



CONNECTSAFELY GUIDE SERIES

A Parent's Guide to Kik

Key Features | Top 5 Questions | Safety Concerns

TOP 5 QUESTIONS PARENTS ASK ABOUT KIK

1. What is Kik and why do teens love it?

Kik is a chat platform that connects teens with friends and the entertainment, games, brands, and media they love. Kik users can chat privately in one-to-one conversations, as well as with groups in group chats. The company also offers video chat for both one-to-one and group chats.

Teens love Kik because it's an "in the moment" experience, without the profile curation fatigue they can feel on other apps, where their photos, videos or status updates are "judged" in the form of likes, shares or comments, and "live on" until removed. Teens worry less about creating a public permanent record of posts and pictures that can affect them later in life. Teens also like that they can be "anonymous" on Kik as they don't need to publicly disclose personal information (more on that later). It's also free to use.

2. Does Kik have a minimum age?

Yes, the minimum age to register for a Kik account is 13. Kik requires a birthday upon sign up, and if the birthday indicates that the user is under 13, they can't create an account.

3. What are the pros and cons of anonymity on Kik?

Kik is considered "anonymous" because people sign up with a username that's not publicly linked to a phone number or real name. Some adults worry that this anonymous environment encourages bad or risky

behavior. While anonymity can sometimes lead people to falsely feel that they can't be held accountable for their actions, it also offers privacy and protection. Teens are able to connect on sensitive issues such as sexuality, religion, politics, problems at school or home, and both physical and mental health issues without the fear of shame or judgment. And while users can be anonymous from each other, they can be held accountable and banned for violating Kik's Community Standards. It's also important to note that a Kik username cannot be changed, which means that a user can't change their username to avoid consequences for mean or inappropriate behavior. For more, see ConnectSafely's Tips for Safe and Civil Use of Anonymous Apps.

4. What are the risks of using Kik?

All communication platforms have risks if users aren't careful about how they protect their personal information. There's also always risk that users will misuse the application, bully, harass others, or send unwanted messages. Teaching teens to respect themselves and each other in both physical and online spaces will go a long way toward creating positive and safe communities, including those on Kik.

5. How can I help keep my teen safe when using Kik?

It's a good idea for parents to have ongoing conversations with teens about how they use Kik and other apps. You can chat with your teen about Kik's blocking, reporting, and new chats features to help your teen always control their privacy and who they're chatting with. Make it a conversation, not a lecture, by asking them to explain what Kik is and how to use it safely. Review this guide together and discuss how your teen can apply some of its lessons. Go over basic online safety tips such as not getting together with people they meet online (at least not without others present) and how to respond to bullying and other unwanted behavior. Remind your teen that how they act on Kik and other messaging and social media apps in general is a reflection of them and that they can be held responsible for their actions online.

LIKE THE REST OF US, TEENS LOVE TO CHAT.

When we were kids many of us talked by phone and, of course, in person. Teens still talk in person but when it comes to electronic communications, they mostly want to use their phones to chat with their fingers rather than their voice.

Kik is a community chat app that allows users to connect with brands or chat one-on-one or in groups, with text, emojis, memes, videos and photos. Teens love Kik because it's an "in the moment" experience, without the profile curation fatigue they can feel on other apps, where their photos, videos or status updates are "judged" in the form of likes, shares or comments, and "live on" until removed. Teens worry less about creating a "permanent record" of posts and pictures that can affect them later in life. Teens also like that they can be anonymous on Kik.

Kik is available for download from the Google Play store, the Apple App Store, the Amazon App Store, and the Windows Store. To sign up, users enter a first and last name (which is their display name on Kik), a unique username, a password, an email address, and a date of birth (anyone under 13 can't register). Kik does not verify, but does maintain this information in their records. The email address and date of birth are not publicly visible to other users.

The Kik username can be anything. Kik recommends that your teen choose a username that's hard to guess and suggests that the best usernames include a combination of letters, numbers, and some special characters (periods, or underscores), and ideally shouldn't be your teen's first and last name. Having a hard to guess username allows your teen to have more control over who may contact them on Kik. Teens should also avoid picking a username that is sexually suggestive or otherwise inappropriate. Passwords for all accounts should be unique and hard to guess, per ConnectSafely's password guidelines.

Users can add a profile photo that is visible to anyone. Parents should have a conversation with their teens about appropriate profile pictures, including what they are wearing and how they present themselves, and whatever might appear in the background.

If your teen chooses to register their phone number, a dialogue will pop up to ask if they want to "Find Friends on Kik". From there they can see who among their phone contacts has also opted in to the feature are also on Kik. They also have the option to tap "Not Now" if they want to skip this step. The user can choose to opt into this feature at any time. It's important to note that phone numbers are not accessible to Kik employees or visible to other users.



CONNECTING ON KIK

Kik allows users to make new friends who share common interests or deepen bonds with existing friends already on Kik. It's always important for teens to be careful when connecting with people they don't already know. For example, it's great to talk baseball or other appropriate topics with people in a baseball group, but not appropriate to share too much personal information too quickly. There's also nothing wrong with your teen being selective with personal information when it comes to people they do know.

