



National Computer Board

Mauritian Computer Emergency Response Team

Enhancing Cyber Security in Mauritius

Guideline on Mobile Apps for Parents (Updated)



CERT-MU

**National Computer Board
Mauritius**

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this guideline is to give provide a guidance for parents who wish to control their children's use of mobile apps. This guideline has been compiled from the different guides, tips and tricks available online. The most commonly used mobile apps have been covered.

1.2 Audience

The targeted audience for this document includes all parents whose children have access to mobile apps.

1.3 Document Structure

This document is organised into the following sections:

Section 1 gives an outline of the document's content, the targeted audience and the document's structure.

Section 2 gives a general background on mobile apps.

Section 3 provides a security guide on WhatsApp.

Section 4 provides a security guide on Instagram.

Section 5 provides a security guide on Snapchat.

Section 6 provides a security guide on TikTok.

Section 7 provides a security guide on YouTube.

Section 8 concludes the document.

2.0 Background

Child-friendly apps can make using the internet a more accessible and enjoyable experience, however, the thousands of apps available for different types of people mean it is important to make sure children use appropriate ones.

This guide maps some of the most common apps available and highlights those that might create risky situations for children, such as unintentionally revealing personal information, stranger danger and generating large bills through in-app purchasing.

Some apps that allow children to create and maintain online relationships raise some important safety issues that it's worth knowing about as a parent:

Chatting with strangers

Meeting and chatting with strangers online poses risks to young people who might be vulnerable to grooming and online (and offline) forms of sexual abuse.

Sending inappropriate content

With the physical barrier of a screen, some people feel more empowered to pressurise others into sending messages, often of a sexual or derogatory nature.

Sharing a location

Many apps share the user's location. This can put children at risk from others who actively seek out children with the intention of meeting in the real world. Sharing a location can also raise concerns with identity theft and privacy.

3.0 WhatsApp

The application, available to download from the App and Play stores, averages over 800 million monthly users. The minimum age requirement to use the service is 16 years.

3.1 How does WhatsApp work?

WhatsApp allows your child to send instant messages only to contacts that they have added to their WhatsApp account. Only people who have a WhatsApp account can send and receive messages through the app. Messages can be sent one to one or within a group conversation. For all messages sent WhatsApp sends “read receipts” to tell sender if the message was delivered, read, seen or played.

3.2 What information can be shared?

Last Seen

This is a timestamp that shows users the last time your child used their WhatsApp account.

Status Message

This can be customised to show what the person wants to share with his / her contacts.

Online

This tells your contacts if you are online. Note there is no way to hide online status from all users.

Note: By default, WhatsApp will automatically set privacy settings to allow any WhatsApp user to view read, last seen messages and profile photo and status. If you do not share your last seen information, you won't be able to see other people's last seen information.

3.3 How to manage information shared on WhatsApp

There are three settings to manage what information is shared:

Everyone

This option will show last seen, your profile photo and status to all users.

My contacts

Last seen, profile photo and status content will only be available to your child's contacts from their address book.

Nobody

No content will be shown to any user. Please advise your child to change this setting to “My contacts” so that only their contacts are able to see this information. If you would like to stop sending “read receipts” you can untick this option in the App.

Note: If you uncheck Read receipts, you will not send read receipts. You will also not be able to see other users’ read receipts.

3.4 Location sharing on WhatsApp

If this setting is switched on, any images and videos shared will also show the location of where they were taken on a map. Talk to your children about the importance of keeping this function switched off.

3.5 Managing the content your child can see on WhatsApp

To make sure your child only receives messages from people they trust they can block, delete or report users.

Delete or block users

Blocked users will not be able to contact you. Any updates to your status, profile image and last seen timestamps will not be shown. If you have blocked someone, they will not be notified but may still be able to work it out as your status message will no longer be displayed.

Please note that blocking will not remove the contact from the WhatsApp list nor will it remove you from the list on this contact’s phone. To delete a contact in WhatsApp you must delete the contact from your phone’s address book.

Reporting Spam

If you receive a message from an unknown contact you can Report spam and Block. This will report the user and add the user your Blocked list.

4.0 Instagram

Released back in 2010, the app is free to download on iOS & Android devices and has amassed over 300 million active monthly users to date. For keen ‘instagramers’ the app provides a channel to share their photography skills and daily life events.

