

Broadcasting live

Kids love live-streaming apps. Here's what parents should know about them

The first webcam was used at Cambridge University in 1991 to live stream a pot of coffee, so people could see when it needed to be refilled.

These days, live-streaming apps allow users to chat or broadcast to other people in real time. They range from those primarily designed for talking to friends and family, such as Skype, to apps that enable you to share moments in your life with a wider online audience, such as Musical.ly or Facebook Live.

But upsetting cases involving some live-streaming services and worries that adults may be using services to groom children, have caused concern.

X Factor appeal

For a generation of teens brought up on shows like *The X Factor* and *The Only Way Is Essex*, these apps offer them the chance to star in their very own reality show.

Used in the right way, they also allow children and young people to practise their communication and presentation skills, and boost their confidence.

For those who use apps to be creative, such as sharing singing or dancing performances, they also provide immediate feedback, as many apps offer those watching the chance to ask questions, comment or send positive emojis, such as hearts, to show they like what they see.

Should I be concerned?

Because live-streaming apps are instant, there is no moderation. No one is watching over what your child is doing in front of others, or what those watching are doing to them.

Putting yourself out there means allowing others to comment on what you do and who you are. If comments are negative, or even if you feel you are not getting enough likes, it can make you feel bad about yourself.

Live streaming with strangers is inherently risky, but your child might not think their online friend is a stranger, so could be persuaded to do things they wouldn't normally, such as sharing sexual images.

Adults who groom children will often meet them in moderated

or public online spaces and then develop a relationship until they can persuade them to take their communication into a private, unmoderated service.

Even if you don't know your child is using live-streaming apps, warn them of the dangers of doing so. As with any online service in which they're interacting with other people, you should also advise them not to give anything away that will identify their full name, where they live, hang out, or go to school.

Teach them how to block and report on any service they use – and make sure they have a trusted adult who they can confide in should something go wrong, even if that person is not you.

What you can do



Take an interest in the apps your child uses, as many, such as Facebook, that aren't primarily live-streaming apps, now have that facility. Give them lots of opportunities to tell you if anything is troubling them by asking questions.

Help them set up privacy settings limiting the people who can interact with them to those they know in real life.

Drum into them the importance of not giving away any details that could allow people to find them in real life, such as location information, school or address.

Make sure they know how to report any harassment to the app (See our Tools section on p45). If an adult makes a sexual approach, they should tell you or another trusted adult and report it to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) at www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-report

33% of 8-17 year-olds have broadcast via a live-streaming service



Three of the most popular live-streaming apps

Skype

Skype was the first widely used live-streaming service and has spawned its own verb, 'to Skype'. It has become a popular way for children to keep in contact with family members who live far away. You can make and receive live video calls for free and conversations can't be recorded. There are, however, ways to keep chats without the other person knowing, including via software that records your device's screen, or external webcams.

Musical.ly (13+)

This karaoke-style app has proved hugely popular with children. It allows you to make your own videos by lip-synching or dancing to pre-recorded music on the app, while other users send messages or comment. It's created its own YouTuber-style stars, including teen twins Max and Harvey Mills.



YouNow (13+)

A live-streaming app and website that features a pop-up window that allows users to watch live broadcasts while chatting to others or leaving real-time messages for the broadcaster. It's free to use, but you can pay to 'virtually tip' broadcasters, while popular broadcasters are invited to offer a paid-for subscription to users. Visit our Tools section on p45 for advice on blocking and reporting on apps, including these.