

A photograph of a classroom scene. A female teacher with dark hair, wearing a denim jacket over a brown top, stands in front of a green chalkboard. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. Several students in the foreground have their hands raised, indicating an interactive activity. The chalkboard has some writing on it, including "May 1", "Challenge", and "Is There". To the left, a whiteboard displays a "Spelling List #24" with words like "laughter", "driver", and "pharmacist". A round analog clock is mounted on the wall above the chalkboard. The classroom is decorated with a banner that says "Every Day Is New" and various educational posters.

THE ULTIMATE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA



SAFER
SCHOOLS
TOGETHER



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Disclaimer: Given the rapidly evolving nature of technology and social media applications, this information (especially social media platform-related) is current as of the date of publication.

SAFER SCHOOLS TOGETHER

Using Today for a Safer Tomorrow



[Safer Schools Together \(SST\)](#) is committed to ending school violence by encouraging school communities to create positive, safe, and caring learning cultures and climates for every student, staff, and parent/caregiver. SST equips law enforcement agencies, school administrators, and community partners with comprehensive violence prevention and intervention strategies, providing teams with the necessary tools to enhance their capacity and sustainability.

Our team of highly skilled Threat Analysts and professional trainers have a proven record of helping school communities throughout various parts of the world minimize, manage, and respond to all threats of violence. Using best practices from the field of School Safety/Threat Assessment (SS/TA), SST will assist your teams in the early identification of individuals on the pathway to violence, suicide, radicalization, and gang involvement.

Regardless of where technology takes us, it is the staff, students, parents, and agency partners who will always be the best app to ensure safe and caring school communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA APPS.....	2
TikTok	2
Instagram	7
Snapchat (“Snap”)	12
X (formally known as Twitter)	22
Discord	25
Vault Apps	28
THE “RULES” (THAT NO ONE FOLLOWS).....	31
INTERNET LINGO/SLANG	32
ADDITIONAL CANADIAN RESOURCES.....	37
CONCLUSION	38

INTRODUCTION

Our current world climate is constantly connected to technology. Is your smartphone the first thing you look at each morning and the last thing you check each night? Given the persuasive designs of social media platforms and the internet, it is no surprise that screen time steadily increases for most of us year after year. It is important, though, how we tend to see device *addiction* more amongst today's youth – it seems as though younger children, teens, and young adults are constantly staring at some kind of device or screen.

Educating ourselves and today's youth on the current digital landscape can seem overwhelming at times. Technology has entered our lives at a rapid pace over the past several years and continues to evolve daily. The reality is that even as apps and technological devices change, individual behavior often remains the same. Today's youth spend on average nearly five hours a day on social media, with evidence noting a direct correlation towards negative mental health for our students.¹

Given the significant level of individual engagement, it is evident that social media is here to stay and will continue to impact our daily lives and school communities. We must recognize that the internet and social media platforms serve as primary channels for student interaction, communication, and engagement. Unfortunately, it may also be the primary way for youth to engage in cyberbullying behavior, threaten, and harass each other.

The goal of the School Administrator's Guide is to familiarize yourself with the major social media platforms currently used by your students, or platforms that have a strong potential to be used by your students. Ensuring you are increasingly more and more familiar with these platforms allows you to navigate through them quickly when addressing digital threats and other worrisome online behavior. Being prepared is a vital part of your school's safety and may prevent tragic incidents from impacting your school community.

A note for school administrators: *There has been a recent rise in [doxxing](#) concerns specifically targeting school administrators. With the rapid expansion of internet access and online platforms, individuals in leadership roles are increasingly vulnerable to having personal information exposed. To help safeguard your privacy, it's important to regularly search your name online and review your digital tattoo. Additionally, ensure your social media accounts are secured with strong privacy settings to minimize the risk of personal information being shared without your consent.*



¹ [American Psychological Association](#)

POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA APPS

Today, there are many social media applications available, and chances are, you or someone you know has one or more of these apps on their smartphone. You likely know how to use some of these apps better than others. This guide will thoroughly introduce the most popular social media apps used by today's youth.

TikTok



TikTok is currently one of the world's most popular video-sharing social networking applications. The platform is centered around individuals posting short videos accompanied by popular songs or sounds. TikTok reigned as the most downloaded app globally in 2024² and has been downloaded 4.92 billion times across iOS and Android devices.³ With over 1.6 billion monthly active users,⁴ despite several incidents of data breach allegations⁵ and being banned in several countries,⁶ TikTok is not going away anytime soon.

TikTok strategically markets to younger audiences, and although users must be 13 years of age to sign up for the app, content on the platform is not filtered. Individuals ranging from 10 to 19 years old may have access to age-inappropriate content wherein access to this content could potentially extend to even younger viewers. Age-inappropriate content inevitably reaches 37.3% of its estimated audience who are under the age of 18,⁷ as well as audiences who are potentially younger than the required 13 years of age, as you can lie about your age.

² [Leading mobile apps](#)

³ [TikTok Statistics](#)

⁴ [How Many People Use TikTok](#)

⁵ [TikTok sued for billions over use of children's data](#)

⁶ [Which countries have banned TikTok?](#)

⁷ [TikTok User Statistics](#)

The average time a user spends on TikTok is 95 minutes per day,⁸ an increase from an average of two years prior which was 46 minutes.⁹ This time is spent either creating and sharing short videos or watching the existing plethora of TikTok videos uploaded to the platform already. Either way, the average time a user spends on TikTok is nearly 100 minutes every day.

In addition to its popularity among today's youth, TikTok is also seeing a growing number of adults joining the platform. More than 44% of users are between the ages of 20-39 years old.¹⁰ Consequently, adults who join the app may not always prioritize creating a safe environment for TikTok's younger users. It is possible that some adults may not be aware that their posted content is visible to youth of all ages. While TikTok outlines in its Community Guidelines that inappropriate content or content violating the platform's rules will be removed by moderators, such actions may take hours or even days to occur, or may not happen at all.¹¹ TikTok's Terms of Services allow for the possibility of moderation, but in effect, there is not much oversight, and removing inappropriate content may be a lengthy process.¹² This is particularly significant given that more than one billion TikTok videos are viewed every day.¹³

With the rising popularity of video-sharing apps, there are alternatives to TikTok worth mentioning, such as Triller—an American-based app boasting over 73 million downloads and offering features similar to TikTok.¹⁴ Other alternatives include but are not limited to Byte, Likee, and Funimate. Below, we will explore further and discover more about TikTok's features.

FOR YOU PAGE (FYP)

Each TikTok user has their own unique preference for the type of video content they enjoy watching the most. TikTok's algorithm assesses these preferences and subsequently delivers the content to the user's customized For You Page (FYP). TikTok published a detailed [blog post](#)¹⁵ about how individual FYP recommendations are generated.¹⁶ As outlined in the blog post, the FYP's algorithm is based on the preferences and activity history of individual users including:

- Video likes
- Video shares
- Accounts followed
- Comments posted
- Videos created

⁸ [Stats About Average Time Spent on TikTok](#)

⁹ [TikTok Statistics You Need to Know](#)

¹⁰ [Global TikTok user age and gender distribution](#)

¹¹ [TikTok Community Guidelines](#)

¹² [Terms of Service | TikTok](#)

¹³ [TikTok Statistics You Should Know](#)

¹⁴ [Triller](#)

¹⁵ [How TikTok Recommends Videos #ForYou](#)

¹⁶ [How TikTok Recommends Content](#)

Information such as the duration of a video watched by a user plays a role in shaping the algorithm. Viewing a video in its entirety indicates significant interest and holds importance. Additionally, other contributing factors encompass:

- Length/runtime
- Captions
- Sounds
- Stickers
- Hashtags (#)

Furthermore, hashtags influence the type of content users see on their FYP. Users who watch or create videos with a particular hashtag are more inclined to encounter content featuring the same hashtag in the future. Additional information about hashtags and their functionality can be found in [SST's resource guide called 'Raising Digitally Responsible Youth: A Parent's Guide.'](#)

Lastly, TikTok has stated it takes a user's device settings and account settings into consideration when recommending content.¹⁷ Some examples of similar settings include:

- Language preferences
- Country settings
- Device type

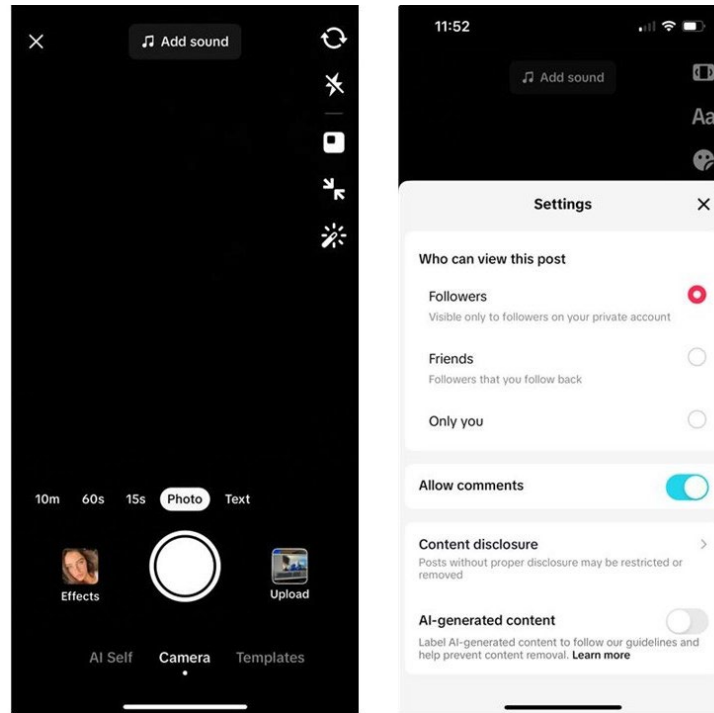
However, these factors do not hold as much weight compared to the amount of time spent watching videos and user activity.

TIKTOK FEATURES

TikTok requires that users grant permission for the app to access their device's camera and microphone. Once granted permission, users are given the capability to upload content, including previously recorded videos or images from their device library.

