# SOCIAL MEDIA: THE BIG PLAYERS

Keeping up with social media can be challenging for parents but you don't need to know all the ins and outs of all the apps, sites, and terms that are "hot" right now. However knowing the basics -- what they are, why they're popular, and what problems can crop up when they're not used responsibly can make the difference between a positive and a negative experience for your child. Following is a summary of some of the more popular social media platforms.

## SNAPCHAT

Snapchat is arguably the most popular of applications used by young people in today's digital world. In fact, over 75% of Snapchat's user base is under that age of 25. Launched in 2011, the app sees nearly 400 million Snapchat images sent daily with over 100 million daily users. It is a photo messaging app that allows users to take still photos, record short videos, add text and create drawings and send them to a personalized list of friends. The user sets a viewing time of up to 10 seconds after which, once viewed, it will be deleted from the recipient's device and as the company claims, from its servers. Nothing stops the end user from taking a screenshot or using a camera to take a picture of the image. Given its seemingly temporary and untraceable nature, this is one of the most popular apps among preteens and teenagers for sexting and thus its misuse encompasses exploitation and bullying.

## INSTAGRAM

Owned by Facebook, Instagram is the most popular photo-sharing app with over 300 million users. If you see a youth scrolling up with his thumb on their smartphone, chances are they are looking at Instagram. Instagram, like Twitter, can be searched by hashtags (e.g. #suicide) which are then grouped together and this gives people avenues to meet and "follow" other users with similar interests. Instagram is an application built for smartphones. To search Instagram online, the best way is through a web viewer such as www.statigr.am or www.pinsta.me.

Instagram is a social platform that is a good example of how youth overshare online. To see first-hand, simply search #selfie. Instagram is also one of the many places where youth worrisome behaviour can be found online.

# TWITTER
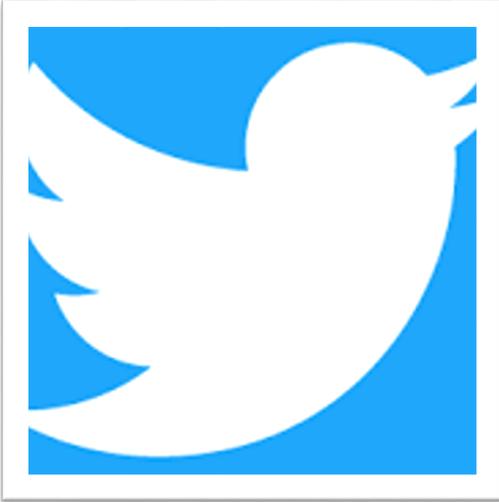
Twitter is the original microblogging network that allows users to post 140-character messages, known as "Tweets" which are can be grouped together and searchable by hashtags (#). Twitter currently has over 300 million monthly active users with upwards of 500 million tweets posted every day. It has become the fastest way for breaking news to travel around the world, so much so that traditional media sources take to Twitter before breaking a story.

We are seeing youth using Twitter as a public forum to voice their thoughts and comments. For some youth, this ends up being the every thought. Surprisingly, it is not uncommon to see youth with over 100,000 tweets. Twitter is, by nature, public and prides itself on the freedom of speech, and thus stays far away from mediating disputes between individuals. Twitter generally responds well to requests for the removal of material in relation to impersonation.

# ASK.FM

A popular question and answer website, and app that allows users to ask questions among one another. The app also allows users to have the option to remain completely anonymous, which of course many youth exercise. It has become the perfect platform for the malicious to bully, harass, and extort someone with essentially no ramifications. Ask.fm is based out of Latvia meaning Canadian law does not apply, making any legal action difficult, if not, futile. Ask.fm has been implicated in at least nine youth suicides around the world. Questions can be as innocent as "Who do you like?" and "What is your favorite subject in school?" However given the anonymity, some youth take advantage and exploit others with malice and hate. The conversations can become highly provocative and sexualized and with little regulation from the site itself, and with little awareness by parents, this results in a dangerous freedom for minds lacking maturity. It is observed across the board there is a general lack of empathy displayed when individuals can hide from behind a screen. An extremely concerning trend that is increasing with the use of ask.fm is the encouragement of making negative comments that are aimed at youth who are depressed and displaying cries for help on ask.fm. Individuals who are looking for positive support from peers are instead recipients of harassment, encouragement to kill themselves, and told that nobody cares about them.

