

#FIXAPPRATINGS

Tech Currently Self-Rates Their Own Apps, Has No Accountability

No one is holding technology companies accountable for the impacts they are having on our young people. Many apps popular with youth are incorrectly self-rated and include dishonest and generic app descriptions that deceive parents. These same apps are frequently used for online grooming, sex trafficking, or contain copious amounts of pornography and sexually exploitative material.

The UK Parliament has proposed measures collectively referred to as a "**Social Media Duty of Care.**" It includes the creation of an independent app rating agency. We agree. The same is needed in the United States. Without accountability, large tech companies will continue to prioritize profits over protecting children. Below are examples of popular apps with misleading and inaccurate ratings. The App Store descriptions are from Apple's App Store, but the same problem is happening on Google Play, the app store for Android.

1 SNAPCHAT (12+)

App Store says: infrequent/mild sexual content and nudity, alcohol, drug use, profanity, and suggestive themes.

Reality: sextortion, pornography, prostitution and sex trafficking; monetized accounts for sex acts, minimal parental controls, Discover news articles frequently push porn, risky sexual behaviors, sexting, drugs and alcohol.

Recommended: 17+



2 INSTAGRAM (12+)

App Store says: infrequent/mild sexual content and nudity, alcohol, drug use, profanity, and suggestive themes.

Reality: sex trafficking and prostitution, self-harm, cyberbullying, pornography, nudity, animal abuse, lack of strong reporting, lack of parental controls, unrestricted web access, no age verification, drugs and alcohol, child abuse and sexual abuse images.

Recommended: 17+



3 FACEBOOK (12+)

App Store says: infrequent/mild sexual content and nudity, alcohol, drug use, profanity, and suggestive themes.

Reality: fake news, sextortion, nudity, sex trafficking and bullying, child abuse rings, grooming, bullying, minimal parental controls, unrestricted web access through platform.

Recommended: 17+



4 TIKTOK (12+)

App Store says: infrequent/mild sexual content and nudity, alcohol, drug use, profanity, and suggestive themes.

Reality: predators, sextortion, nudity, bullying, lack of reporting, minimal age verification, unrestricted web access.

Recommended: 17+



5 NETFLIX (4+)

App Store says: because it's 4+, no content warnings included.

Reality: poor parental controls, regularly recommends TV-MA, R, and NC-17 content next to child content; originally-produced content depicts graphic sexual violence, normalizing sex trafficking of minors and gratuitous nudity.

Recommended: 17+



6 EPISODE (12+)

App Store says: infrequent/mild sexual content and nudity, alcohol, drug use, profanity, suggestive, and horror/fear themes.

Reality: alcohol, hook up, group and other risky sex discussed, frequent adult themes, marketed in child gaming apps.

Recommended: 17+



7 VPN'S (4+)

App Store says: because they're 4+, no content warnings included.

Reality: allows for secret and anonymous web browsing, kids often use on school networks and to hide online behavior from parents, circumvents parental and content controls.

Recommended: 17+



8 GROUP ME (4+)

App Store says: because it's 4+, no content warnings included.

Reality: categorized as social networking but has a 4+ age rating, unrestricted web access, pornography and child sexual abuse material exchanged on platform.

Recommended: 17+



9 TWITTER (17+)*

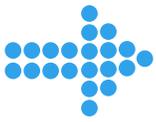
App Store says: infrequent/mild sexual content and nudity.

Reality: rated 4+ by Apple for years, hardcore pornography rampant, prostitution and sex trafficking, child sexual abuse images and discussion, total lack of parental controls, unrestricted web access, no age verification.

Recommended: Adult only



STATEMENT: Child Advocates Call for Accurate App Ratings Due to Online Grooming, Sex Trafficking, Pornography, and Sexploitation. #fixappratings



Washington, DC – The National Center on Sexual Exploitation, along with Utah State Senator Todd Weiler, and child advocates Chris McKenna from Protect Young Eyes, and Melissa McKay, are calling out the current system for app ratings because it is misleading, inconsistent across platforms, and does not appropriately warn parents of the potential dangers found in apps.

“Parents are empowered with rating information to keep kids out of R rated films, but when it comes to apps, parents are left in the dark about the kind of content their children are accessing,” said Dawn Hawkins, Executive Director at the National Center on Sexual Exploitation. “Apps in the Apple and Google app stores are not held to any kind of third-party accountability to adhere to a consistent rating system.”

“As a result, social media apps like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Facebook, all rated 12+ in Apple's App Store, are hot spots for bullying, grooming, advertising sex-trafficked child and adult victims, glamorized self-harm content, pornography, the buying and selling of illegal drugs, and sextortion. Hashtags make harmful content easy for anyone to discover, regardless of privacy settings. In fact just today a man was sentenced to prison for using Facebook to facilitate sex trafficking of a 15-year-old.”

“It’s our societal duty to protect kids online, and that starts with properly warning parents about the risks associated with certain apps and giving parents more parental controls options,” said Chris McKenna, Founder of Protect Young Eyes. “Parents often depend on parental controls provided by Apple or Google that prevent downloading apps with certain mature ratings. But, when apps are rated inaccurately and app descriptions aren’t fully transparent, parents are being deceived into thinking they’re preventing sexually explicit and dangerous content when in fact, they aren’t.”



Advocates call for the following actions:

- **The creation of an independent app ratings board.** This board would have powers similar to the Entertainment Software Ratings Board, which uses a rating system that is clearly understood, enforced, trustworthy, and exists to protect the innocence of minors.
- **The release of intuitive parental controls on iOS, Android, and Chrome operating systems.** These controls should be simplified, circumvention loopholes closed, age-based safety-settings be built-in, and selective app shutoff be added for bedtime and school hours.

“We need social media platforms to step up and be better corporate citizens and neighbors. Our children’s innocence is at stake,” added Utah State Senator, Todd Weiler.

“We are hopeful that a few major technology companies understand the immense control they exert over our young people,” said child advocate, Melissa McKay. **“And, that they decide to start proving to the world that they care about their health and well-being,”**



**UTAH STATE SENATOR
Todd Weiler**