The apps every parent needs to know about!

For many parents, keeping up-to-date with the technology and apps kids are using can feel like just another chore. Digital Awareness UK, the online safety and digital wellbeing organisation, has shared what apps it thinks parents really ought to know about.

We know that parents find it difficult keeping up-to-date with the risks, age ratings and features of the apps their kids might be using. For the vast majority, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook are household names, but here are a few other suggestions that may be worth researching.

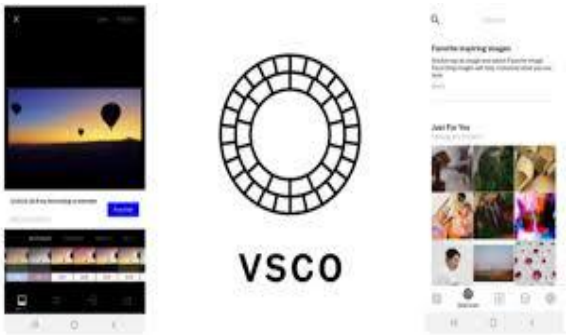
VSCO

If you hear your child talking about VSCO (or Visco), then they're probably talking about the image editing app. For a monthly subscription, the app allows users to edit and post pictures and videos using filters to make them social media-ready.

VSCO has two million users, because in addition to its flashy filters, it doesn't allow users to comment on or 'like' posts, unlike similar apps.

The 'VSCO Girl trend' is where it gets interesting, and many young teenage girls aspire to be one. A VSCO Girl is said to be 'on trend' in terms of how they dress, act and post on social media. It is reported that the VSCO Girl is environmentally conscious and typically identified by messy buns, baggy t-shirts, scrunchies, shell necklaces and 'effortless beauty'.

You can't make your VSCO account private or see who's following you, so talk to your child about the consequences of sharing private information. Location-based information appears on shared images; however, location sharing features can be disabled. It may also be worth speaking to your child about how they present themselves online and the pressures that they may face to fit in with trends.



Tellonym and YOLO

Tellonym and YOLO are currently winning the race to be the most popular anonymous messaging apps used by teens, with millions using them to chat and voice their opinions without being tracked.

YOLO can be used in conjunction with your child's Snapchat account and Tellonym can be linked to their Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram accounts. While we find that today many teens are aware of the downsides associated with anonymous apps (such as abuse), they still appeal to those who want to have honest conversations with others about anything from what they look like to how popular they are.

As with all anonymous apps, both Tellonym and YOLO come with the possibility of your child receiving abusive messages, so ensure your children know how to manage online bullying – not just through 'blocking' and 'reporting' but by talking about what's happened. It's important to discuss with your child the benefits and consequences of sharing opinions anonymously and to think about how they would respond to something upsetting.

TikTok

With more than 500 million monthly users, TikTok has young people dancing and lip-syncing across the world right now and it certainly doesn't seem to be getting any less popular. TikTok allows users to upload short videos of themselves set to popular music and audio. Videos tend to be humorous with fun filters provided by the app.

Like Instagrammers and YouTubers, TikTokers are users who can be extremely influential and earn large sums of money. Many students see them as celebrities and aspire to become successful TikTokers themselves.

The app offers endless creativity, self-expression and imagination, but comes with similar risks to other social media networks such as exposure to inappropriate content, grooming and bullying.

Your child must think carefully about what they share and with whom when using the app.

Discord

The social aspect of video gaming can be just as important as playing the games themselves, which is why it's important for parents to get to grips with how apps such as Discord are used by their children.

Like leading live-streaming platform Twitch, Discord allows users to chat to other users publicly and privately while playing their favourite video games.

Students say that connecting with other players through chats adds a bit of competition or even mentorship. There are features within the app that allow users to make new friends over common interests and be part of huge communities.

As with any app that provides one-to-one or group chat features, Discord can lead to bullies or groomers interacting online with your child, or the possibility of them seeing inappropriate content. Have a good play around with the app's Privacy & Safety settings to ensure you and your child are happy with them, as well as discussing the benefits.