Parents should talk with their teens about what friends to connect with on Kik, perhaps starting only with friends they know and then gradually widening their circles with friends of friends or by joining groups that share their interests.

Chatting is Kik's main feature, but a Kik chat can be a lot more than text on the screen.

It can be...

- A photo or video a user uploads that was saved to the gallery of their device or takes with their device during a chat in the Kik app
- A GIF (graphic image) from Kik's GIF library
- A sticker from Kik's Sticker Shop
- An emoji (like a smiley face)
- A live video chat in a one-to-one conversation or in a small group with up to six other Kik users
- Users can also send a sketch, a meme (a funny video, graphic or text that's spread online from person to person) or web links.

KEY FEATURES

Bots

In addition to communicating with individuals, groups of friends and affinity groups, Kik users can also interact with “bots.” A bot, derived from “robot,” is basically a computer program that allows developers, brands and Kik itself, to engage in automated conversations with Kik users.

Kik Codes

Every user and bot has a Kik Code associated with their account, which can be scanned by other Kik users to quickly connect and begin chatting. Codes can be scanned directly from someone’s phone or they can be posted online, sent via email or even printed out. Teens should always be aware of where they post their Kik Code.

Public and Private Groups

Public Groups make it easy to meet people with similar interests. It could be a sports team, a celebrity, a video game, a political party, a hobby, a dance, or any other interest people share.



Public Groups are searchable to anybody and, as long as there's room in the group, anyone can join. Private groups allow users to have more control over who they connect with as users must receive an invite in order to join.

All groups have a maximum capacity of 50 users at any one time and have to comply with Kik's Community Standards. Whether in a public or private group, teens should heed Kik's advice to "be nice and keep it PG-13" and be aware that the messages they send in these groups can be seen by anyone in the group. Parents should also remind teens to be very careful about the types of conversations they're having with folks in groups that they may not know. If the conversation goes off-topic, especially if it gets personal or sexual, they may want to consider reporting or blocking the user, or leaving that group. Users can also report an entire group.

Video & Photos

Kik users can share images and videos in both one-to-one conversations and group chats. It's important to remind teens to be conscious of the types of images and videos they are sharing with others. Teens should also be reminded that they should have permission from anyone who is in the photo or video or might have their privacy violated prior to sending.

Kik also lets users live video chat in one-to-one chats and in private group chats, with up to six other users.

New Chats

The "New Chats" feature puts messages from people users haven't previously chatted with in a separate section. Teens should exercise caution should they choose to accept chats from people they don't know. The New Chats section blurs any images and videos sent by these accounts. Your teen has the option to chat with the new user (which will un-blur the content), or they can also choose to delete, block, or report the person without ever having to review the content.

BLOCKING & REPORTING ABUSE

Kik users can block anyone who sends offensive or annoying messages or anyone they simply don't want to chat with. The conversation will automatically be hidden from the blocker's conversation list, but can be restored if the blocker later unblocks the account.

Users can also report any user or any group that violates Kik's Community Standards. Once a user submits a report, Kik will review the reports submitted with chat history and take appropriate action. The reporter can choose to remove the conversation from their device, and the reported person or group will not know who reported them.

To report a person in a chat:

- Tap their display name at the top of the chat
- Click on the three dot menu in the upper right
- Select "Report User" from the list of options



Users have the option to report for the following reasons:

- I don't want to talk to them
- This is a spam bot
- This person is being abusive

Users then have the option to include the chat history to allow Kik's content moderation team to have the necessary context in order to take action on the report. If a user chooses to include the chat history, a select number of recent messages (including any personal information that may have been shared in the chat) will be sent to Kik's moderation team.

CLOSING THOUGHTS FOR PARENTS

It's easy to feel intimidated by all the social networking and messaging apps and services that teens use; even technology experts have trouble keeping up with all the new services. But you don't have to be an expert to understand how to help your teen use Kik or any other app safely.

The "rules" for using any site or service are pretty similar. Everyone should be respectful of themselves and others, be mindful of what they post, and understand how to use any privacy settings, security tools, or blocking and reporting mechanisms.

It's also important to remember that apps like Kik are a major part of your teen's social life. What's most important is to help your teen develop critical thinking skills so that no matter what service they use (online or off), they think about what they're doing, take actions to protect their privacy, security, and reputation, and keep an eye out for scams and things that may not be what they seem.

Parents, too, need to do a bit of critical thinking by not panicking every time they hear a media report about something awful happening on social media. The reason the news media cover awful situations is because they're rare. How often do you see headlines about planes landing safely? Of course teens can get into trouble on messaging or social media apps, but the same can be said for swimming pools. That's why we teach them how to swim.

It's important to keep the lines of communication with your teens as open as possible, and to have ongoing conversations about what's appropriate for them in terms of privacy settings, time spent online, and the types of activities they're engaging in. It generally works better to talk with your teen about their favorite tools—with genuine interest, not fear—because they're more likely to come to you when they need help, and you're much more likely to be kept in the loop about the technology that they use.





ConnectSafely