

SELF-DESTRUCTING/SECRET APPS

Burn Note is a messaging app that erases messages after a set period of time. Unlike many other apps of this sort, it limits itself to text messages; users cannot send pictures or video. That may reduce issues such as sexting -- but words can hurt, too.

What parents need to know

- **It allows kids to communicate covertly.** To discourage copying and taking screenshots, a spotlight-like system that recipients direct with a finger (or the mouse) only reveals a portion of the message at a time.
- **It may encourage risky sharing.** The company claims that its "Multi-Device Deletion" system can delete a message from anywhere: the device it was sent from, the device it was sent to, and its own servers. But it's wise to be skeptical of this claim.
- **You don't have to have the app to receive a Burn Note.** Unlike other apps -- for example, *Snapchat* -- users can send a Burn Note to anyone, not only others who have the program.

Snapchat is a messaging app that lets users put a time limit on the pictures and videos they send before they disappear. Most teens use the app to share goofy or embarrassing photos without the risk of them going public. However, there are lots of opportunities to use it in other ways.

What parents need to know

- **It's a myth that Snapchats go away forever.** Data is data: Whenever an image is sent, it never truly goes away. (For example, the person on the receiving end can take a screenshot of the image before it disappears.) Snapchats can even be recovered. After a major hack in December 2013 and a settlement with the FTC, *Snapchat* has clarified its privacy policy, but teens should stay wary.
- **It can make sexting seem OK.** The seemingly risk-free messaging might encourage users to share pictures containing sexy images.

Whisper is a social "confessional" app that allows users to post whatever's on their minds, paired with an image. With all the emotions running through teens, anonymous outlets give them the freedom to share their feelings without fear of judgment.

What parents need to know

- **Whispers are often sexual in nature.** Some users use the app to try to hook up with people nearby, while others post "confessions" of desire. Lots of eye-catching, nearly nude pics accompany these shared secrets.
- **Content can be dark.** People normally don't confess sunshine and rainbows; common *Whisper* topics include insecurity, depression, substance abuse, and various lies told to employers and teachers.
- **Although it's anonymous to start, it may not stay that way.** The app encourages users to exchange personal information in the "Meet Up" section.

Yik Yak is a free social-networking app that lets users post brief, *Twitter*-like comments to the 500 geographically nearest *Yik Yak* users. Kids can find out opinions, secrets, rumors, and more. Plus, they'll get the bonus thrill of knowing all these have come from a 1.5-mile radius (maybe even from the kids at the desks in front of them!).

What parents need to know

- **It reveals your location.** By default, your exact location is shown unless you toggle location-sharing off. Each time you open the app, GPS updates your location.
- **It's a mixed bag of trouble.** This app has it all: cyberbullying, explicit sexual content, unintended location-sharing, and exposure to explicit information about drugs and alcohol.

- **Some schools have banned access.** Some teens have used the app to threaten others, causing school lockdowns and more. Its gossipy and sometimes cruel nature can be toxic to a high school environment, so administrators are cracking down.