

Monitoring Kids' Cell Phone Use

My daughter has started using snap chat for texting. I hate it! Does anyone know of a way to monitor snap chat? I did a trial with this program called teensafe, which is OK, but it does not capture snap chats.

So this does not digress into a privacy issue - my daughter knows I read her texts. If I can find something that works for snapchat, I'll let her know that too

TIA

I can't help but am very interested in the responses. No phone yet (mine's only 9) but it's a losing battle I'll have to face sooner rather than later.

Scared sh*tless.

Laura Mann

My solution was to delete snapchat. I have told my kids that they get a phone but I get to read their texts. No deleting texts, no hiding texts. If they do, they lose the phone. When one kid tried to get snapchat, we deleted it. We then installed parental locks so there are no apps without our permission and they don't know the password.

I live by the David Kaufman philosophy that I would rather keep them safe then care what they think. I don't care if their friends have it. I don't care if everyone else on the planet has it. If I can't see it, you can't use it.

By the way, a group of high school kids up my way was arrested for using snapchat to send naked pictures. Both boys and girls were arrested. That is reason enough to just tell them not to use it.

Jonathan G. Stein, California

One thing to know is to avoid iPhone products. The iPhone proprietary system makes it virtually impossible for third party apps to lock down the phone. With the other smart phones, parental control options are far, far, more robust.

It's especially important to know this before your child gets too invested in i-stuff.

Andy Simpson, U.S. Virgin Islands

MSpy gets good reviews and I've heard positive comments from parents who have used it:

<http://www.mspy.com/>

When our boys were first getting cell phones and until they were 16-17 our general house rule was that we could take their phones any time and do a random check.

Laura Kosloff

They can do whatever they want with a browser anyway. I'm not sure I see the utility of monitoring any individual app.

Steven O'Donnell, Pennsylvania

We tried not allowing her to have it, but I caved! That was before I knew they would use it to avoid texts. I am typically of the same philosophy, but I'm also afraid that my daughter will be excluded - serious risk with teenage girls - and so I don't want to limit her friend's access to her.

We do have the parental controls on her phone, so she can't get new apps without us.

Some days being a parent is like a job.

Teri Robins, Illinois

I've heard good things about MySpy as well. Our house has cell phone random checks. We also don't allow Snapchat.

Elizabeth Cuccinello, New York

And I 8th grader was arrested at my kids' school for taking a picture up a girl's skirt on Halloween and then sharing it. Her friends were over with their parents right after it happened and we discussed the risks of that.

They all know this boy is in really serious trouble and hopefully they will learn from his mistake.

Teri Robins

My goal is actually more about helping her navigate situations better. If you know how the conversation went, it's easier to see how the conversation went bad, or more likely how something was misinterpreted, and help give tools for next time. Without really knowing the conversation and just getting the 14 y/o summary it can be hard.

Teri Robins

Jeez when I was that age I used to have to ask use the land line where you used a dial.

Excuse me while I slink back to the museum where I can be found among the other fossils.

John Davidson, Pennsylvania

And had to wait until the party line was free, right?

Tim Ackermann

We have our kids' passwords. We are also friends, or followers, or whatever the appropriate terminology is for the particular app, so we see what they post. (mine are 13 (boy), 17 (girl) and 21 (girl, who successfully made it into "adulthood"))).

I think that starting out with the assumption that you can control what your kids do or see online is doomed to failure. It seems like technology should enable parents to have more control, but, IMO, it's the same kind of thinking that led bar regulators to think that email was less secure than snail mail. When we were young(er), and we went out, our parents had little or no idea where we went or what we did. We survived.

Trying to completely lock down a phone is really no different than not allowing a kid to go out of the house unchaperoned. It's unrealistic, and likely more harmful than the bad things that have a remote chance of happening to them. Social media is a part of modern schooling, typically starting in middle school. Your child is going to need email, probably a google docs account, and various other accounts that individual teachers or schools may require. So you can't keep them off line. Plus, just like criminals are steps ahead of the cops, your kids are 3 steps ahead of you in terms of social media. Changes are, if you've heard of a platform, it's already passé for a high-schooler.

To be sure, there is a greater chance of doing something colossally stupid on the internet than there was in our day, but we can't prevent our kids from living in that world. But, if they are going to do something

colossally stupid, it is almost certain that it will be something that you never could have imagined, and not so 2014 as sexting.

IMO, the phone, and all social media, is part of a whole, not a separate thing. If the child is happy, well-adjusted, has friends you know, knows you'll check her phone occasionally, and doesn't huddle in a corner for 8 hours a day texting, then you have a great kid. Talking to them about social media, and life in general, is also good. If they start becoming obsessed about another person, or withdrawn, or any other big changes, it could cause a problem with social media, but also other things. I personally think that they need to learn to live in modern society, including social media, and it's better for them to learn with some oversight than to stay ignorant (and I'll never forget my young cousins when I was a kid; their parents forbade them from having candy, so whenever they visited, they scarfed down anything sweet that wasn't nailed down. You can't make pressure go away; it's going to get released somewhere)

Ultimately, of course, it's what's right for you and the particular child.

Sometimes being incredibly strict works, sometimes it's the worst thing in the world. Sometimes being loose works, sometimes it's the worst thing in the world. Sometimes what worked great one year becomes the worst thing in the world. Those darn kids are complicated.

Just don't think you can actually monitor what they're doing online. You may think you can. You may buy an app that says you will be able to. But the kids are much smarter (devious) than you.

Patrick W. Begos, Connecticut

I don't know if it's worse or better, but in our school we had a teacher arrested for doing much the same thing. The thing is, he was caught by students. They saw what he was doing, grabbed his phone, and ran to the principal, who then did exactly the right thing (she happens to be the best HS principal in the world).

