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Apps to Help Keep Track of What Your Kids Are Doing Online

Though open communication is best, these tools can help parents who want a little extra control.

By [Christine Elgersma](#) July 4, 2016 via commonsensemedia.org

As kids become more independent, we want to foster their sense of responsibility and give them room to prove themselves. But it can be difficult to navigate this natural separation, especially when kids are doing who-knows-what on their devices. There are constant questions: Where are they? Who's contacting them? What are they doing online? Since tweens and teens are often tight-lipped about their lives, it can be tricky to get clear answers.

Though direct communication is always best, and the conversations around [online safety and digital citizenship](#) should start long before a kid becomes a teen, there are occasions when parents feel it's necessary to [monitor what kids are doing on their devices](#). Maybe they've broken your trust or you're worried about their safety. Whatever the case, there are tools to track what your kid is up to. Be aware that spying on your kid can backfire and that kids can find a way around just about any type of tracking. But if you're at the end of your rope or just need extra help managing your kid's digital life, then one of these tools might work for you. To get more information, check out our [advice about cell phone issues](#), including [basic parental controls](#), and less invasive (and expensive) ways to [limit access to content](#).

[Bark](#): Similar to VISR (see below), kids and parents need to work together to hook up accounts to the service. It also analyzes all device activity and alerts parents when a problem is found. If they get an alert, parents will see the content in question and get suggestions on how to handle it ($9/month).

[Circle Home](#) and Go: This app manages the Circle with Disney device, which pairs with your home Wi-Fi and controls all Wi-Fi-enabled devices. Can create time limits on specific apps, filter content, set bedtimes, and restrict internet access for the whole house or for individuals. Circle Go will let parents filter, limit, and track on networks outside the home Wi-Fi (the [Circle device](#) is $99, the Circle Home app is free, and the Circle Go service will be $9.95/month).

[Limitly](#): If screen time and specific app use is your concern, this system might work for you. It lets you track your kid's app use and limit time using the device or certain apps (free, Android-only).

[Pocket Guardian](#): Parents get alerts when sexting, bullying, or explicit images are detected on your kid's device, though you won't see the actual content or who it's from. Instead, the alert can prompt a conversation, and the app offers resources to help ($9.99–$12.99/month).

[Trackidz](#): With this program, you don't see specific content from your kid's device, but you can track app installations and use, block browsers and apps, manage time in apps and on the device, block out device-free time, grant bonus time, track location, get an alert when your kid's phone is turned off, and see your kid's contacts. It also claims to detect cyberbullying by tracking when your kid's device use drops dramatically, which can indicate avoidance. Setting up a geo-fence lets parents track a kid's location and alerts them when a kid has gone outside the boundaries, and a kid can tap the power button to send an emergency message to parents (currently free, but will be $6.99).

[VISR](#): For this one to work, a parent needs the kid's usernames and passwords, so be aware that it's easy for kids to set up dummy accounts. Once enabled, the tool analyzes posts and emails for bullying, profanity, nudity, violence, drugs, and late-night use and sends parents alerts when anything iffy is detected (currently free, but will be $5/month).