AGE RESTRICTION

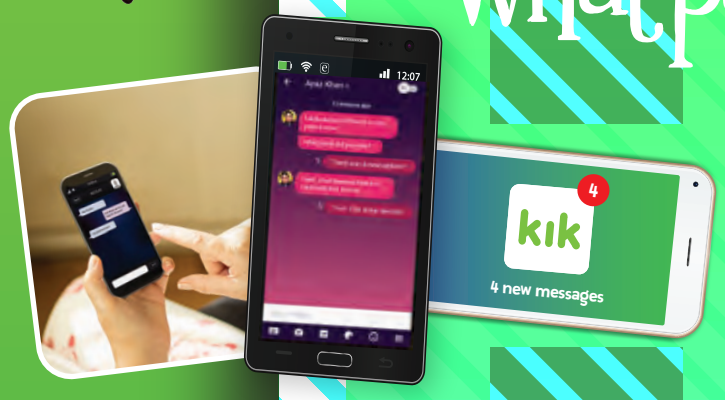
13+

kik

Kik (or Kik Messenger) is a free messaging app used by 300 million people worldwide that lets users exchange messages, photos, videos, GIFs and webpages via a Wi-Fi connection or data plan. Kik is unusual in that your child can sign up without a phone number and then find and message other people via just their username. Kik is aimed at anyone aged 13 years and older – the app says teens between 13 and 18 years old will need parental permission but it does not verify ages.

1 new message

What parents need to know about Kik



CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION & GROOMING

Police in the UK have warned that Kik has featured in 'more than 1,100 child sexual abuse cases in the last five years' and that 'children are at risk' on the app. Offences involving the app include child sexual exploitation, grooming, and image violations. Kik has also been identified by US police as being used by sex predators, and they say it is responsible for several recent incidents involving children, including the murder of a 13-year-old girl by a man she met via Kik.

FAKE OR ANONYMOUS PROFILES

What makes Kik unique to most other private messaging apps is the fact that it doesn't require a phone number as it works through Wi-Fi instead. By using a username, your child can avoid sharing personal information with others on Kik, but on the flipside, this makes it far easier for people to remain anonymous or to create a fake persona.

SEXUAL PREDATORS

Some people may use Kik with the intention of targeting children. Typically, this is a subtle and a potentially dangerous individual who will initially portray themselves as a friend who 'understands' a child. They may also lie about their age and it's possible that your child could be manipulated by a stranger into doing regrettable or illegal activities, and maybe even meeting them in real life.

JOINING PUBLIC GROUPS

As soon as Kik is downloaded, your child can join public groups to chat with up to 49 others about anything from music, to sports, to travel by searching for topics they are interested in. However, groups can include inappropriate names and content. There are also private groups on Kik that can be joined by scanning a group Kik code or if they're added by someone on their contact list.

SEXTING

Due to the general ease of sharing photos and videos, sexting has been reported on the app. These messages can be screen-captured or copied at the press of a button, which could lead to further dangers, such as blackmail and cyberbullying. It is illegal to make, possess, download, store and share sexual images, photos and videos of a person under the age of 18. This also includes any sexual images, photos and videos that a child may have taken of themselves.

KIK 'BOTS'

Users can add 'bots' to their friends list and communicate with them on the app. 'Bots' are automated software programs built into the app that mimic conversation – developers, brands and Kik can create 'bots' to communicate with any Kik user who has opted to start a conversation with them. Kik has been associated with 'pornbots' and 'spambots', which try to lure users into clicking on links or porn websites by using suggestive and often personalised messages.

VIDEO CHAT

Your child can take part in a live video chat with their friends in a one-to-one chat, or with up to six friends at a time in a private group chat. There is the danger that conversations can be recorded and shared without their knowledge, and with live video conversations, your child is at risk of seeing or hearing content that is inappropriate, sexual or violent.

PERSONAL OR COMPROMISING USERNAMES

As Kik works with usernames and not phone numbers, some people may search for clues as to who someone is in real life, based on their name. For example, if your child uses their real name or something similar, strangers could potentially find out their identity and even start looking for them on other social media platforms.

Top Tips for Parents

1 new message

CHOOSING A USERNAME

When setting up a Kik account, ensure that your child knows the importance of a secure username and why it shouldn't contain ANY clues as to who they are in real life – especially their first or last name. Get them to choose a username that is hard to guess, using a combination of letters and numbers.

SHARING USERNAMES

Explain to your child that sharing usernames on social media channels, such as Twitter, Instagram or Facebook, will make it visible to people they might not know – and they'll be able to message your child. If your child joins a group, anyone within that group will be able to see their username. Your teen will have a Kik Code that's unique to them and lets your child connect with anyone that scans the unique code: encourage your child not to share their Kik Code with anyone they don't trust.

DEACTIVATING ACCOUNTS

If your child is under 13, you can submit a deactivation request to Kik by emailing support@kik.com. Use the subject line 'Parent Inquiry' and include your child's Kik username and age in your message. If your child is over 13 and you want to close their account, you will need access to the email address registered to their account before you visit https://ws.kik.com/deactivate.

FIND GENUINE FRIENDS

The Kik app includes an optional feature that your child can turn on to help find real friends on Kik. The feature works by checking for accounts in Kik that match an email address or phone number stored in contacts (on a smartphone). If the app finds a match, it will notify both your child and their friend with a Kik message.

SHOW HOW TO BLOCK & REPORT

Teach your child how to block and report users on the app. Kik's 'block' feature lets users block all contact with another user, without revealing to the other user that they've been blocked. The blocked user's name will no longer appear in contacts in Kik. Your child can also report a group if they think it's offensive or being used for abuse. Some users of Kik have reported that they receive sexually explicit, automated messages over the app – this is when automated spam bots have been created to distribute explicit images and texts using the service. Your child can use the 'Report' feature to report spam. Once reported, there is the option to keep or remove the chat from the conversation list. If conversations are saved, Kik will automatically block the spam account but save the chat history.

DON'T TALK TO STRANGERS

If your child knows not to talk to anyone they don't know in real life, the risks of using Kik are drastically lowered. Alternatively, if any stranger happens to send your child a message, teach them to ignore it.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

If your child sees something disturbing, pornographic, deviant or otherwise troubling, they may be left confused and in need of somebody to explain it to them. As such, tell your child that you are always there to help them if they need it, and if they start acting differently to normal, calmly ask them why.

AVOIDING UNEXPECTED IMAGES

Kik censors images from strangers to limit lewd content being shared by surprise. The app will blur all photos in messages when users who have never interacted before contact each other for the first time. Users can only share unblurred images after they have both approved each other.

USING A VALID EMAIL

According to Kik, it is really important for users to provide a valid and accessible email address when registering their account. This will help to make sure your child is able to receive important emails from the service, such as a link to reset their password, when they need them.

MUTING OR LEAVING A CHAT

If someone has said something inappropriate to your child through Video Chat, they can mute the user or leave the Video Chat. Tap on the person's Video Chat bubble and a mute icon will appear. When a child mutes themselves, their microphone will be disabled and nobody else in the chat will be able to hear them.

SOURCES:
https://www.teensafe.com/blog/everything-a-parent-needs-to-know-about-kik/
https://help.kik.com/hc/en-us/articles/115006089388-Keep-your-Kik-account-private
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45568276

National Online Safety

A whole school community approach to online safety

www.nationalonlinesafety.com

Email us at hello@nationalonlinesafety.com or call us on 0800 368 8061