

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about JUSTALK KIDS

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

JusTalk Kids is a child's version of the JusTalk app – a highly popular social networking platform – designed for users up to 13 years of age, allowing them to video call, message and participate in group chats. While adults can link their own JusTalk account to their child's and make use of parental controls, it's important to understand the risks associated with the app.

SUBSCRIPTION FOR PREMIUM ACCESS

While JusTalk Kids is free, there's the option to subscribe to a kids' premium account or a premium family account. At a cost, this feature allows children to have access to more fun features such as games they can play with others in a call; exclusive stickers; a badge denoting them as a premium subscriber; and exclusive ringtones and themes.

RESISTANCE TO CONTROLS

JusTalk Kids endeavours to allow children the sense of having a chat-based app while allowing parents to set controls (within the app or from their own adult JusTalk account). The basis behind this is positive; however, some children are challenging their parents by refusing to use JusTalk Kids, preferring to use the adult version without any restrictions in place.

KNOWING THE PARENT PASSCODE

After downloading JusTalk Kids, parents can set a passcode which users must enter to add contacts. The parental controls help to manage which content can be viewed and who children can add as a contact: this then allows children to chat with friends in a controlled environment. However, prospective contacts don't have to know a specific username. In theory, someone could type in a random name and then add them as a friend.

POTENTIAL DATA LEAKS

JusTalk and JusTalk Kids claim to be secure and encrypted, going so far as to state that even the developers themselves won't access your data. However, a security lapse in 2022 highlighted that messages were not in fact encrypted – leading to concerns around the security of the app and the transparency of the development team.

CYBERBULLYING

Online chats can provide a sense of anonymity, leading some users to post things which they wouldn't normally say in person. Combined with the option of group chats, there's a risk that young people might join in with this kind of behaviour, escalating it further and potentially turning what should be a fun experience into something deeply negative.

TOO MUCH SCREENTIME

A report by the UK Parliament Education Committee highlighted a 52% increase in children's screen time between 2020 and 2022 – as well as finding that 25% of children used their smartphones in a manner consistent with screen addiction. Introducing children to social networking apps when they're too young can lead to bad digital habits and a reliance on technology from an early age.

Advice for Parents & Educators

JUSTIFY THE CONTROLS

If parents allow their child to use JusTalk Kids, they should explain that they're putting parental controls in place to make the app safer. Make sure the child knows not to put their full name on the account and doesn't use a photo of themselves as their profile picture. This type of open discussion will help to ensure that a child is aware of the app's potential risks and knows how to reduce them.

TALK ABOUT ONLINE FRIENDSHIPS

Young children could be excited to use this app. However, highlight that they must do so in a positive, respectful and responsible manner. While it can be easy to get caught up in a group chat, it's important to talk to others politely and call out any unpleasant behaviour. Discuss the importance of limiting their contacts to people they know in real life and use parental controls to enforce this.

DOS AND DON'TS OF SHARING

Some children might not understand the potential dangers of oversharing online. Set clear guidelines around what *is* and *isn't* safe to share on the internet, and discuss the concept of a digital footprint. Children need to understand that the things they say and share online can never be completely erased. Even if they delete it themselves, it can be saved and distributed by others.

ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION

Apps like JusTalk can sometimes lend themselves to bullying behaviours. Parents should monitor what their child is sending and receiving, check in with them regularly and encourage them to share their feelings (both positive and negative) at home. Remind them that they can block a contact if someone is treating them disrespectfully.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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