form of online abuse where identifying or sensitive information of an individual is released online with malicious intent. Typically, information such as one's first and last name, home and/or work address, family members, or even banking information is revealed to the internet in an attempt to intimidate the victim or even subject them to dangerous and vulnerable positions both online and in the real world. Motivations of doxing can include personal, competitive, or political reasons. Doxing does not discriminate and web users of all ages, genders, and internet experiences can be targeted. Doxing is also one of the few forms of cyberattacks that can cause direct, serious, and lasting harm to its victims.

Searching and obtaining an individual's publicly available information and re-posting it online is not technically considered a cybercrime or attack, however, doxing can become illegal if this publicly available or private information is obtained through illegal methods such as hacking or extortion. Other factors that may cause doxing to cross the line into illegality are harassing or intimidating the victim, invading their privacy, or having the victim assaulted.

In order to avoid having your information or your child's information doxed, it's important to follow a few best practices for using the internet, including any video games that your child may be playing:

- Don't use legal or identifying first, middle, or last names as usernames.
- Don't post photos/videos of the interior/exterior of your home that may include identifiers such as your address, where your doors/windows/bedrooms are located within the property, license plates, mail, or locks.
- Don't post photos or videos with any identifying factors to your child's school such as the school name, class schedules, or classmate's faces that have not given permission for their photo/video to be shared; this includes online learning.
- If you are going to leave your home for an extended period of time such as a vacation, be cautious about who you share this information with including the dates that no one will be home.
- Don't list the day, month, or year of a birthday publicly.
- Don't post photos/videos of your computer screens, desk stations, or any other personal area where you may expose sensitive information such as mail, email, bank statements, contracts, or personal photos/videos.
- Be cautious of identifying factors to the clothing you wear in photos/videos you choose to share such as school hoodies or uniforms, work uniforms, after-school programs, or local causes.
- Always set accounts to private when possible in order to control whom you are allowing to view your photos/videos, views, and other information you choose to share online.

If you feel you or your child have been doxed, be sure to document the evidence and report the doxing to the platforms they happened on, as well as the appropriate authorities for cybercrimes in your area. If you need assistance with this, please reach out to your local school district and they can follow up with us.

PARENT/CAREGIVER RESOURCES

As parents/caregivers, it can be hard to keep up with all the new social media websites and applications, video games, movies, music, and everything else our children have exposure to when given access to the internet. There are resources, including Safer Schools Together and Common Sense Media, that can be a huge help when trying to understand current trends in the online world.



Safer Schools Together

[Safer Schools Together](#)'s Parent Resources include a library of many constantly updated resources such as Raising Digitally Responsible Youth, [Sexting Safety Agreement](#), [Protect your Privacy](#), [Social Media Checklist for Parents/Caregivers](#), [Family Media Agreement](#), and more.



Common Sense Media

[Common Sense Media](#) is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to helping kids thrive in a rapidly changing world. Their valuable resources include detailed explanations and reviews of movies, books, video games, TV shows, social media, apps, and more from experts as well as contributing parents and students. If you are unsure if your child is emotionally mature enough for a movie, book, video game, TV show, social media platform, etc. it is worth checking out Common Sense Media to review the content and age recommendations alongside the ESRB.



SAFER
SCHOOLS
TOGETHER



International Center for
Digital Threat Assessment