Content posted can be amplified through the use of hashtags meaning masses can be reached in a matter of minutes.

There are various steps you can take to make sure your child’s profile and experience are both as safe as possible starting with the option of a Public or Private Profile:

Private Profile

This ensures only followers that your child knows and approves personally can see their posts.

Public Profile

All posts and activity can be seen by everyone who uses the app and web version of Instagram. By default all profiles are Public, a Private Profile can be activated by selecting the gear icon in the top right of the profile view followed by Private Profile.

4.1 The sharing and posting of content

There are 3 options to consider when posting content and who with:

Public

The most relaxed profile setting. All photos and videos are searchable and can be viewed and commented on by all users.

Private

Videos and photos are only seen by ‘approved followers’. All followers must be approved by your child.

Direct

Instagram has an option to send content directly to up to 15 people. Messages are deleted after 2 weeks if they remain ignored.

4.2 Location tagging

Tagging a location when posting will show where the photo or video was captured including private vicinities. Explaining to your child the consequences of this is advisable.

4.3 Managing the content in your child's feed

For more information about what, as a user, you can and cannot post click [here](#). To manage the content that your child see's on their feed you can:

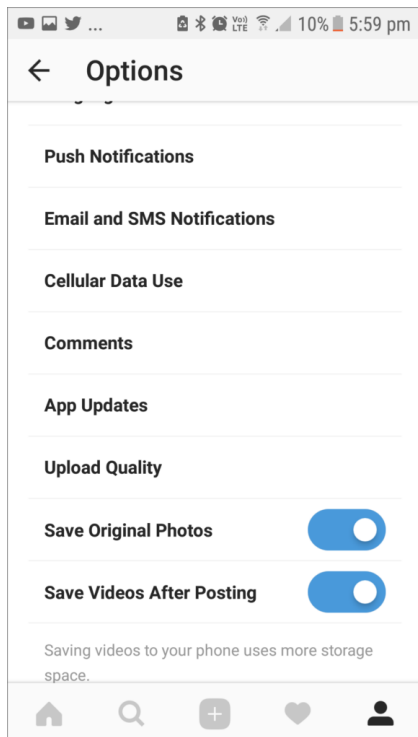
Unfollow a user

If your child no longer wants to see a particular user's content or doesn't like what they see, simply unfollow that person. This can be executed directly from their profile page.

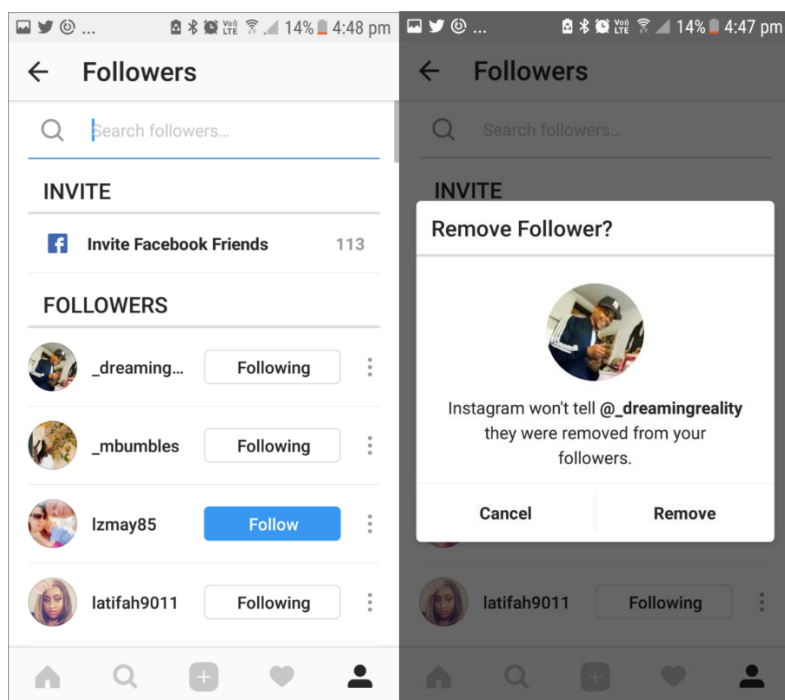
Block a user and/or report their content as inappropriate

A user can be blocked, or their content reported as inappropriate, by tapping the ellipsis in top right-hand corner of their profile. Select 'Block User' and/or 'Report Inappropriate Content'. You can use the keyword moderation tool to restrict any comments that contain a list of words you consider offensive or inappropriate.