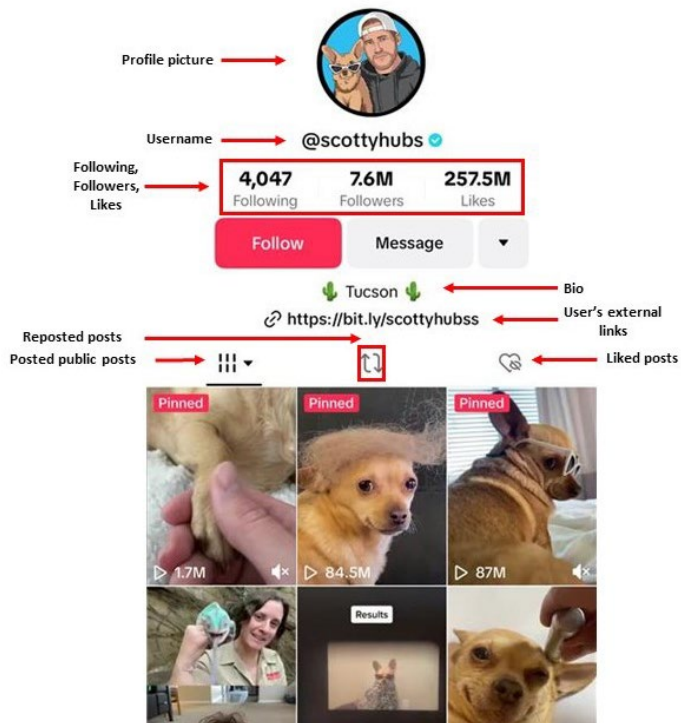
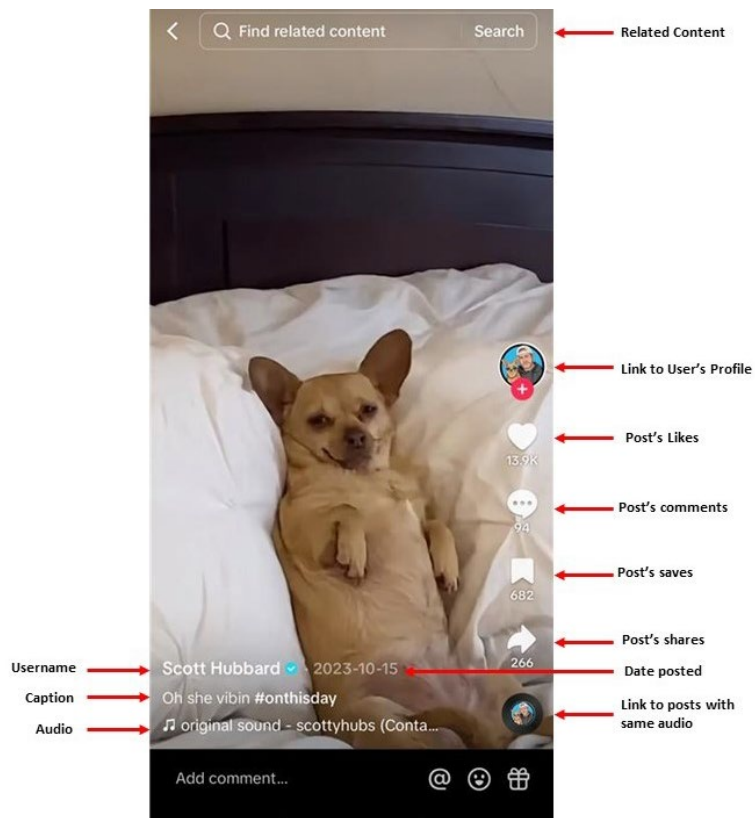
Consequently, TikTok allows for the re-upload of videos that were previously removed from the app, regardless of whether they were deleted by the user or were removed due to a violation of TikTok's Terms of Services.

¹⁷ [How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou](#)



ANATOMY OF TIKTOK

Together, let us look at the anatomy of TikTok posts, profiles, and the app's comment sections. To follow along, open the TikTok app:



Instagram



Instagram, owned by Meta, is a widely used photo-sharing platform with over 1 billion monthly active users.¹⁸ If you see a student scrolling through photos on their smartphone, chances are they are browsing through Instagram.

Similar to TikTok, hashtags are often used on this platform. These hashtags provide users with a means to discover and follow other users who share similar interests.

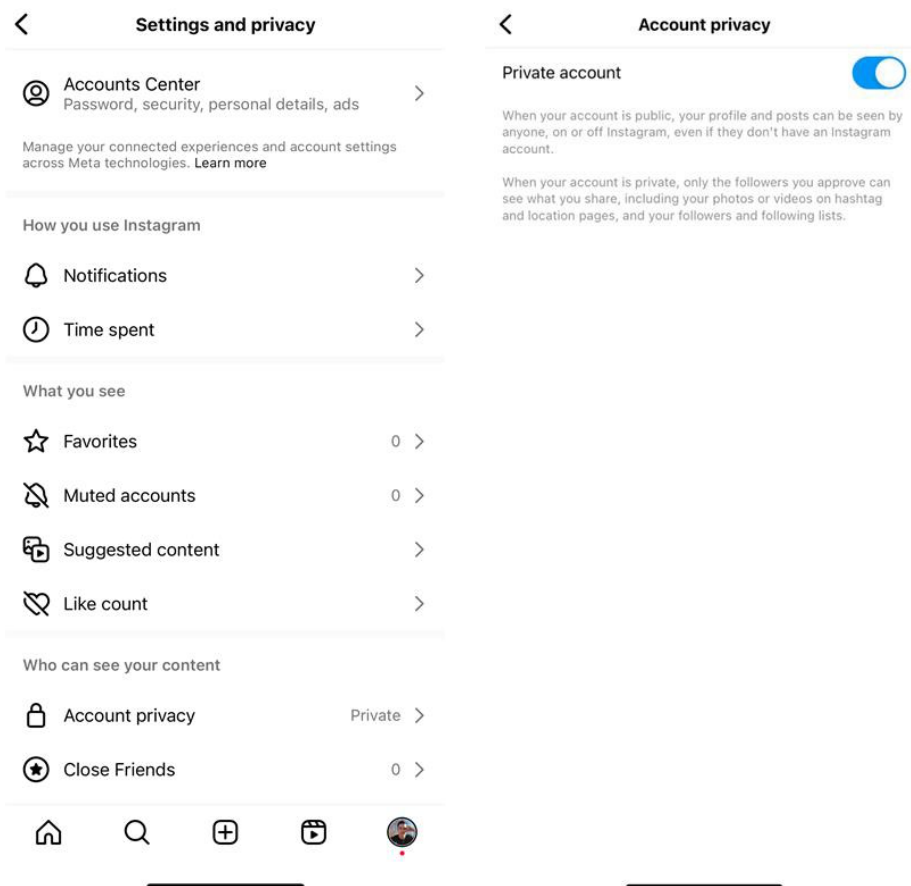
**#love #instagood #beautiful #fun #smile
#photooftheday #instagramers
#selfie #pretty #lol
#picoftheday #instalove
#bestoftheday #best #beauty
#fashion #nofilter #pamper #cute
#salonselfie #selfie #throwbackthursday**

SUGGESTED PRIVACY

On Instagram, users can choose to share posts with either everyone, by maintaining a public account, or exclusively with approved followers, by setting their account to private.

¹⁸ [Number of Instagram Users Worldwide](#)

SST recommends that all students maintain a private Instagram account for safety purposes. However, an exception may apply to grade 11-12 students who aim to cultivate their digital presence and create an account that university recruiters and employers can access. Instructions on enabling a private account can be found below.



INSTAGRAM STORIES

Instagram Stories allow users to share videos and/or photos publicly or with their followers; these posts remain visible for 24 hours. Additionally, users can send videos and/or photos that vanish after being viewed once. There is also the option to post poll questions, messages, locations, and other users can comment on the Instagram story. This feature, inspired by the widespread usage of Snapchat, became widely popular among younger users. Additionally, users have the ability to track who has viewed and/or engaged with their content if they post an Instagram Story. Furthermore, Instagram users can post photos/videos to their “Stories” for only their “Close Friends” list to see – a list the individual user creates on Instagram.

INSTAGRAM REELS

Instagram Reels were added as a feature in 2020 and were originally 15 seconds long.¹⁹ These are short videos with music included, remarkably similar to the style of TikTok videos. Instagram Reels can now be up to 90 seconds and can also be cross-shared on Meta's other platform, Facebook. Instagram Reels are the fastest-growing feature of Instagram worldwide and are expected to have over 2.35 billion users each month.²⁰ Instagram reels rival TikTok, surrounding posting short videos to which users have an endless scroll of options to see; the platform utilizes this persuasive design so users can always stay on Instagram instead of switching to TikTok. School administrators should recognize Reels as a powerful medium for student expression, potentially useful for educational projects and fostering a positive school culture online; however, there remains the possibility of worrisome content being posted on a user's Reels too.

THREADS

Threads is a recent addition to Instagram, introduced as a new option for conversation (similar to X, formerly known as Twitter), where users can engage in real-time conversations. Threads offers the ability to post messages with a 500-character limit and videos with a duration of up to 5 minutes. Users are prompted to sign up for Threads through their existing Instagram account, enabling users to also share posts from Threads directly to their Instagram Stories. Threads has over 175 million monthly users and 33 million daily users, and within its first five days of launch, 100 million users created accounts.²¹

DIRECT MESSAGES (DMS)

Instagram has the option for users to communicate one-to-one by messaging privately. Direct Messaging, or 'DMs,' is a private message inbox within the Instagram app. This is a feature that allows users to communicate privately, like text messaging, or also the option to create group chats to communicate with multiple users at once. Yes, Instagram DMs are where our youth receive private messages from their friends and participate in group chats, but there is also the possibility they may receive messages from strangers. Furthermore, there is currently no way to disable Instagram DMs.

If you do not follow a user, yet they message you, this is filtered into a section called Message Requests. Within this section, there is further filtration to 'Hidden Requests,' where Instagram may hide a DM from your generic Message Requests screen if it deems the message as potentially inappropriate.

