



TWSCB Briefing: Kik Messenger, WhatsApp and Tumblr

This is the second briefing note on Online Apps that children and young people are regularly accessing, if used properly they are fun but children and adults alike need to be aware that they need to keep themselves safe. Next month we will look at 3 more!

Kik Messenger is a texting app that lets kids text for free. It's fast and has 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).

What parents 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 user's 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.

WhatsApp lets users send text messages, audio messages, videos, and photos to one or many people with no message limits or fees.

What parents 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.

Tumblr is like 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.

What parents 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.** Re-blogging on Tumblr is similar to re-tweeting. A post is re-blogged from one tumblog to another. Many teens like -- and, in fact, want -- their posts re-blogged. But do you really want your kids' words and photos on someone else's page?

Please look on the TWSCB Website www.telfordsafeguardingboard.org.uk and select Online Safety Icon for more online safety tips and support.