

Jennifer Powell-Lunder Psy.D.Let's Talk Tween

# Buyer Beware: Two New Apps Your Tweens Should Avoid

Law enforcement caution parents about new social media sites.

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These days it is difficult to keep up all that the digital world has to offer. New apps seem to arise on a daily basis. It doesn't take long for use of new social media platforms to spread like wildfire. Your social media savvy tween is sure to jump right in when she hears that a new app is all the rage. Two apps that have come to the forefront in popularity among teens and tweens however, are raising red flags among law enforcement and other professionals.

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**Yellow Could Make a Parent Green**

You were just getting used to Snapchat and Instagram when Yellow showed up, aka "Tinder for Teens." According to Webwise, the Irish-based internet safety watchdog, users connect to the app through their Snapchat or Instagram accounts. Twelve App who distributes the app describes it is "a new social media to meet new friends and have fun with them." Similar to Tinder, the well-known dating/hook-up app, users must set their location on so that local users near them can swipe right to 'like' or show interest, or left to pass. The app is targeted at kids ages 13 to 17. If both users swipe right they can then message each other and are automatically added as a friend to their Snapchat. That's where things can get a bit concerning for parents. Basically kids can be "talking" with these new friends who live close by but since messages on Snapchat instantly disappear, parents may be in the dark about the content. The app states that users must be between the ages of 13 to 17 to sign up, but similar to many apps, has no way to verify a user is entering a correct birthdate. This app is a predator's dream, and tweens are especially vulnerable to this type of app.

Maybe Yellow doesn't concern you because you doubt your tween is interested in dating. The real reason tweens are so vulnerable is that the app is marketed as a way to make new friends who are located in near proximity. Such a situation opens the door to individuals with less than honest intentions. With virtually no way to monitor users, the app basically offers predators an open and local playing field.

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Law enforcement from Europe to the U.S. have raised red flags about the app. Earlier this year the app came to the attention of the FBI who identified it as an app parents should watch out for because of the potential to connect children with predators.

**Sarahah: Why Parents Should Say "Ah, No!"**

And just when you thought bullying apps were on the outs, along came Sarahah. The app originally developed in Saudi Arabia has recently become popular in the U.S. Users are assigned their own personal page. Anyone can then post any comments they want on the page. Posters do not have to subscribe to the app. While the developers state that the app is designed to “help you in discovering your strengths and areas for improvement by receiving honest feedback.” In the land of tweens, subscribers looking for honest feedback usually simply sets them up for mocking and meanness. The only difference between this app and apps such as ASKfm and it’s predecessor Formspring, is that instead of the user posting questions to which anonymous answers are offered, the user invites unsolicited comments and of course criticism from others whose identities are protected. The app’s argument against the idea that it could turn into bullying central for some users is that it encourages posters to leave “Leave a constructive message :)” I guess it’s all about interpretation.

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## **Simple Solutions to Ensure Social Media Safety**

So what can you do to ensure that your tween doesn’t fall into the traps of these apps? The key is consistent monitoring. The good news is that technology also provides the tools to parents to control what apps their tweens are downloading. It is imperative that all parents understand how permissions work on all the electronics to which their children have access. Setting clear rules and expectations with your kids about when and how they use their devices is important. In addition, do not be fooled, kids today are very technologically savvy and often understand how to easily work around parents’ attempts to enforce safety measures. Random device checks are a productive way to ensure safety. Consistent conversation with your tweens about what apps are hot, and what’s not, are the best way to keep a handle on how they are connecting with others in the social media world. In addition, frequent review of the "friends" they are connecting

with on these platforms is also important. There are a multitude of apps out there designed to help parents monitor their children's social media use, don't let your own discomfort with digital devices dissuade you from investigating and implementing. Such safeguards can really make a difference. If you are less than tech savvy there are many people you can turn to who can help you out. Most local libraries for example have a technology specialist on staff. Your local school, or even the older kids down the block can all serve as helpful resources. Don't be shy about contacting the customer service representatives at the companies whose apps or devices you are looking into. They are more than happy to help their parent customers.

Finally, frequent searches on the web and in the app store can keep you up to date on what platforms your tweens should avoid as well as offer an understanding of the sites to which they subscribe.

## References

<http://www.webwise.ie/parents/explained-what-is-yellow/>