It is important to note that photos, videos, and voice recordings can be sent through Instagram DMs, including from accounts that are not mutual (do not follow the user/the user does not follow them). Additionally, users can enable "Vanish Mode," similar to Snapchat's feature, which deletes chats after a recipient views them.²²

¹⁹ [Instagram Reels](#)

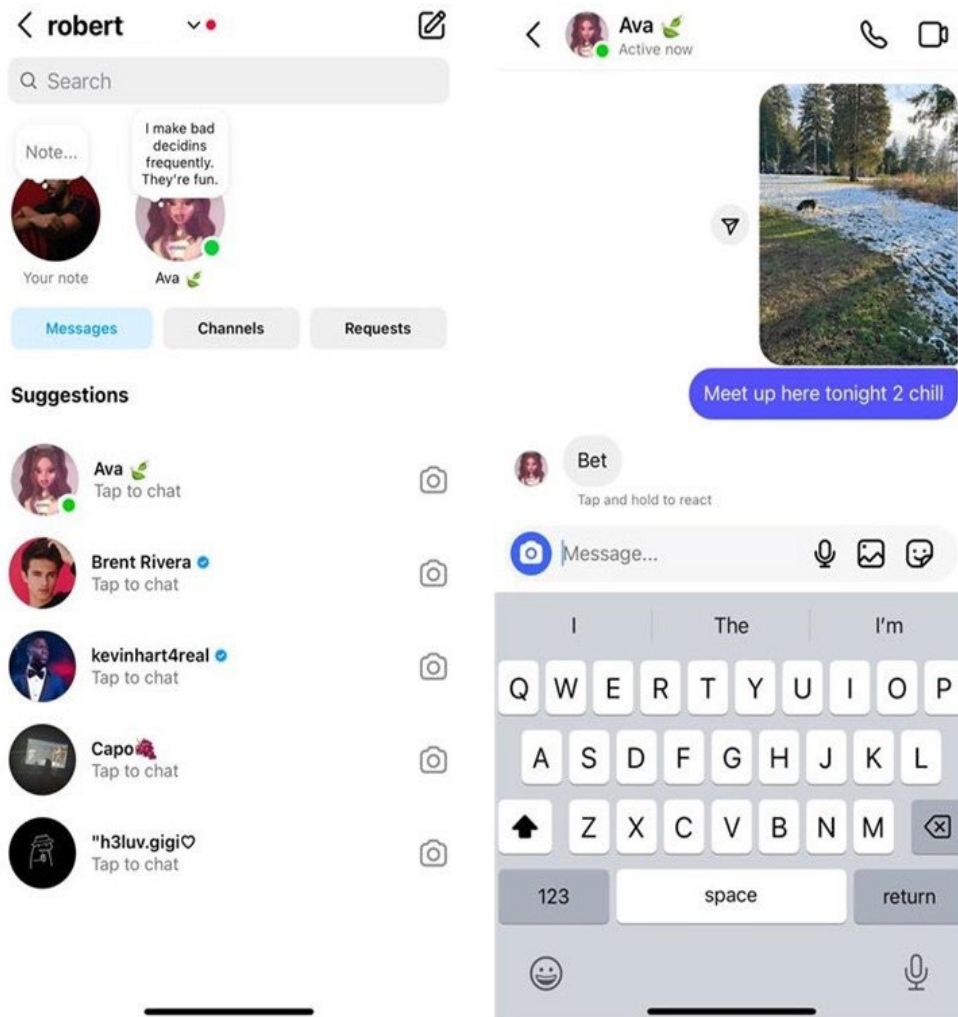
²⁰ [Instagram Reels Stats](#)

²¹ [Threads Statistics](#)

²² [Instagram Vanish Mode](#)

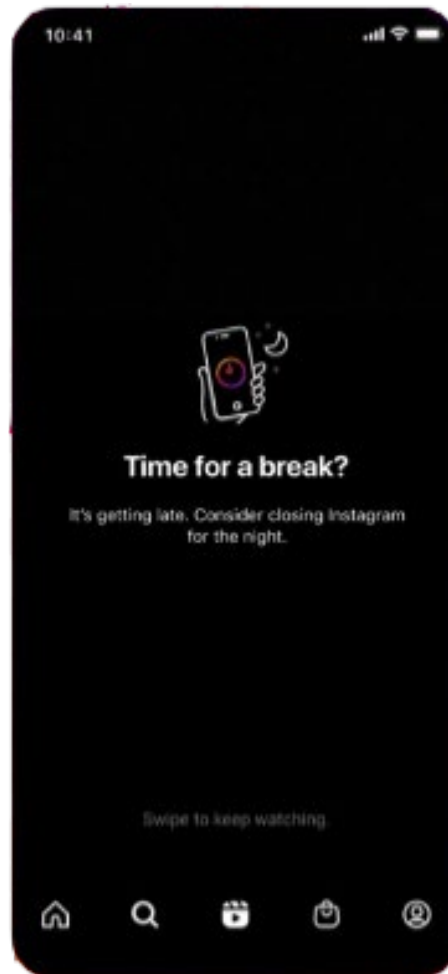
INSTAGRAM NOTES

Instagram's Notes feature permits individuals to post brief, 60-character messages that remain visible for 24 hours. This feature fosters a private communication channel between youth and their peers. It is important for school administrators to be aware of this tool, as it enables students to share quick updates or thoughts, potentially impacting the dynamics of student interactions.



NIGHTTIME NUDGES

Instagram's Nighttime Nudges is a recent addition aimed at encouraging today's youth to reduce their late-night usage of the app. When a user between the ages of 13 and 17 spends more than 10 minutes on Instagram, especially in sections like Reels or DMs during late hours, they will receive a gentle reminder suggesting it is time for a break.²³ These nudges are programmed to appear automatically after 10 p.m. and cannot be disabled, although users can dismiss them.²⁴ This initiative is part of Instagram's broader efforts to promote healthier usage habits among today's youth, complementing other features on Instagram such as 'Take a Break' and 'Quiet Mode.'



²³ [About Instagram teen privacy and safety settings](#)

²⁴ [Instagram will now 'nudge'](#)

Snapchat (“Snap”)



Since its launch in 2011, Snapchat has consistently maintained its status as one of the most popular social media applications among today’s youth, serving as a primary platform for communication and sharing digital experiences. Its popularity stems from transforming text communication into a visual experience, allowing users to send photos that disappear without leaving evidence, thus minimizing their digital tattoos – for the most part. Around 40% of Snapchat’s userbase is under 18, and 82% of United States teenagers use Snapchat at least once a month.²⁵

According to [Snapchat’s Terms of Service](#), users must be 13 years of age to register. However, the absence of age verification makes it relatively simple for individuals under the age of 13 to create an account.

At the core of Snapchat lies the concept of disappearing photos or videos, which vanish after being opened. Users can set a viewing time of as little as 1 second up to 24 hours after which, once viewed, the image or video is deleted from the recipient’s device and from Snapchat’s servers as the company claims.²⁶

Snapchat allows users to take still photos, record short videos, add text, create drawings, and send this content to a personalized, and typically private list of friends. However, there is nothing currently in place that prevents a recipient from taking a screenshot or using a different device to take a picture of the image or video.

Note: if you take a screenshot using the recipient device, within Snapchat, it will notify the sender that you have recorded a copy of the content.

²⁵ [Snapchat 2025](#)

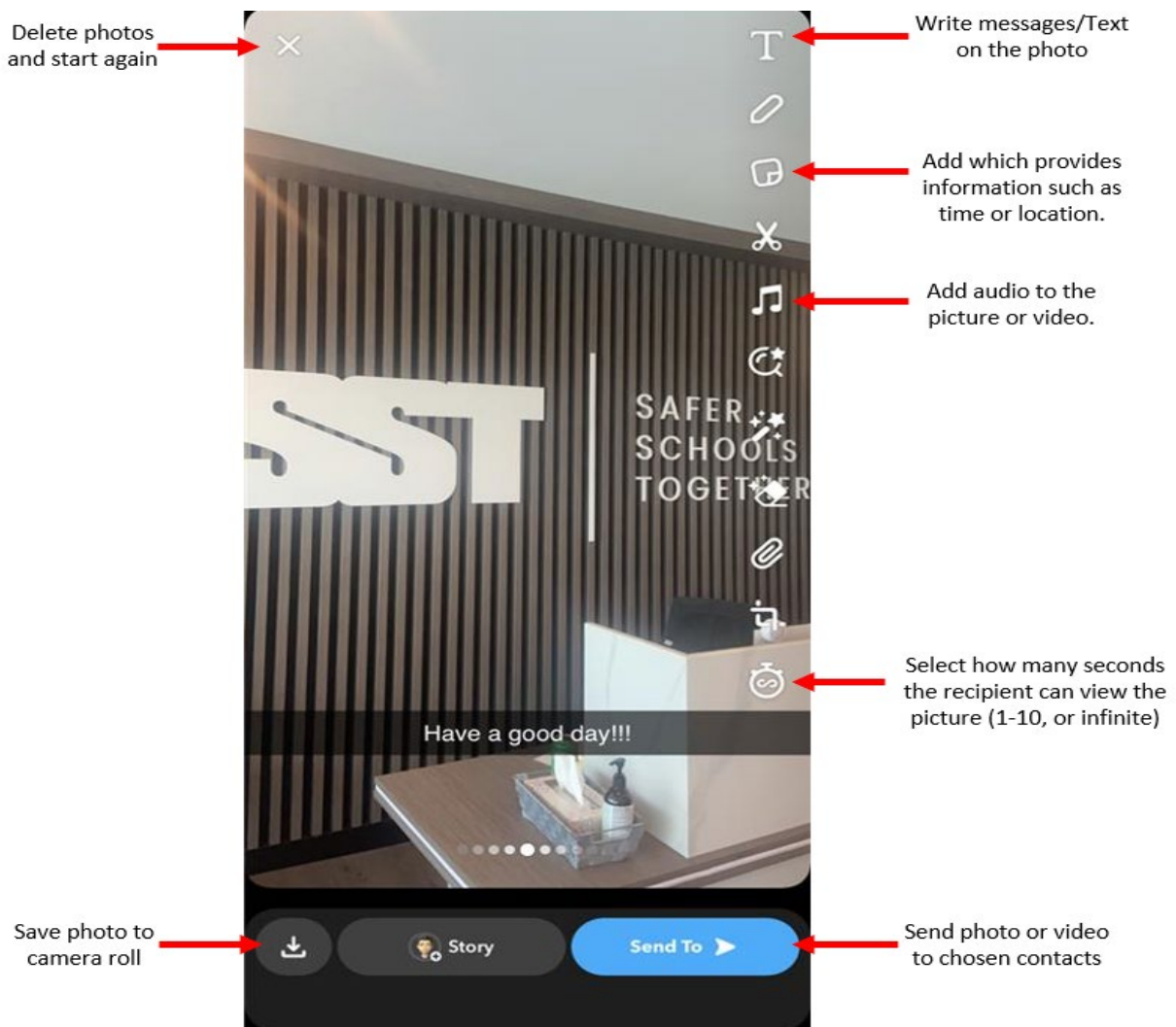
²⁶ [Snapchat Support](#)

SNAPCHAT LINGO

Snaps

A user captures a photo or video using their digital device or smartphone in real time. They have the option to set a viewing duration between 1 and 10 seconds or opt for an infinite viewing time for the recipient. Additionally, users can choose whether to save the photo or video to their device's photo gallery, their '[My Eyes Only](#)' folder, or send it via Snapchat without saving it locally.