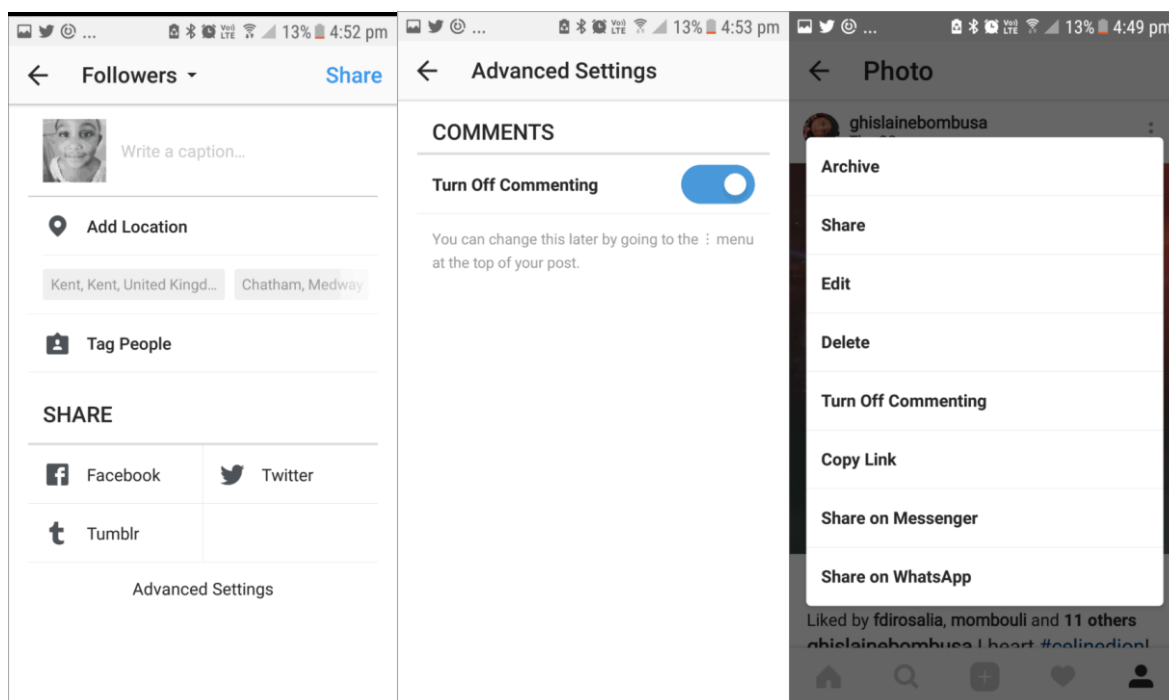
Users can choose their own list or use a default words provided on the app.



Users with private account can remove any followers and the person will not be notified. The platform has made it simpler to remove followers without blocking them. Simply select the follower(s) you wish to remove and press remove and they will not be notified but they will no longer see your posts.



Simply select the post you wish to remove the commenting function from, tap on the three dots on the right-hand corner and choose ‘Turn off commenting’. If you’d like to turn this off before posting, click on advanced settings before posting and swipe to ‘Turn off commenting’.

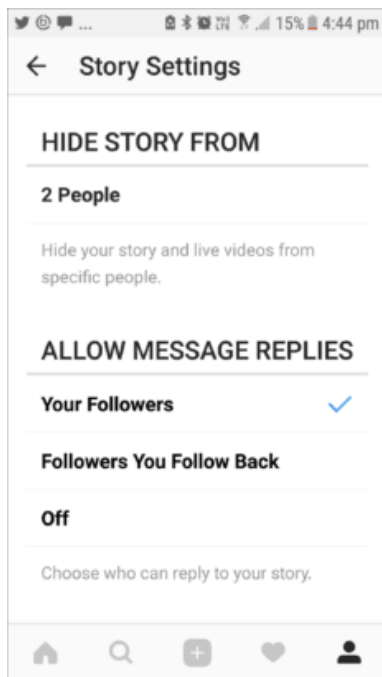


4.4 What is Instagram story and how does it work?

Your Instagram Story can be either a photo or video you upload to your profile that’s visible on the app for 24 hours before it disappears.

