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Term 3 2013 Child and Family Safety Newsletter



Kik Messenger



What is Kik messenger?

“Kik is the fast, simple and personal smartphone messenger that connects you to everyone you love to talk to.” Sounds like a great idea doesn't it? 50 million users agree.

Kids like apps like Kik because:

- Its free
- It allows them to stay connected to their friends.
- Easy to use video and pictures
- It's fun! (They can download sticker packs to add to messages to personalise them).

Messaging apps are the modern version of the telephone—and yes it is certainly different to having a phone that was attached to the wall, with a 1metre long cord and having to ask permission to use it!

Is Kik dangerous?

Like so many apps, Kik itself is not dangerous. What is dangerous is the way kids share and post their information, such as their usernames, email addresses and mobile phone numbers. Giving away personal information such as this opens up the opportunity for possible predators to text them in private. Once your child has a Kik address they can advertise it on other sites such as Instagram by posting “kikme@username” or #kikme.

Kik also provides message status notification, so it lets you know if



your message has been sent and delivered and when it has been read. This sounds okay, until you speak with a 12 year old girl who is feeling overwhelmed because she has been contacted by someone she does not know, who is asking her strange questions, and this person can see that she has read the message and begins to persist with messages of why she is not responding!

Having random conversations with random people in itself may not be dangerous; however it crosses the line when someone they do not know face to face begins asking private information. It may help to explain to your child that if someone is asking for information that a face to face friend would know already—then they need to question that behaviour and let you know!

Kik allows up to 9 friends to join in group chat, another reason why kids like it. However, where there is inclusion there can also be experiences of exclusion. Many friendship issues have arisen from the exclusion of conversations on group chat messages. It is possible to leave the group conversation, however when you leave the group, you delete the entire conversation. In some circumstances we may want to keep evidence of the conversation, particularly if it included negative or harmful comments towards your child, or others.

Potential threats to safety

Sharing private usernames on social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc. makes it very easy for your child to be contacted and targeted. Once someone has a username, they can easily contact that person and send them a message. A consistent username across many social networking platforms makes it easier to be tracked down and followed. Encourage kids to have different usernames on each of the different social networking sites they are using.

Acma's click and connect study in July 2009 showed that youth ages 12-17 years of age are more likely (56%) than 8-11 year olds (35%) to receive friend requests from people they do not know. However, as children age they become far more likely to accept the request; 23% of 8-11 year olds as opposed to 61% of 16-17 year olds.

Encourage kids to be safer on Kik

- Create a unique username for each social networking platform
- Safe usernames are on gender specific and give nothing away about age or personal interests
- Only communicate with face to face friends (those friends that you have met in the real world and have been in the same room with at some point and time)
- Use the "ignore new people" feature
- Block negative people and online friends that attempt to contact them (done in account settings)
- Have a family philosophy that nothing is so bad that we cannot talk about it

What can I do?

As a parent, continue to monitor your child's internet presence. Kids do not need a smartphone to download the Kik app – an iPod, iPad or similar Android device and a Wi-Fi connection is all they need. If they can connect to Wi-Fi it is as simple as downloading the app. Kik looks just like texting, so have a look to see what format your kids are using to chat with their friends.

Also, do your best parenting by looking into apps and investigating their safety features. In the case of the year 6 student above, she did let her mum know and they were able to block the online "friend". Many parents do not realise that Kik Messenger contains age-restricted material. The app simply asks you to "Tap OK to confirm that you are 17 or over".

As a parent, you have the right to ask your child to uninstall Kik or any app. Parents can use the devices in built parental control setting to restrict the ability to install apps. Another way to limit kids ability to access Kik is by managing the password for the account. In order to monitor the messages your child receives, ask them to NOT delete any messages, and set up an agreement to access their tech devices.

Keep conversations ongoing with your kids about everything from apps, to values, to safety online. Kids are experts at technology; however they lack those vital critical thinking skills that keep them safe. Our responsibility as parents is to set the guidelines and expectations. Many parents feel they have little control over their child's internet use. Keeping kids safe online is about managing agreements with our kids, rather than just trying to manage them. The power of the plug is in your hands.



Kidproof Melbourne is committed to providing families with critical child safety resources, and our team is continuously developing new safety courses, seminars and services that enrich and empower families and ultimately keep your kids safe.



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