After taking a photo on Snapchat you will see:



Stories

A user can add photo(s)/video(s) to their Snapchat story. Depending on the user's privacy settings, photo(s)/video(s) added to a story can be viewed for up to 24 hours by all Snapchat users (See Snap Map below), just those on their friends' list, or even a more specified list of their friends the user chooses.

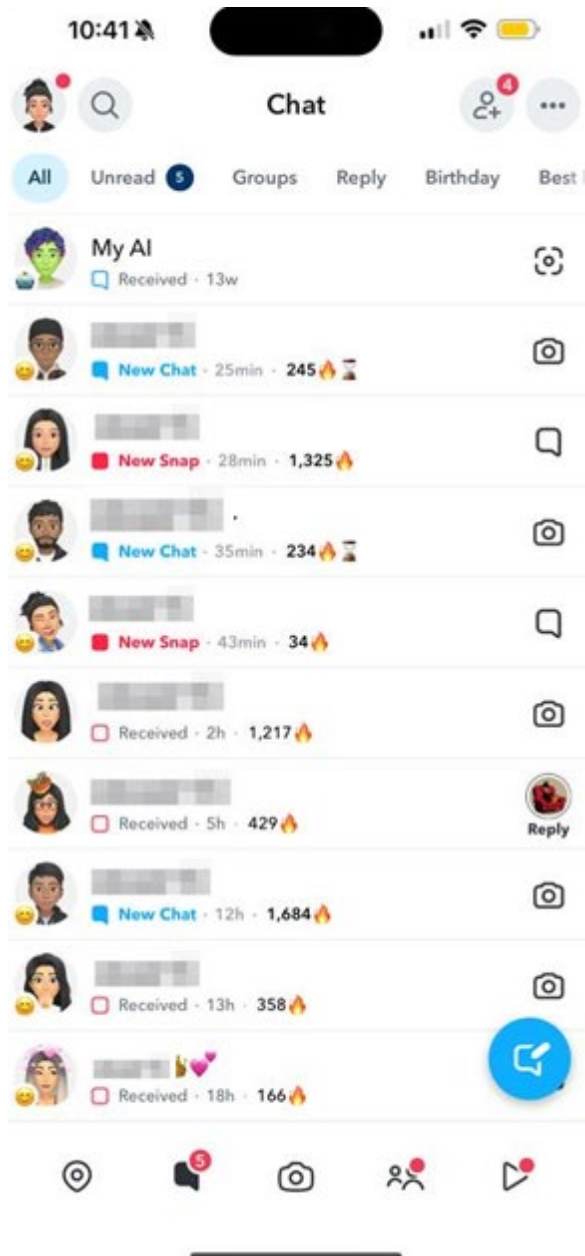
Spotlight

Spotlight is a new dedicated tab where users can see short form videos, much like Instagram Reels or TikTok videos. Users have up to 60 seconds to create Spotlight Snaps for the public to see.

Chat

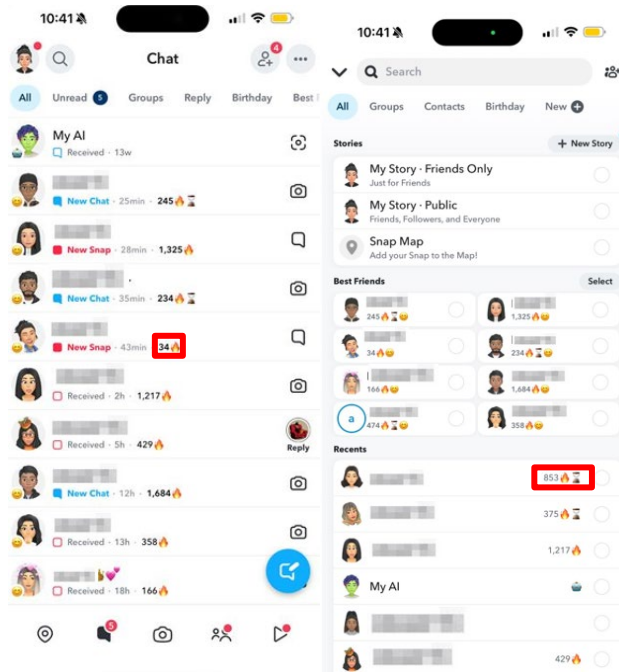
Using this feature, users can send direct messages, similar to text messages, to their friends within the Snapchat app. After both parties have viewed the message, it will disappear. It is worth noting that within each conversation, users can manually adjust the chat settings to make messages disappear after 24 hours instead. Additionally, photos from the user's local device or Snapchat gallery can be uploaded and sent within the chat feature. Group chats often exist between multiple friends. It is important you are aware that many of the negative group interactions we may see as Administrators within the school have the potential to arise from negative interactions within Snapchat group chats that occur primarily outside of school hours.

Below is an example of what the Snapchat Chat screen could potentially look like within a Snapchat account. Use the Chat Screen Icon Guide and the Friend Emoji charts on the [pages 15 and 16](#) to see who this student interacts with the most. Note, My AI cannot be removed and will stay at the top of the list.



Streaks

Seen within the chat log screen, a user's "Snapchat Streak" is the number of consecutive days the account owner and a friend have sent at least but no less than one Snap per day to each other. If they do not snap each other in 24 hours, they will lose their streak with that particular user. This is a huge deal for our youth – we have seen students avoid field trips or traveling to places where they cannot access their phones in order to keep up these streaks. Connected with snap streaks is when an emoji of an hourglass next to a streak may appear, which means the users will lose their streak soon and if they do not snap each other, indicating the time period is closing in on 24 hours since they last snapped. Below is an example of what streaks look like on both pages of Snapchat. The red box outlines what a streak looks like.



Bitmoji

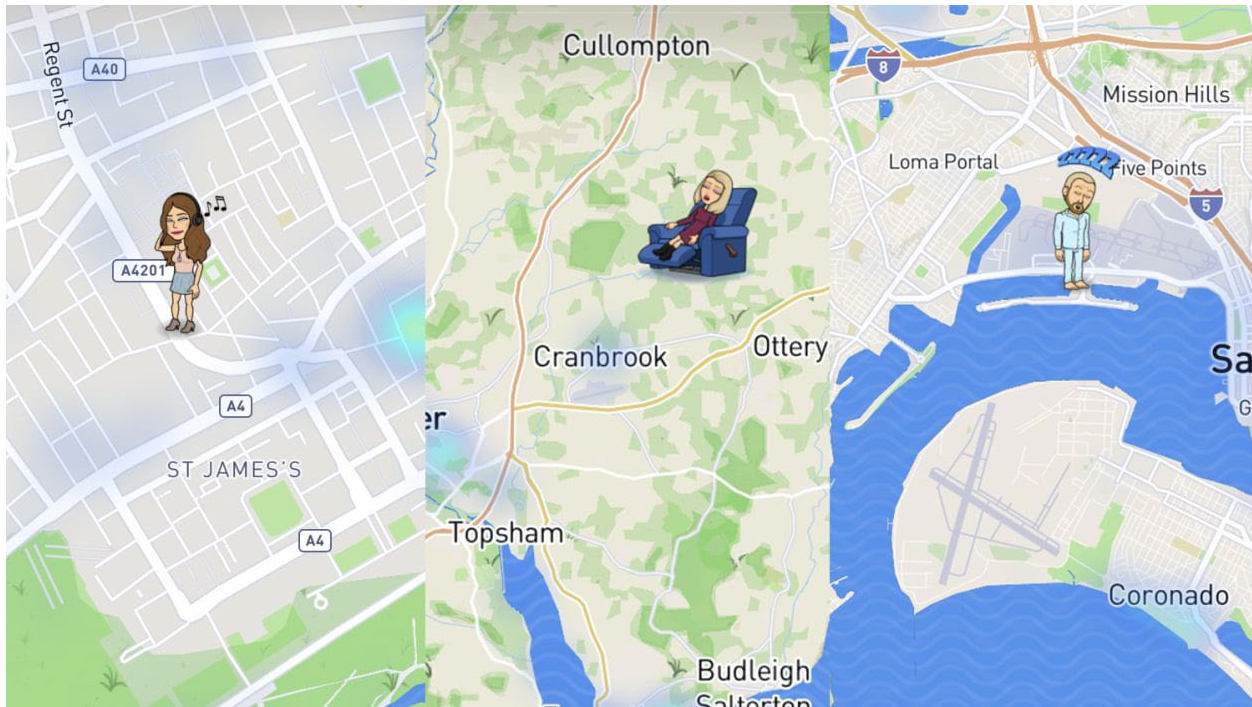
Owned by Snap Inc., users are encouraged to create an avatar, known as a Bitmoji. A Bitmoji is a personalized emoji-like character designed to reflect the user's likeness. Users can personalize their avatar by changing hair texture, facial expressions, and body proportions. To further personalize their avatar, users can choose specific outfits that better portray personal style.

Discover Page

Snapchat's Discover page allows users to access a variety of Stories from publishers and other subscriptions tailored to their interests. To navigate to the Discover page, users simply swipe left while on the camera screen.