4.5 Who can comment on your Instagram story?

When you post a Story, one of your followers can send you a message while viewing your Story, but they won’t be able to leave a public comment on it for others to see. You can also select who is allowed to send you a message in response to your Story if you want a bit more privacy.



How do you know who's looked at your Instagram story?

Instagram also keeps a log of your viewers so you can see which Instagram users have viewed your Story. This viewers list can only be seen by you and not the rest of your Instagram followers.

5.0 Snapchat

Snapchat averages 400 million ‘snaps’ a day, the minimum age to sign-up for an account is 13. Each time a Snap is shared your child can choose how long the viewers can view it – from 1 to 10 seconds. Snaps capture a moment and are not captured with a screenshot. If a person screenshots a Snap that has been sent to them, Snapchat will notify your child but people have found workarounds to this so please share this with your child.

5.1 Who can my child share content with on Snapchat?

Users can share content with 3 different audiences:

Everyone

This will mean that their content will be seen by all users.

Status Message

Videos and photos are only seen by added friends. Your child must actively add friends that they would like to send or receive content from.

Online

This enables your child to select friends they want to block from seeing their content. By default only users your child has added to their friends list can send them content

5.2 Who can send them content?

Your child can choose to receive content from either “Everyone” or “My Friends”. Encourage your child to set their default setting to only accept content from “My Friends”.

Tap the ghost icon > tap the gear icon > select “My Friends”.

There are three sections that you should update ‘Contact Me’, ‘My Story’ and ‘Quick add’.

- (i) Quick add feature allows people who have your phone number in their contact list to add you as a friend on Snapchat app

This will ensure that only people your child has added (or friended) on Snapchat can send them a photo or video.

Screenshot is possible – the Snapchat platform does not support this but Apple’s iOS and Google’s Android smartphones do allow you to take screenshots and save them. Encourage your child not to screen grab Snaps without permission from the sender.

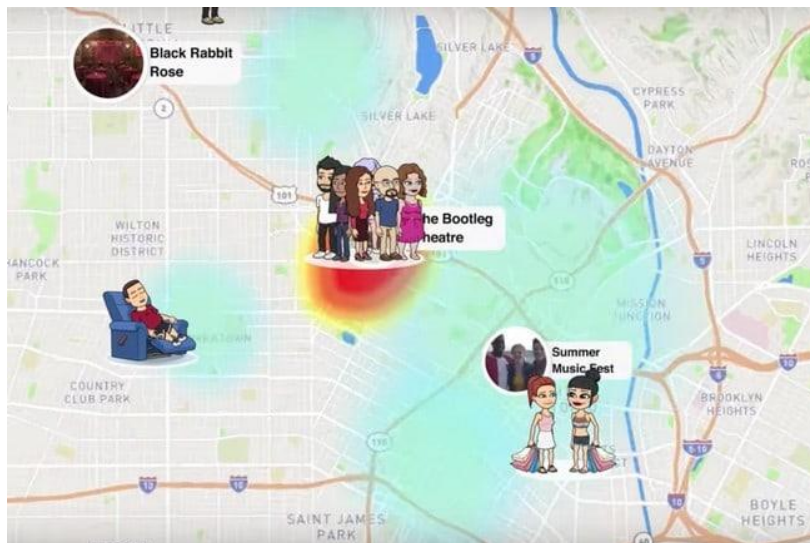
5.3 Sharing content with real friends

Snapchat, like other social networking apps, is designed to share moments with “real life” friends but there is still the danger that children may connect with people they don’t know.

Encourage your child to only share content with their “real friends” and share things they would be happy to share with you.

Sending nude images of children under 18 is illegal and may be shared people that it was not intended for. Have an open and honest conversation about the implications of sexting with your child.

5.4 Location sharing – Snap maps



Snap maps enable a user, if you and a friend follow one another, to share their locations with each other so you can see where they are and what is going on around them.

As this new feature shows your precise location pinpoint on a map – we would encourage users not to share their location, especially with people they do not know in person.

Location settings

There are three location settings to choose from:

Ghost Mode: you are the only person who can see your location on the map. Within Ghost Mode you can still see the locations of your friends but they will be unable to see you.

My Friends: means that all of your contacts on Snapchat can see your location.

