Social Media Apps: Risks

Technology is ever-changing. The following are some social media app risks that you may want to consider.

Discussing kids and technology in the context of privacy, safety, and security is an essential topic, especially given how quickly technology is evolving and becoming integrated into children's lives. Social media platforms like TikTok, Snapchat, BeReal, and Instagram come with their own sets of challenges and dangers:

TIKTOK:

- **Data Privacy:** TikTok collects a significant amount of data on its users, which has raised concerns about how that data is stored and used, particularly given its origins in China where data protection laws are different from those in countries like the U.S.
- **Exposure to Inappropriate Content:** The platform is replete with content that might not be suitable for younger audiences, including violence, explicit content, and misinformation.
- **Influence and Peer Pressure:** Trends and challenges can propagate very quickly on TikTok, sometimes encouraging dangerous or harmful behavior.

SNAPCHAT:

- **Ephemerality:** Messages in Snapchat disappear after they've been viewed, which could encourage riskier behavior or sharing of more intimate photos or messages.
- **Location Sharing:** Features like Snap Map show a user's location unless specifically disabled, posing a security risk.
- **Online Strangers:** As with other platforms, the friend suggestions can sometimes introduce children to people they shouldn't necessarily be connecting with.

BEREAL:

- **Peer Pressure:** The app encourages users to take spontaneous photos (or "real" moments), but this can introduce peer pressure to always be "on" and can contribute to anxiety over self-image.
- **Data Privacy:** Any app that collects data poses a potential privacy risk, especially one that encourages the frequent sharing of personal moments.

INSTAGRAM:

- **Mental Health Impact:** Instagram has been criticized for impacting young users' self-esteem and body image, as they compare themselves to often unrealistic portrayals of others.
- **Inappropriate Content:** While Instagram tries to monitor content, it is not always successful in filtering out inappropriate or harmful material.
- **Direct Messaging:** The direct messaging feature can expose children to contact with strangers and the risks associated with that.

ROBLOX:

- **In-Game Purchases:** Children may not understand the value of the virtual currency, Robux, and could make unauthorized purchases.
- **Online Interactions:** Roblox allows communication between players, posing a risk of exposure to inappropriate conversations or bullying.

MINECRAFT:

- Minecraft is often seen as one of the better gaming apps for children, particularly because it can be played offline, reducing risks associated with online interactions. However, online multiplayer versions can expose children to similar risks as other online platforms if not properly monitored.

In summary, while each platform has its own specific risks, there are common themes of data privacy, exposure to inappropriate content, and the potential for harmful social interactions that parents should be aware of. The key is active parental involvement and guidance to help children navigate these platforms safely.

Social Media Apps: Tips

Technology is ever-changing. Listed below are some social media tips that you may find helpful.

Ensuring the safe use of technology for kids is a shared responsibility between parents and their children. Here are some precautionary measures that can help minimize risks:

GENERAL TIPS:

- **Parental Guidance:** Actively guide your child in selecting appropriate apps, games, and websites.
- **Education:** Teach kids about the importance of privacy settings, and the risks associated with sharing personal information, photos, or location data.
- **Regular Monitoring:** Parents should periodically check their children's devices and social media accounts to ensure they are using them safely. However, it's essential to do this transparently to maintain trust.
- **App-Specific Controls:** Many apps offer parental controls. Make use of these to limit what your child can see or do.
- **Use of Parental Control Software:** These applications can help control and monitor your child's device usage.
- **Communication:** Keep an open line of communication with your child about what they're doing online, who they're talking to, and what kinds of websites and apps they're using.

TIKTOK:

- **Private Account:** Make the account private so only approved followers can see the content.
- **Disable Direct Messaging:** Disable the direct messaging feature for accounts of kids under 16.
- **Restricted Mode:** This limits the appearance of content that may not be appropriate for all audiences.

SNAPCHAT:

- **Ghost Mode:** Use "Ghost Mode" to disable location sharing in Snap Map.
- **Friend-Only Communication:** Set the privacy settings to ensure communication is only possible among friends.
- **Data Deletion:** Familiarize yourself and your child with how to delete stored data.

BEREAL:

- **Friends Only:** Limit the sharing of "real" moments only to known friends and family.
- **Explain Social Dynamics:** Make sure your child understands the implications of sharing personal moments online.

INSTAGRAM:

- **Private Account:** Use a private account to restrict who can see posts.
- **Block and Report:** Teach your child how to block and report other users and harmful content.
- **Turn Off Direct Messaging:** Restrict unknown users from sending direct messages.

ROBLOX:

- **Parental Controls:** Roblox provides a variety of parental controls that allow parents to turn off chatting, joining games, and following others.
- **Friend List Monitoring:** Regularly review your child's friend list and remove any unknown or suspicious contacts.
- **Secure Account with PIN:** Use a PIN to secure settings, so your child can't change them without your permission.

MINECRAFT:

- **Whitelisting:** When using multiplayer, only allow approved friends to join the server.
- **Disable Chat:** You can disable the chat feature in multiplayer games to prevent unsolicited contact.
- **Use a Family Account:** Some versions of Minecraft offer family accounts, which provide additional parental controls.

With the right measures and open dialogue, the risks associated with these apps can be significantly reduced.