Snap Map

Snapchat features a tool called Snap Map, where users can explore Snaps from various events such as sporting events, celebrations, and breaking news. Additionally, a new Snap Map feature called Places, enables users to tag specific locations, including schools, restaurants, malls, or public spaces, when posting a public story. The most concerning aspect of the Snap Map is the ability to view the real-time locations of your friends on the map. Users can share their locations with all their "friends," allowing others to see their current activities, such as driving, sleeping, or listening to music.

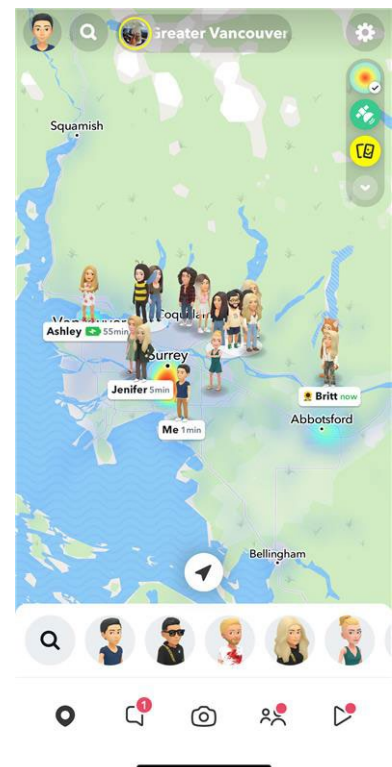


Here is an example of what the Snap Map looks like to a user from the mobile application while logged into their account. The user's friends are represented by the [Bitmoji](#) that they designed.

Within the Snapchat Settings, users can turn off the ability for others to see their location by enabling something called Ghost Mode or only allowing their location to be viewed by certain friends (i.e., their best friend) and/or parents/caregivers or other trusted adults.

Ghost Mode is a full privacy mode that makes a user's presence on the Snap Map invisible to other users. This disallows other users from viewing their location, including users on their friend list.

The Snap Map is often used by SST Threat Analysts and law enforcement to find missing students by asking their peers to share their Snap Map with us.



MY AI

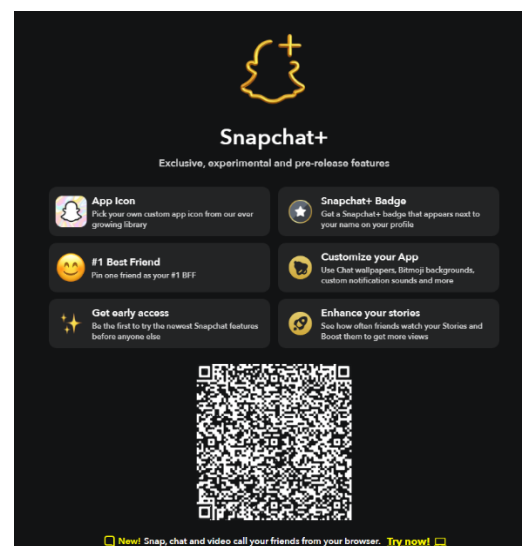
As the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) increases, we have seen a surge in the development of new AI services, specifically within social media. Most recently, Snapchat rolled out its own AI bot, called My AI. My AI was created to foster creativity and connections with friends, receive real-world recommendations, and learn more about their interests.²⁷ The new AI bot is powered by OpenAI's ChatGPT technology but has additional safety enhancements and controls that are unique to Snapchat.²⁸ With My AI, users can leverage a variety of AI capabilities. To access My AI, users need to access the Chat screen. From the Chat screen, users will then be able to select My AI and ask the AI bot a variety of questions. Unless you sign up and pay for Snapchat+, there is no verified way, nor has SST found a way to permanently remove My AI from a user's Snapchat account.²⁹

SNAPCHAT +

In 2022, Snapchat released a subscription-based feature called Snapchat+. This monthly subscription is accessed within the Snapchat app and offers a collection of exclusive features.

Snapchat+ has 11 million paying subscribers.³⁰ According to Snapchat, the "subscription will allow [them] to deliver new Snapchat features to some of the most passionate members of [their] community and allow [them] to provide prioritized support."³¹

There are several unique features of Snapchat+, which include priority story replies, allowing a Snapchat+ user's posts to become more visible on the platform. Snapchat+ users can also assign a specific emoji for friends to show they have viewed their Snaps, add custom backgrounds for their Bitmojis, and change the look of the Snapchat icon on the home screen of their device. In addition, Snapchat+ users can set time lengths to send a photo to as short as .10, .25 and .50 of a second.



SNAPCHAT FOR WEB

In 2022, Snapchat released Snapchat for Web which allows users to access the Snapchat application from their PC or laptop via <https://web.snapchat.com>. This new feature includes most of the same features as the mobile version including posting, direct messaging, group chats, video sharing, and voice calling. Snapchat users who already have accounts can login to the web version with the same credentials they use on their mobile devices or can sign up for a new account on the web. Once either mobile or desktop applications are synced, users can continue their conversations with other Snapchat users.

²⁷ [Early Insights on My AI](#)

²⁸ [What is My AI on Snapchat and how do I use it?](#)

²⁹ [How do I Unpin my Snapchat AI?](#)

³⁰ [Snapchat+](#)

³¹ [Introducing Snapchat+](#)

To use Snapchat for Web, users are required to give the application access to a webcam and/or microphone for users to post, video, and voice call. If the user does not grant access or does not have a webcam or microphone available, they will still be able to text chat on the application. As well, please know that you will not be able to access the Snap Map via the Snapchat Web version.

CHAT SCREEN ICON GUIDE

Sent Icons

-  You sent a Snap without audio
-  You sent a Snap with audio
-  You sent a Chat
-  Depending on privacy settings, a gray pending icon may appear if someone has not accepted your friend request

Opened Icons

-  A friend opened a Snap without audio
-  A friend opened a Snap with audio
-  A friend opened a Chat

Received Icons

-  You have an unopened Snap (or group of Snaps) without audio
-  You have an unopened Snap (or group of Snaps) that includes audio
-  You have an unread Chat

Viewed Icons

-  Your Snap sent (without audio) has been viewed
-  Your Snap sent (with audio) has been viewed
-  Your Chat has been viewed
-  A Snap or Chat is pending and may have expired

Screenshot Icons

-  A screenshot has been taken of your Snap without audio
-  A screenshot has been taken of your Snap with audio
-  A screenshot has been taken of your Chat

Replay Icons

-  Your Snap sent without audio has been replayed
-  Your Snap sent with audio has been replayed

Photo courtesy of Snapchat.

FRIEND EMOJI ICON GUIDE

Friend Emojis are determined by Snapchat to keep track of the status of a user's friends. These can change over time based on the interactions between users. Below is a screenshot of the default Snapchat Friend Emojis that have specific meanings; however, users are able to customize these emojis to their personal preference in the settings of Snapchat.

Super BFF

You have been each other's #1 [Best Friend](#) for two months in a row. This is getting serious!

BFF

You have been each other's #1 Best Friend for two weeks in a row. Aww!

Besties

You are each other's #1 Best Friend. You sent the most Snaps to this Snapchatter, and they sent the most Snaps to you, too.

BFs

They're one of your Best Friends! You send a lot of Snaps to this Snapchatter, but they're not your #1 Best Friend.

Mutual Besties

Your #1 Best Friend is also their #1 Best Friend.

Mutual BFs

One of your Best Friends is also one of this Snapchatter's Best Friends!

Snapstreak!

You're on a [Snapstreak!](#) This appears next to the number of days that you and a friend have continually Snapped each other.

Snapstreak is ending

Your Snapstreak is going to end soon! Both you and your friend need to send a Snap to each other within 24 hours, or you'll lose your Snapstreak. Chats and Snaps sent in Groups don't count!

Birthday

It's your friend's [birthday!](#) This appears next to your friend's name on the date they entered as their birthday on Snapchat.

X (formally known as Twitter)

X, formally known as Twitter, was purchased by Elon Musk in 2023 and was officially rebranded as X.³² Since its release in 2006, the social media app has garnered widespread popularity. Users can post tweets containing text, images, videos, and links, limited to 280 characters. X allows users to follow other accounts and receive updates from them in their personalized timelines. X functions as a platform for individuals, organizations, and businesses alike to disseminate information, participate in discussions, voice opinions, and stay informed on diverse topics of interest.

X profiles include various elements found in other popular social media profiles, including a profile picture, a cover photo, a brief bio, a URL, a date of birth, and user location. While users are not required to provide all of this information, they have the option to do so.

X is commonly used by individuals to discuss ideas, trends, and current events. These are often posted in real-time on the platform as incidents occur. Furthermore, hashtags are commonly used on this platform to create different communities that discuss topics under the same heading. The effectiveness of showcasing world events in real-time on X is extremely helpful for SS/TA teams, as well as the hashtags feature.



³² [Elon Purchases X, Formerly Known as Twitter](#)

FEATURES OF X

Hashtags (#)

Hashtags are a pivotal tool for categorizing content and fostering discussions around specific topics. School administrators should be aware of how hashtags can influence student interactions and the visibility of posts.

When using hashtags, today's youth can join larger conversations, connect over shared interests, or engage in trends relevant to their personal lives. However, hashtags also make posts more discoverable, potentially exposing individuals to a wider audience. Understanding the use of hashtags can provide insights into popular trends, concerns, or topics circulating within a school community, aiding educators in addressing relevant issues and promoting a positive digital environment. A hashtag is a symbol added before a word or phrase to create a searchable category indexed by social media (in this case, X) and becomes searchable by other accounts.

Instagram, X, and TikTok are platforms where hashtags are most commonly used. When a user clicks on a hashtag, they will be shown other posts and profiles where that same hashtag was used.