Select Friends: allows users to look through their friend list and then decide which of their friends they want to be able to view their location. Only share your location with people you know in person. Never share your location with strangers.

5.5 Browsing safely

Snapchat uses Google's browsing service to warn users of suspected phishing, malware, other dangerous sites.

5.6 Managing the content your child can see on Snapchat

Delete or Block the user

When you block or delete a user that person is unable to view or comment on any of your posts. People aren't notified when you block them.

Report a Snap on Story Explorer

If you see something on Story Explorer that does not follow Snapchat's **Community Guidelines**, press and hold on the Snap to report it to their team.

6.0 TikTok

TikTok, previously known as Musical.ly, is a mobile app and social network for users 13 and above that revolves around sharing 15-second video clips, which are set to music often licensed from artists, record labels or others. TikTok has been downloaded over 1 billion times, including 96 million in the United States, according to estimates from the research firm Sensor Tower. It is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, now considered one of the most valuable start-ups in the world.

TikTok is now used by not only by lip-synching 14-year-olds, but also by comedians, athletes and brands. The app is fast-paced and chaotic, combining elements of Spotify, Snapchat, Vine, and Twitch into a single social network.

6.1 How does it work?

After you download the app, you can immediately start browsing videos. But in order to post any yourself, you will need to sign up for an account. You can make an account using your email, your phone number, or a third-party platform like Facebook. The app automatically assigns you a username. If you sign up for TikTok with your phone number, the app will generate a generic username such as user1234567. Using an email address, it will generate a more personalized ID. However, this may present a privacy issue for users.

To change your username, tap the icon in the right bottom corner. Then hit Edit Profile. Here, you can change it to something more unique, as well as add a bio, picture, and Profile Video.

By default, TikTok accounts are public, meaning anyone can see your profile and view the videos you post. To adjust these privacy settings, tap the three dots in the top right corner of your profile.

6.2 Navigating TikTok

The app is divided into two main feeds. The default is for You, an algorithmically generated stream of videos similar to Instagram's Explore page. Swipe left and you'll find the other, Following, which features uploads from people you choose to follow. You'll notice to the right of every TikTok video a series of icons. The first will take you to the profile of the user who posted it. Then there's a heart, which functions just like hearts, or likes, on Instagram. Next are

comments, then a right-pointing arrow for sharing individual TikToks to other platforms. Click the arrow if you want to copy the link to a specific TikTok, for example, to share it on iMessage.

6.3 Learn how to keep your kids safe on the TikTok app

- Monitor and have a dialog about the apps your children are using
- Always be on the apps your children use. No monitoring app is better than having a regular digital safety conversation with your children
- If your child already has a phone, ensure that they ask for permission before downloading and using any new apps
- Have your child teach you about any new apps they want to download. Then do some research on your own to determine if the app is safe for your family to use
- Remind your children that their online activity (even under a fake username) can impact their reputation

6.4 How can my kid control who sees their videos and sends them messages?

Users can control who can see their uploaded content, follow them, and send them messages by making their account private. With a private account, users can approve or deny followers and restrict their uploaded content and incoming messages to followers only.

If a user has a public profile, anyone signed into the TikTok app can view that user's public videos. However, only approved followers can send that user a message.

Whether users choose to have a public or a private account, they can always:

- block another from contacting them at any time
- save a video privately so that content will not be viewable by any other user
- enable restrictions on comments, duets, or messages