# KIK, TEXT+ & WHATSAPP



Kik Messenger, Text + and WhatsApp are all variations on the same communication application – the focus is free phone-to-phone messaging that's private and not applicable to a text messaging (SMS) plan. As it is a cross-platform, and lets you attach pictures and videos, all without counting towards SMS counts or minutes. Parents often think this is a good tool because of the minimal financial impact and the ability to delete the conversation stream. Kik is by far the most popular amongst youth and you will see taglines posted with "kik me", but it can also be the most dangerous because many youth post their kik username online for all to see, which is an easy access lure point for a predator.

# TUMBLR



Tumblr is a blogging platform recently acquired by Yahoo.com for over one billion dollars. This platform is an organized social network appealing to adults and young people "liking" one another's posts, commenting and fielding questions from strangers. Youth like tumblr because they can be expressive and channel their inner feelings, thoughts, and desires into building their own page with backgrounds, pictures, and creativity. Some pages also have a space where comments can be left anonymously, similar premise to ask.fm, where hatred can breed.

# WHISPER



Whisper is a new anonymous social network that gets three billion page views a month and provides a place for young people to share their secrets without the risk of it being traced back to them. It allows users to post written messages on top of photos and illustrations to which other users can like and comment. The idea behind the app is to promote online anonymity and it does a good job doing that. Posts cannot be traced back to a person, and in fact no user data is collected on sign up - only a username. Whisper works on geo-location and presents you with Whispers near your location. This has become another avenue for pre-teens and teenagers to behave inappropriately online, this time securely as "anons" (anonymous).

# 4CHAN

4Chan is a simple forum platform where anyone can post images and comments on the bulletin boards, hiding behind anonymity, discussions often become hostile and involve extremely dark content. The bulletin boards are categorized into a variety of topics and can be accessed by anyone at any time. Adult content is easily accessible to youth, who simply have to click "agree" to continue.

# REDDIT

www.reddit.com is a social networking website that allows users to share text, pictures, links and news with each other and the reddit "community". Similarly to 4Chan, anyone can view the content but only registered users are able to vote the submission as "Up" or "Down". They are then categorized by popularity and change on a daily basis. Reddit has become a focal point for finding content before it becomes main stream in the media. Submissions and content are organized into subcategories called "subreddits" and these are as diverse as one's imagination. Reddit has been described as the underbelly of the Internet and is the base for a strong contingent of Internet activism. The dark side of reddit can be notoriously grotesque with very sinister categories.

# TIKTOK
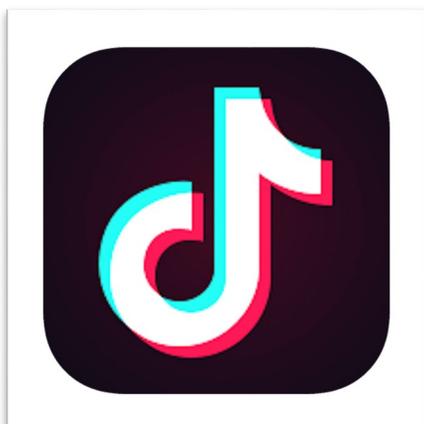
TikTok is the newest player on the block. It is a video-sharing social networking service owned by ByteDance, a Beijing-based company founded in 2012 by Zhang Yiming. It is used to create short lip-sync, comedy, and talent videos. The app was launched in 2017 for iOS and Android for markets outside of China.  As it gains in popularity, there are more sexualized videos, with many "copy cat" tiktoks.