Verified Accounts



Checkmarks

Blue or Gold Checkmark -   

While browsing X, users may come across accounts with a blue checkmark beside the username; these are called Verified Accounts. The blue checkmark denotes that the account has an active subscription to X Premium and meets the [eligibility requirements](#) to obtain a verified account.³³ The Gold checkmark indicates the account is an official organization, and a grey checkmark indicates the account represents a government/multilateral organization or official.³⁴

In April of 2023, X began winding down their legacy Verification program, and accounts that were verified under the previous criteria (active, notable, and authentic) no longer retain a blue checkmark unless they are subscribed to X Premium.³³

³³ [X Verification Guidelines](#)

³⁴ [Profile labels and checkmarks on X](#)

Explore Page

The Explore Page is a feature tailored to highlight trending content, including tweets, news, and topics currently popular, either locally or globally. The Explore Page is curated based on user interactions and interests; this page provides school administrators with valuable insights into what topics students may be engaging with. By understanding the dynamics of the Explore Page, school administrators can gain a broader understanding of trends that could impact school culture and student behavior, while also remaining informed about discussions relevant to their school community.

Direct Messages (DMs)

Direct Messages, or DMs, allow users to send and receive private messages with other users on X. Users can send messages, tweets, or media from their personal devices through this feature and have the ability to create group chats to facilitate larger conversations.

Bookmarks

Bookmarks are accessible only through device or account access and allow users to save tweets for future viewing. Users often save posts they enjoy or wish to reference later. Each user can only access their own bookmarked tweets.

Lists

Lists allow users to customize, organize, and prioritize tweets they see in their timeline. Users can join lists created by others or create lists of their own. Once a list is created, the owner of the list can then add or invite other users to join. Lists can either be public or private, depending on the preference of the creator.

Profile Page

A user's Profile Page shows everything the user has tweeted/retweeted, media they have posted, tweets or accounts they have liked, and any tweets they may have been mentioned in.

Discord

Discord, a free voice and text messaging application with over 150 million monthly active users, is available as a desktop, browser, and mobile application (iOS and Android).³⁵ Typically, Discord is used as a space for video gamers to converse, either by direct message, voice chat, or video chat. Discord is now used by various online communities such as YouTubers/Influencers, art communities, and is also known as a space to meet new people. Discord has over 150 million monthly active users, with over four *billion* server conversation minutes every day.³⁶

Within Discord, users can create or join Servers where they can invite individuals they would like to engage in conversation with. In addition to voice or video chat, users can also share their computer screens within Discord. Voice chat can be used as either an open mic or push-to-talk, a feature that only allows others to hear you by enabling voice via the designated button set by a user on their keyboard or mouse. Users can also share their computer screens with Discord.

Discord also offers a paid subscription service called Discord Nitro.³⁷ Discord Nitro allows users to access Discord upgrades such as increased upload limits, customized emojis, HD video streaming, access to games/activities, server boosts, custom profiles, and more. Below is a video illustrating how Discord works.



Video courtesy of YouTube user Discord.

³⁵ [Discord](#)

³⁶ [Social Media Platforms](#)

³⁷ [Discord Nitro](#)

FEATURES OF DISCORD

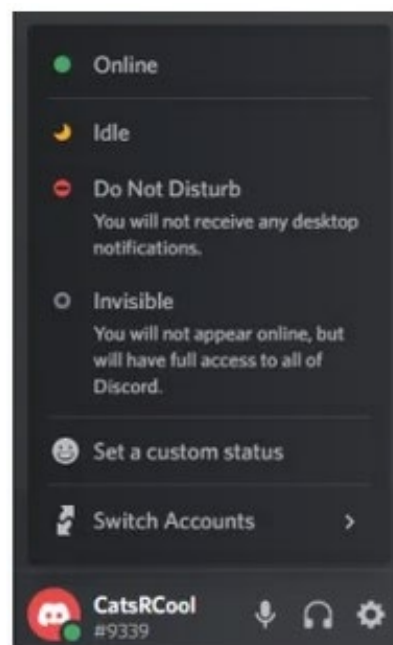
The general layout of most features on Discord is similar to chat features in applications such as Microsoft Teams or Slack, which are often used by businesses, schools, and organizations to communicate.

Status Icon

The status icon is located at the bottom left corner of the app and is attached to the user's avatar or profile photo. Clicking on the avatar will open a menu allowing a user to change their status to either online, idle, do not disturb, or invisible. Users can also create a custom status to reflect what activity they are engaging in, what music they are listening to (by connecting with applications such as Spotify or Apple Music), or which game they are playing. If the custom status option is chosen, this gives other users the ability to join the games the user is playing, or even listen along to the music they are listening to.

Username

Beside a user's avatar is their username. In the example shown on the right, we can see the username of this user is CatsRCool#9339. Discord usernames are unique in the sense that the username (in this case, CatsRCool) can be changed as many times as the user wishes without any cool-off period, and for free. The ability to freely change a username can make it difficult for SS/TA teams to identify individual user accounts. Remember the difference between a username and a vanity name though – the username will be unique also in the sense that only one individual on discord can have that username.



Chat Feature

Discord's chat features can be used in multiple ways, including direct messaging (DMs). From the home screen, located on the top left corner of the Discord application, users can see all DMs received from friends they have added. They can also see DMs from users they have not added as friends if their account settings allow for it.

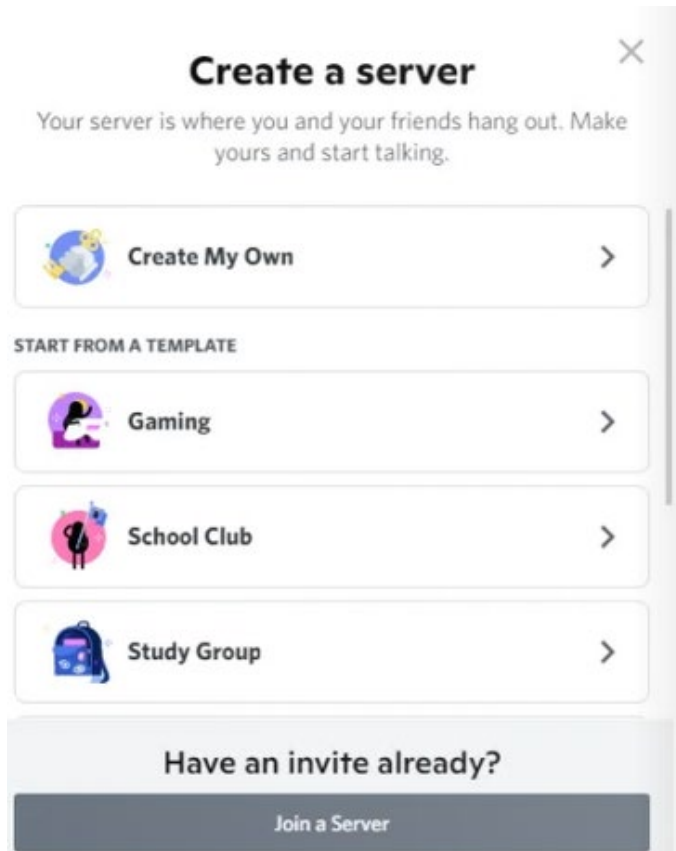
DMs can include one-on-one chats between users or group chats with multiple users. Discord allows for up to ten users in a single DM group chat. Regardless of user privacy settings, a user does not have to be friends with other users in DM group chats to interact in the group chat.

DMs and group DMs both have the same chat features and capabilities. Users can send messages, add emojis, stickers, and GIFs, send files, start voice calls, or start video calls. Voice and video calls can be conducted within a group DM with all users; however, not all users have to be in the call for it to stay active.

Creating a Server

If users wish to have more than ten members interacting with each other, they may either join or create a server. A server is a centralized communication channel that can be used for multiple purposes. Third-party applications and bots can also be used to bring in different elements to the server, such as polls, ticket submissions, chat games, helping moderate chat from spam or inappropriate content, and more.

To create a server, users can either create their own from scratch or start from a template pre-programmed in the application. Users can name the server any name they want, which can be changed at any time by users who have permission to do so.



Vault Apps

Vault apps are mobile applications designed to hide private photos, videos, files, or other applications on a device, usually by using the icon of another app such as a calculator, camera, or notes. Vault apps are popular amongst teens to protect their mobile privacy by using app locking, private bookmarks, incognito browsing, cloud backup, and more. However, teens should be reminded that using technology is a privilege and they are not entitled to full privacy on their devices for their own safety.



DEVICE CAPABILITIES TO HIDE CONTENT

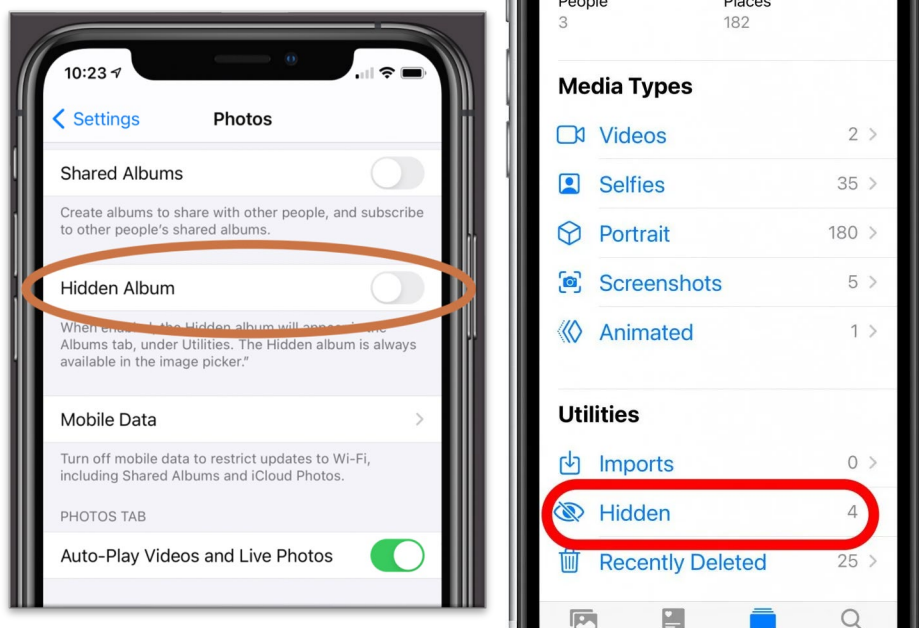
Android Secure Folder

The Secure Folder on an Android device is an encrypted space within a smartphone where the owner can store any content or data they want to keep private, including photos and videos. The Secure Folder can be located by selecting 'settings' then 'Biometrics and Security' then 'Secure Folder'. Users set up the Secure Folder by establishing a private access code; this can be in the form of a swipe pattern, 4 or 6-digit PIN, password, or fingerprint.

iPhone Hidden Album

The main purpose of the Hidden Album feature on an iPhone is to conceal photos and videos from being seen by the person who is in control of the device. Previously, any users who were in control of an unlocked iPhone could locate photos in the Hidden album, so long as they knew how to navigate to this location. However, iOS 16 has implemented a default setting that locks the Hidden and Recently Deleted albums; Because of this new security feature, Face ID, Touch ID, or the device's passcode is required to access these files.³⁸ Furthermore, as iOS 18 is now out, further changes may occur.

