

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

KIK

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

Kik is a free messaging app – much like WhatsApp, although it does feature some extra functionality. It's aimed at younger people aged 13 upwards, though the formal information from Kik themselves states that users between 13 and 18 must get their parent or guardian's permission. It's currently used by over 300 million people, though only around 15 million of them use it on a monthly basis.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

EASY PROFILES

Unlike some other messaging apps, Kik doesn't require users to link it to their phone number. It's more like an old-school chat room, where you sign up with a username. This offers younger people more anonymity, as they needn't enter any sensitive information. However, it also increases the risk of people being able to remain anonymous behind a username. While you must be at least 13 to use Kik, anyone can set up an email address and sign up, meaning younger users could easily skirt the rules.

HELLO
MY NAME IS
OSC4R

OPEN USE

Because children and teens can find new friends through Kik, based on having similar interests, this can open them up to almost anyone making contact in the app. Predators, for example, could stalk groups on topics which generally appeal to a younger audience (such as anime or gaming) and befriend younger users. It could also lead to antagonism in public groups, where users interact with large numbers of different people who they may not know offline.

PREDATORS

Because Kik is so simple to use and only requires an email address, which can be set up in seconds, this can make it easy for predators and bullies to prey on younger people. Anonymity can lead to users lying about their age, interests or their geographical location. It's not difficult for some youngsters to be lured by the potential new friends Kik may give them, only to discover their 'friends' aren't who they say they are.

SECURITY

Kik may be safer when it comes to your personal information, but it doesn't offer many options for deterring those who infringe the app's rules. Of course, you can block a user should they seem fake or make you feel uncomfortable – and reporting is an option – but the simplicity with which a new account can be set up means that an individual who's been reported can create a new username, locate their target again and begin the harassment anew.

BOTS

Bots operate on Kik much like any other platform. They are specially programmed software designed to imitate real speech, which is only growing more sophisticated with the advent of AI. These bots can be used in myriad ways – including promoting adult material such as pornography or selling products and services that would be deemed inappropriate for younger users.

VIDEO

As with other apps, video messaging is possible with Kik. Users can chat one-on-one or in a group of up to six people. Of course, even if a child is chatting to their friends, there are certain risks that you need to be aware of, such as sharing personal information or people besides their friends being in the chat. Moreover, the sheer accessibility of Kik means that they could also end up chatting to anyone – and seeing or hearing something that's not intended for children or is similarly inappropriate.

Advice for Parents & Educators

DON'T GIVE OUT PRIVATE INFORMATION

Educate children on the risks of giving out private information and take time to set up their Kik account for them. If they're showing interest in the app, go through the various elements with them, even helping them select a username that they don't use elsewhere (you don't want them using their Xbox gamertag on Kik, for example). Try to prevent them from giving out their phone number or location to anyone. Never use any part of their real name in a username, as this is something everyone will be able to view.

LEARN THE SYSTEM

Use Kik's website to learn where the blocking and reporting features can be found. You'll also find guides on their site for teachers and law enforcement which can help educate you on any finer details you might need to know. Encourage the child to think about what is and isn't appropriate to see, depending on their age, and remind them often that you're there to help should things get out of hand.

KNOW WHEN TO STOP

Kik can be very attractive to users, especially as there's always someone to talk to or a conversation to be had. Try to limit time on the app as much as possible. Children may not want to avoid using it if that's how they keep in touch with friends, but you can advise them that spending all their time online can limit conversation and can isolate them from other friends in the 'real' world. It's also helpful to speak to them about when to end a conversation if it's getting overwhelming or problematic.

STRANGER DANGER

If a child is educated on the risks of talking to strangers, they'll be able to use Kik responsibly. Any danger they might put themselves in can be reduced if they know what signs to look out for. Suggest some signs for young ones to keep an eye out for and teach them to ignore and block users who might seem disingenuous – and to always tell a trusted adult if this happens.

Meet Our Expert

Daniel Lipscombe is a writer who specialises in technology, video gaming, virtual reality, augmented reality and Web3. With articles published by the likes of PC Gamer, Kotaku, Pocket Gamer, VG247 and Eurogamer, among others, Daniel has been an avid tech enthusiast for more than three decades and estimates that he has reviewed more than 50 products over the past year.



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