7.0 YouTube

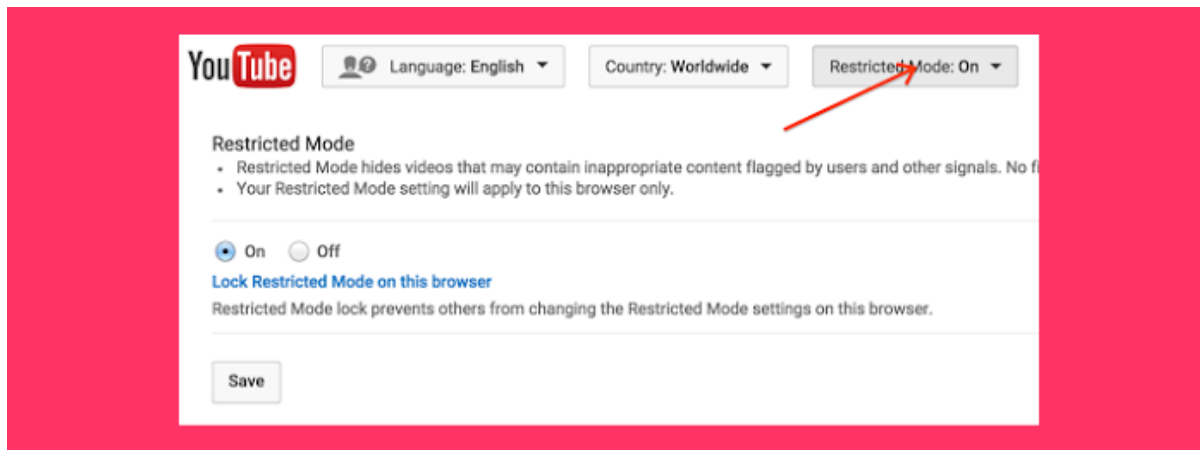
Entertainment for families no longer means sitting in front of the television, watching appropriate programming at set times in the day. Now, there are multiple ways to watch your favourite shows, including online. And one of the most popular ways is through YouTube.

YouTube has become synonymous with online video, even though it is far from the only host of clips. It is now not only where we go to watch footage of cats playing the piano or the latest pop videos, but a valuable resource of entertainment for children.

7.1 YouTubing tips

- Have a shared family account for YouTube
- Turn the Safety Mode on
- Vet the content
- Subscribe to channels that you feel comfortable with then create a feed of safe videos
- Watch and enjoy YouTube shows together with your child
- Keep YouTube screens out of bedrooms and in family spaces

7.2 Getting started with YouTube



It is important to have a shared family account for YouTube so that you can easily track what videos are being watched and suggested. You can then turn the Safety Mode on via the Safety button at the bottom of the YouTube page. You can also click the Lock Safety Mode option to avoid it being turned off.

Responsible video creators on YouTube can flag their content as only appropriate to certain ages. This will restrict access to the video if your account settings indicate you are not old enough.

7.3 Know your YouTube channels

An approach that has been successful in our houses has been to restrict our children to watching certain YouTube channels. If they want to start watching a new one we watch some videos ourselves first to vet the content.

Recognised brands are useful here as they carry with them more rigorous standards in terms of appropriateness — although at the same time can be more commercial. DreamWorks TV, Mother Goose Club, Talking Tom and Friends, Jim Henson TV, Reading Rainbow, National Geographic Kids, and Thomas the Tank Engine are good examples. Then there are other now well-known independent YouTubers like Vlogbrothers and Stampylonghead.

It is important to not only check out recent videos but also browse the channel's back catalogue. Even now mainstream YouTubers like Stampylonghead retain videos in their back catalogue with swearing. These older videos will often be suggested by YouTube for young viewers to watch next if they are already watching the channel.

Subscribing to channels that you feel comfortable with then creates a feed of safe videos for your children to browse and watch in the My Subscriptions area of YouTube in the web or app platform.

7.4 Third-party apps for safer YouTube viewing

There are also a range of apps that provide carefully checked lists of videos that are safe for children of different ages. Some of these include; Kid-safe Tube TV, Kids Video Player for YouTube, YouTube Videos for Kids, Playlist for YouTube, etc.

7.5 Further protections against YouTube content

If you want some extra protection you can use web filtering software such as Symantec's Norton Family Premier (for Windows and Android) or McAfee Security's Safe Eyes (for Windows and Mac). These are an extra way of ensuring your children do not come across content that is unsuitable.

7.6 Common sense media

While these suggestions will you manage good content on YouTube for your children, there is no substitute for watching and enjoying these shows together.

Another simple and positive step is to keep YouTube screens out of bedrooms and in shared family spaces. It can be a juggle to accommodate this activity downstairs but it not only eliminates any secretive viewing but also creates a context for children to discuss and question content they do not understand.

By sharing the highs and lows of YouTube viewing, you and your children can build both understanding and trust. The settings and tools here provide a framework to ensure that continues and helps avoid some of the unexpected pitfalls.

8.0 Conclusion

Mobile apps have become very popular nowadays with the advent of smart phones and tablets and also because of the breakthrough in technology. Therefore, it is imperative that we always monitor our children who are using those apps, ensuring they are using appropriate ones and as parents, we have to make sure that we are addressing the safety issues at all times.