³⁸ [Apple Hidden Album Feature](#)



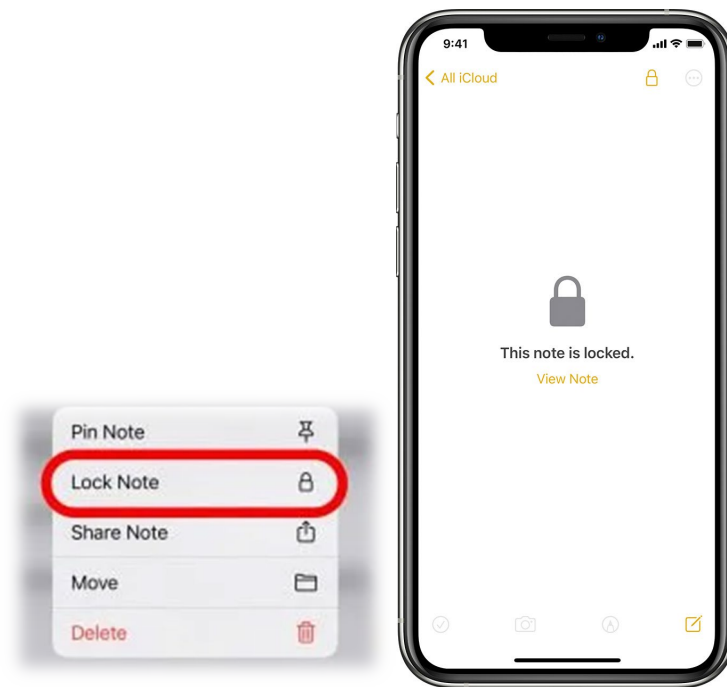
My Eyes Only

It is popular for students to use the [My Eyes Only](#) feature on Snapchat to hide videos and images as well. YouTube user *How-To Authority* provides a helpful [video](#) that discusses what My Eyes Only is, and how a user can set this up.

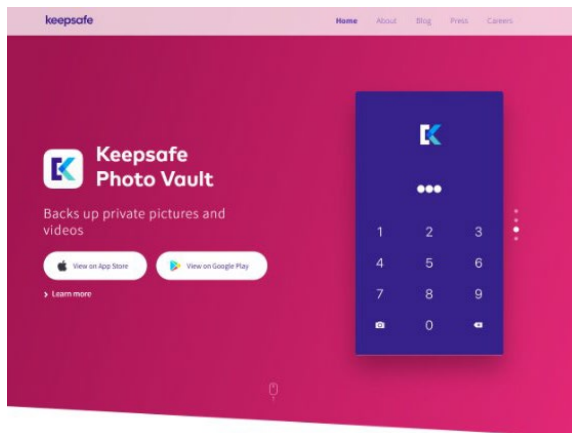
iPhone Notes Feature

Another way to hide or secure files on an iPhone is by utilizing the device's Notes application. A lot of people do not know this, but you can store digital files such as documents, photos, and videos within the Notes app.

Apple allows users to secure some of this content by "locking" the note and enabling a password-protected privacy wall. Now sometimes the nuances of these features may change over time; however, as of the most recent iOS update, Apple does not allow users to lock a note if it contains video or audio files. However, the note can be locked if it contains photos.



In addition to these options, you should be aware of two vault apps that are quite common for students to use. One is Keepsafe³⁹, and another is Private Photo Vault.⁴⁰ It is important to note that for Keepsafe, if you input the passcode wrong when prompted, the app will take a photo from the front-facing camera; therefore, the next time your child logs into the app, they will receive a photo of you alerting them that you tried to access their vault app.

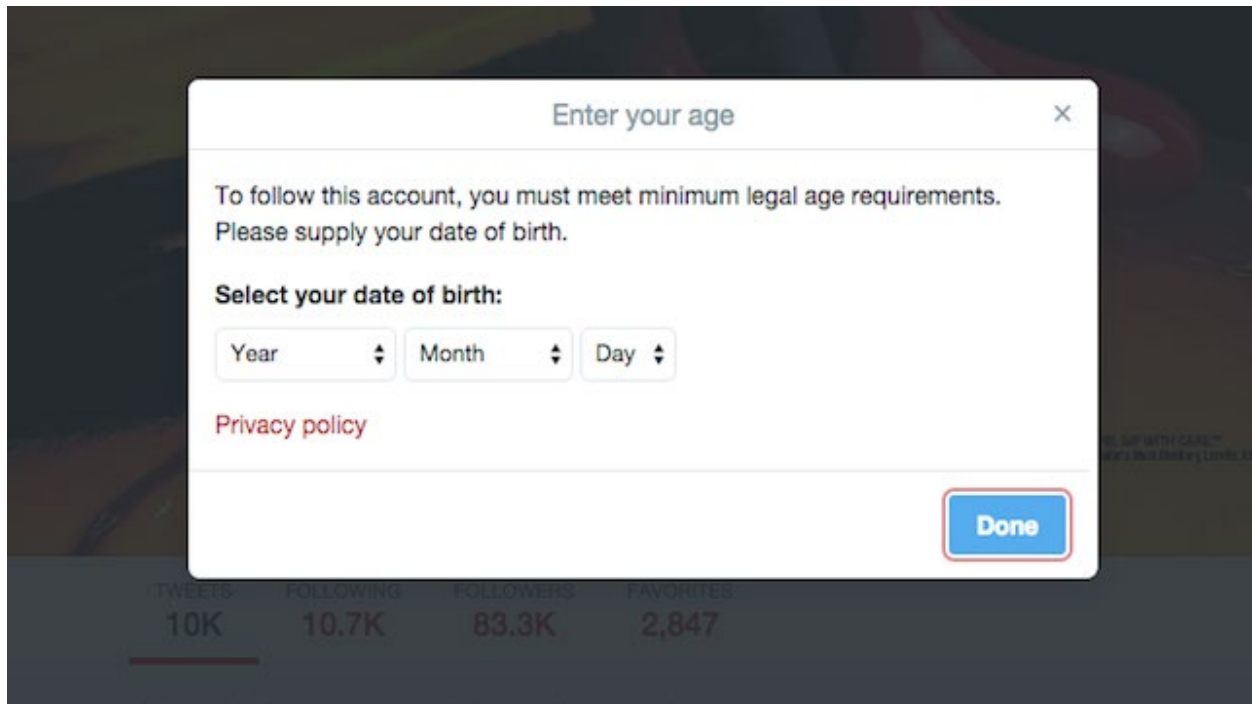


³⁹ [Keepsafe](#)

⁴⁰ [Private Photo Vault](#)

THE “RULES” (THAT NO ONE FOLLOWS)

Although many social media platforms and apps have a User Minimum Age Agreement⁴¹ either to sign up or that are outlined in their Terms of Service, younger users typically bypass these to circumvent the platform’s efforts for age restriction.

A screenshot of a social media app's age verification dialog box. The dialog is titled "Enter your age" with a close button (X) in the top right corner. The text inside reads: "To follow this account, you must meet minimum legal age requirements. Please supply your date of birth." Below this, it says "Select your date of birth:" followed by three dropdown menus for "Year", "Month", and "Day". At the bottom left of the dialog is a link for "Privacy policy" in red text. At the bottom right is a blue button with the word "Done" in white. The background of the app is visible behind the dialog, showing a profile page with statistics: TWEETS 10K, FOLLOWING 10.7K, FOLLOWERS 83.3K, and FAVORITES 2,847.

⁴¹ [Age Limitation in Terms and Conditions Agreements](#)

INTERNET LINGO/SLANG

LINGO	TRANSLATION	LINGO	TRANSLATION
2 man	Double Date	Kush	Marijuana
Addie	Refers to ADHD (female version)	Lit	Cool/Awesome
Alpha	Those at the “top” of the male socio-sexual hierarchy	Lock in	Become massively focused on something
AMA	Ask me anything	LOL	Laughing out loud
Ana	Refers to Anorexia (female version)	Low-Key	Quiet/Modest
Andy	Refers to ADHD (male version)	LVL	Refers to what age someone is
Annie	Refers to Anxiety (female version)	Max	Refers to Anxiety (male version)
ASL	Age/Sex/Location	Maxxing	Improve one’s physical appearance
Ate	You successfully did something/pulled something off	Merch	Merchandise
ATM	At the moment	Mewing	Face Exercise to improve Jawline
Aura points	A term used to determine how cool or not you are	Mia	Refers to Bulimia (female version)
Beige flag	A quality of someone that is weird/off-putting but not enough to break up/reject them	MOFO	Mother f*****
Bella	Refers to Borderline (female version)	Molly	MDMA
Ben	Refers to Borderline (male version)	Mood	Relatable feeling or situation
Bet	I agree	NBD	No big deal
Beta	Someone who is weak/soft (in opposition to alpha or sigma)	NM	Not much/Nothing much
BF/GF	Boyfriend/Girlfriend	No Cap	No Lie
BFF	Best friend forever	Noob	Inexperienced
Bih	Short form of b****	NP	No problem
Bill	Refers to Bulimia (male version)	NVM	Never mind
Bob	Refers to Bipolar (male version)	O/	Used as a form of emoji to resemble the Nazi salute
Body count	The number of people an individual has had sex with	Olive	Refers to OCD (female version)
Bonespo or Thinspo	Utilized as a term regarding eating disorders that refers to images of bones protruding that are “inspiring”	OMW	On my way
Bop	A good hit, something you enjoy or can refer to someone who has had many sexual partners	Oof	Onomatopoeia when something bad happens
Bot	Cannot be trusted; A gaming phrase used when someone is	Owen	Refers to OCD (male version)