Patrick W. Begos

No we had a private line but the phone book did discuss the laws on 4 and 2 party lines.

And we never had to dial 1 for long distance. the benefits of living near Bell Labs

John Davidson

As it happens, I was just dealing with related parts of the "problems with modern tech for kids" issue this past week in the context of high schoolers

-- I supervise/counsel/work with high school exchange students between the ages of 15-18 who are here in the U.S. for a semester or academic year, and while technology makes it much easier for the kids to stay in touch with friends and family -- well, it makes it easier for them to stay too much in touch. Had two major "family meetings" last week with teens and host parents on what started out as "they're not really engaging" issues and which turned out to have a lot to do with too much time on the Internet and poor choices of what to do on the Internet.

Anyway as part of that I came across the following website/blog that Sezzers reading this thread today might want to take a look at:

<http://www.bewebsmart.com/parental-controls/making-the-case-for-monitoring/>

I've linked to one particular article, but she's got others that are quite relevant for parents today (and the post I've linked to gives links to other places, too).

Laura Kosloff

You can't monitor everything they do. But you can be vigilant. Look, I grew up in a town where I could wander the streets during the summer. But my parents knew EVERYONE on our street and someone on every street. We thought we were funny one winter and went a few streets over to throw snowballs - at the mailman's car. (Yes, he was a mailman so don't complain.) No one was around.

I got home and got busted by my dad. He was pissed. I ditched 1 day of high school in 4 years. 1 freaking day my senior year. My parents were in Seattle as my dad was on business. 3pm the phone rings. I answer it since school is out. It is my dad - busted for not going to school. He wasn't upset, but he wanted to remind me that he knew what I was doing.

We can't monitor everything that our kids do online. But we can be vigilant about it. My kid wants a new app, I read up on it first. AT&T emails me a list of phone numbers that send and receive texts from my kids phones every week. I get a list of phone calls. I checked internet history. My IT guy installed a firewall that lets me check what websites they go to from the house. Sure, they can get around it if they took it off of Wi-Fi and did it on 3G, but I know that.

We can't stop everything. We can take reasonable steps to keep them safe. I think that means we monitor what we can and make sure our kids know we are watching. I also won't get apps that have online chat for my 12-year-old and won't let them get things like Snapchat because it can't be monitored. But, everyone has to make their own decisions.

Jonathan G. Stein, California

I completely agree with pretty much everything that you say.

The main points I tried to make is that monitoring can't be the beginning and end, because it will fail. And that most kids are smart enough to get around any monitoring their parents do if they are motivated to do so. It looks like you agree. I guess I was railing, a bit, about the notion that we can keep our kids out of trouble if only we oversee everything they do, or monitor everything they write or post. Even if it worked, you'd end up with a socially stunted kid.

You also note you have a 12-year-old, and I agree that the rules applicable to a 12-year-old are likely going to be different than those applicable to a

15 or 17-year-old.

And I completely agree that every parent needs to make their own decisions.

Patrick W. Begos

I miss my Princess phone...

Amy J. Holzman

In an update to this, we checked my 12 year old's cell phone today. He has this girl he has been texting. So far it has all been harmless. But she dropped an "F U" on him and he responded with a word that I won't even use.

We took his phone and his iPad. He can earn them back. I may not catch everything, but when I catch stuff like this, he learns very quickly that there are certain standards in our house that he must meet as well!

Jonathan G. Stein

My (now) 28-year-old didn't get a phone until he could drive. My daughter (age 17) got her first iPhone as a freshman in high school. We just got my 12-year-old his first smartphone. The older two kids gave me crap for giving their brother a phone, when they had to wait to get their first phone.

I was hypervigilant with my daughter when she got her phone, but gradually backed off as she got older. She is a smart kid and has never given us reason to suspect she is doing anything we wouldn't approve of.

My 12-year-old is a screwball. I suspect he would do something stupid without thinking, so I am on him like a wet blanket. I am not sure I will have the luxury of backing off with him the way I did with my daughter, but there will be a point that I will be deluding myself to assume that I can completely control this.

There are people who devote 100% of their waking life to developing apps to thwart the mainstream tech-world.

If kids are really intent on using their phone for something inappropriate, they will go underground to do it. There are plenty of resources to help them figure out how and you won't figure it out until mainstream technology catches up to the technology underworld.

Do the best you can, but never assume that you are seeing all there is to see.

Michelle Kainen, Vermont

Really is nothing you can do about snapchat or other sub rosa communication and storage apps, unless you lock down the phone and ban the apps. Even then there are cloud tools that they can play with to do the same nefarious things.

Instead, you need to monitor what you can, communicate with your child, and teach them to live up to your expectations. They'll blow it again and again, so you teach them again and again. Even the bestest, nicest, and sweetest kids will test the limits (oh, the stories I could tell). Teach them to not only live up to your expectations, but their own too.

Make certain they know that snapchat IS NOT secure. If they send something the recipient wants to save and share there are several methods for the recipient to save snapchats. And once something is out there it's out there forever. I used to get calls from parents weekly about mostly girls mad that prurient pictures were out there of their children. I gave them some counsel which mostly included the contact info for reporting to innocent images teams, which are overwhelmed.

Good luck.

Roger Traversa, Pennsylvania

Look at the mobile version of webwatcher

Peter Clark, Massachusetts

Sorry for the delay:

My daughter's phone is set to automatically back up photos to the "FAMILY" amazon account (FREE with prime) and I see all her photos. (LOTS of duck face)

Respectfully,

Bradley L. Schencker, Illinois