	playing poorly		
Brat summer	Term based on the singer Charli XCX's 2024 album "Brat" but refers to an aesthetic trend of lots of partying and a "cool girl" lifestyle	Pat	Refers to Paranoia (male version)
Bri	Refers to Bipolar (female version)	Perry	Refers to Paranoia (female version)
Bruh	"Bro" but in a sarcastic way often	Ping/Pinging /Pingers	Slang referring to MDMA/ecstasy
BTW	By the way	Plug	Someone who can connect you to buying drugs
Bussin	Something is good or amazing	Pookie	A term of endearment as a nickname you call someone, or is used to describe something that is cute
Cake	Used to describe an individual with a large bottom	POS	Piece of s***
Cancelled	Bad publicity	POV	Point of view
Canon event	Moment in development that shapes an individual's life	PPL	People
Cap	Lie	Pressed	Annoyed/Angry
Cat	Refers to self-harm (female version)	qq	A texting term for crying
Cat scratches	Epidermis cuts	Rex	Refers to Anorexia (male version)
CEO of [something]	Used to represent frequently doing something. Example: Leah is the CEO of sleeping in.	Rizz/Rizzler	To charm and woo a person
Cheugy	Used to describe something that is out of date/basic	RN	Right now
Crash out	A visible breakdown displaying erratic behavior	Roasted	To be dissed
Cray	Crazy	RT	Retweet
Cuffed	To be locked down in a relationship	Saints Culture	An extremist trend within the white supremacist movement where individuals who have committed extreme acts of hate-motivated violence are referred to as 'Saints'
CW	Current Weight	Salty	To be upset/bitter about something
Cyber	Sex online	Sam	Refers to self-harm (male version)
Dallas	Refers to suicidal (male version)	Scoom/ Scoomer	Shooting/Shooter
Dan	Refers to depression (male version)	Selfie	Picture of yourself

Dead	Funny/Unbelievable	Sending Me	Something that is very funny
Deada**	Being serious	Sewerslide	Term to refer to suicide but is commonly used on TikTok to avoid content moderation
Deb	Refers to depression (female version)	SH	Self-Harm
Deepfake	A video of a person where their face or body has been digitally altered (almost always in a malicious way)	Shade	Disrespectful manner
Deets	Details	SHEDTWT	Self-Harm Eating Disorder Twitter
Delulu	Short for delusional and is used when someone has unrealistic ideas of things	Shook	Shocked/Surprised
Demure	Used on the internet to refer to a modest/reserved girl and associated activities	SHTWT	Self-Harm Twitter
DGAF	Don't give a f***	Sick	Crazy/Awesome
DM	Direct message	Sigma	Males who live outside of the hierarchy/are lone wolves but are very desirable
Drip	Good fashion sense	Simping	To have a crush on someone
DTF	Down To F***	Skibidi	Has multiple meanings of cool, dumb, or bad, and originated from meme culture through Skibidi Toilet which is a popular YouTube video
Ed	Refers to EDNOS (male version)	Skip	Refers to Schizophrenia (male version)
Edgelord	A poster on an internet forum – primarily 4chan – who expresses opinions that are nihilistic or refer to taboo topics to offend readers	Slay	Succeed
EDNOS	Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified	SMH	Shaking my head
EDTWT	Eating Disorder Twitter	Snack	An attractive person
Ellie	Refers to EDNOS (female version)	Snack/Meal	An attractive person
Emo	Emotional	Snap	Snapchat
Extra	Over-the-top	Snatched	Looking good
F4F	Follow for follow	Sophie	Refers to Schizophrenia (female version)
Faded	Drunk/Intoxicated	Squad	Group of friends
Fanum Tax	Forcefully deriving any unknown property from its rightful owner	Stan	A crazed fan

Fav/Fave	Favorite	STFU	Shut the f*** up
Fierce	Awesome/Positive Spirit	Stoked	Excited
Finsta/Spams	A secondary social media account	Story	Social media feature where you can add photos/videos that are viewable for 24 hours
Fire	Cool/Awesome	Styro	A self-harm cut that reaches the dermis
Fit	Outfit	Subway surfing	Trend of teens riding on top of moving trains and partaking in dangerous stunts in reference to the popular mobile game
Flex	Showing off	Sue	Refers to suicidal (female version)
FML	F*** my life	Suiclid	Term to refer to suicide but is commonly used on TikTok to avoid content moderation
FWB	Friends with benefits	Sus	Suspicious
Gas	Used to describe something that is cool	Swag	Being or having something cool
GG	Good game	Taking a L	Taking a loss
Ghosted	The relationship ended by someone disappearing and ending all contact	TBH	To be honest
GOAT	Greatest of all time	Tea	Gossip/interesting news
Go-Off/Pop-Off	To hype someone up	Terrorgram	Used to refer to a specific section of Telegram that is based on spreading propaganda to recruit members and coordinate violent activities that align with neo-fascist and militant accelerationist ideologies (White Supremacist focused group)
Griffrule	Defines how you should only express your true feelings online and not to anyone in person, and includes a subreddit for people to talk about their deepest secrets	Thicc	A sexualized term for a desirable body
GTFO	Get the f*** out	Thirsty	A synonym for someone who is sexually eager
GTG/G2G	Got to go	Tho	Though
Gucci	Something is good/cool	Thot	Used to negatively refer to someone with multiple sexual partners (that h** over there)
GW	Goal Weight	TJD	Anti-Semitic phrase representing "Total Jewish Death"
HBD	Happy Birthday	TOR	The Onion Router (browser used to access the dark web)

HBU	How about you	Troll	Internet bully
Hella	A lot/really	TTYL	Talk to you later
High key	Very interested in something	TW	Trigger Warning
HundoP	100% sure about something	TXT	Text
IDC	I don't care	UGW	Ultimate Goal Weight
IDK	I don't know	VSCO Girl	Girls that use VSCO
IG	Instagram	W/E	Whatever
ILY/ILU	I love you	WDYM	What do you mean
IMO	In my opinion	Weak	Amused
IMU	I miss you	Weimerica	Term used by white supremacist groups to represent a turn towards the United States aligning with the Weimer Republic ideologies
Isaiah	Refers to insomnia (male version)	Winter arc	Trend to promote positivity during wintertime
It's Giving	Connecting someone or something's look or vibe with an ironic connotation	WYA	Where are you at?
Izzy	Refers to insomnia (female version)	Yeet	To discard an item at a high velocity
JK	Just kidding	YOLO	You only live once
Karen	Used to refer to an entitled mom	Zaza	Marijuana
KMS/KYS	Kill myself/Kill yourself	Zip bomb	A compressed file on a computer that takes up little space, but once it is unzipped it takes up a lot of space, causing computer systems to become overwhelmed and disrupted

ADDITIONAL CANADIAN RESOURCES

[BC Children's Hospital](#) and the [Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre](#) offers specialized resources and tools for parents, caregivers, and educators. These resources cover important topics, including:

- Having open conversations about suicide with care
- Recognizing self-harm and support systems
- Navigating major life changes
- Supporting your child through grief and loss

Please find the resources here:

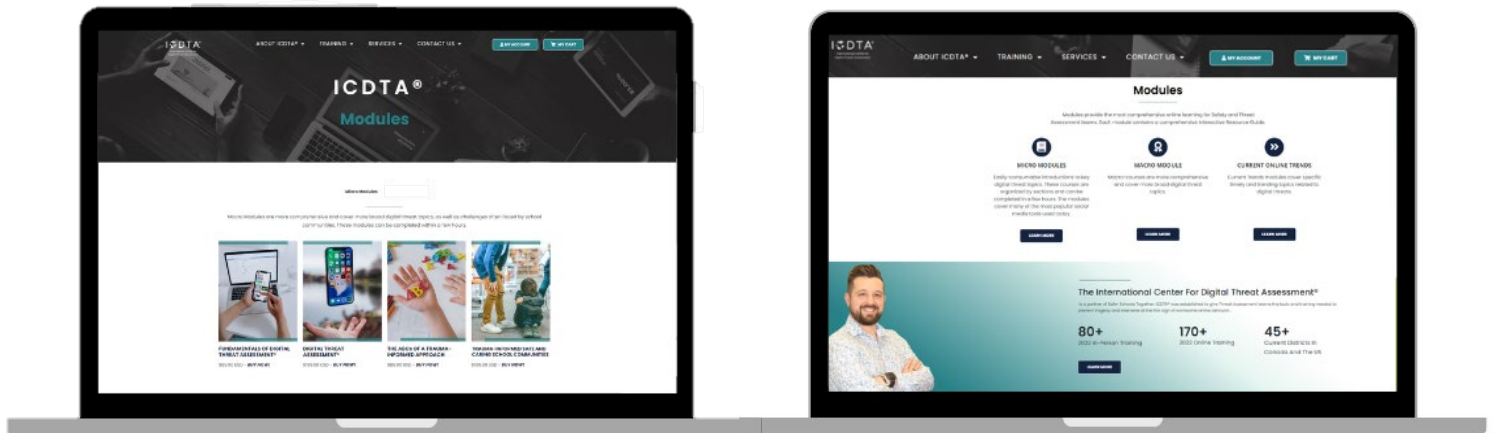
- [Our Kids' Health Mental Health Learning Hub](#)
- [Healthy Minds BC - Suicide prevention and Self-Harm video series and resources](#)

CONCLUSION

Given the widespread use of social media among today's youth, it is crucial for school administrators to comprehend the social media platforms commonly used by students. Proficiency in navigating the digital landscape that today's youth are most engaged in enables proactive identification of student safety concerns, facilitating the prompt implementation of risk-reducing interventions.

[Digital Threat Assessment® \(DTA\)](#) is a vital tool to assess student safety concerns in real-time. By understanding how and where to look for worrisome online behavior, often referred to as [digital leakage](#), SS/TA teams can conduct a more precise assessment of a threat's severity. The early identification of concerning social media posts, created by a student or member of your school community, can ensure a more accurate determination of risk.

[The International Center for Digital Threat Assessment® \(ICDTA\)](#) provides comprehensive training that can teach your school safety and threat assessment teams to search for, identify, and assess worrisome social media posts that can threaten your school community. Training is delivered in-person, remote, or via video-based modules.





SAFER
SCHOOLS
TOGETHER

