

# Monster Messenger

## WHITE PAPER



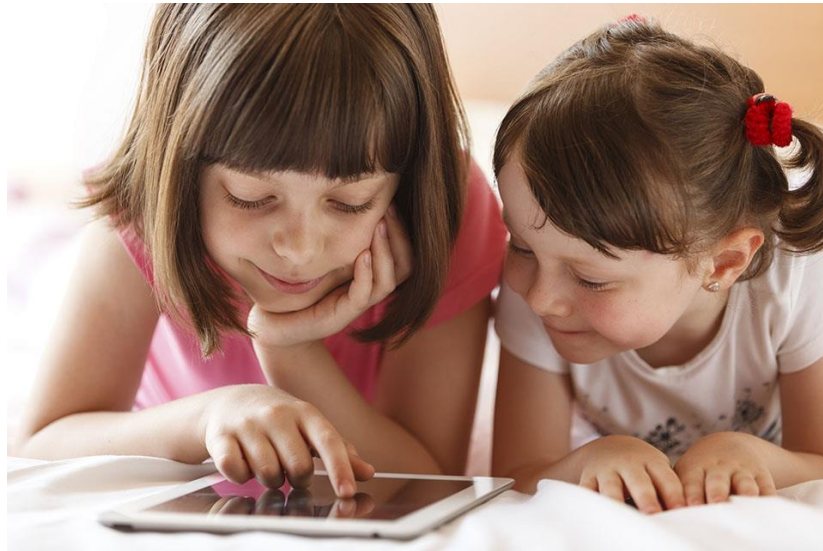
## The 5 Most Common Mistakes Parents Make With Social Networks

*Monster Messenger team has compiled insights and feedback from eduPad's user base of 5 million children, parents and teachers and has identified the 5 most common mistakes parents make when it comes to their children's use of social networks. Communication and education are at the core of their conclusions.*



## Monster Messenger

More than half of the world's adult population is registered on at least one social network like Facebook, Snapchat, Line, Kik, Wechat, Line or WhatsApp ([Statistica, 2015](#)). Facebook has recently passed the *1 billion daily active users* mark. Social networks have disrupted the way we interact with people, inducing new behavior patterns in our work, family, and friend circles.



Of all categories, teens have been the fastest adopting group. There is an abundant body of literature and a lot of debate on the impact of social networks on teenage personality building, mental representations of the world we live in and the impact on real-life social interactions.

A lot has been said about bullying, violence, abuse, addiction and teen suicides. But there is very little data available for children under 13. The reason is simple: kids are not supposed to use social networks. You must be at least 13 (or sometimes 17 or 18) to sign up on a social network, as it's been a legal requirement in the US since version 1 of the [COPPA](#) law passed in 1998, and since 2015 in the [EU](#).

However, children (sometimes with the consent of their parents) *lie* about their age and do register for these services, which they love just like their elders do. Back in 2012, a [study](#) estimated that **7.5 million kids under the age of 13 had a Facebook account**. We estimate that this figure has at least doubled since then to more than 15 million kids. When [asked](#), **52% of children admit simply ignoring age limits on social networks!**



## Monster Messenger

Monster Messenger has analyzed eduPad's apps, whose 160 educational apps have been downloaded by more than 5 million children, parents and teacher users, and has compiled a synthesis of the more than 100K comments gathered from users. This study enabled Monster Messenger team to identify the **five most common errors parents make when it comes to their children's access and usage of social networks.**

Here is the result of this analysis:

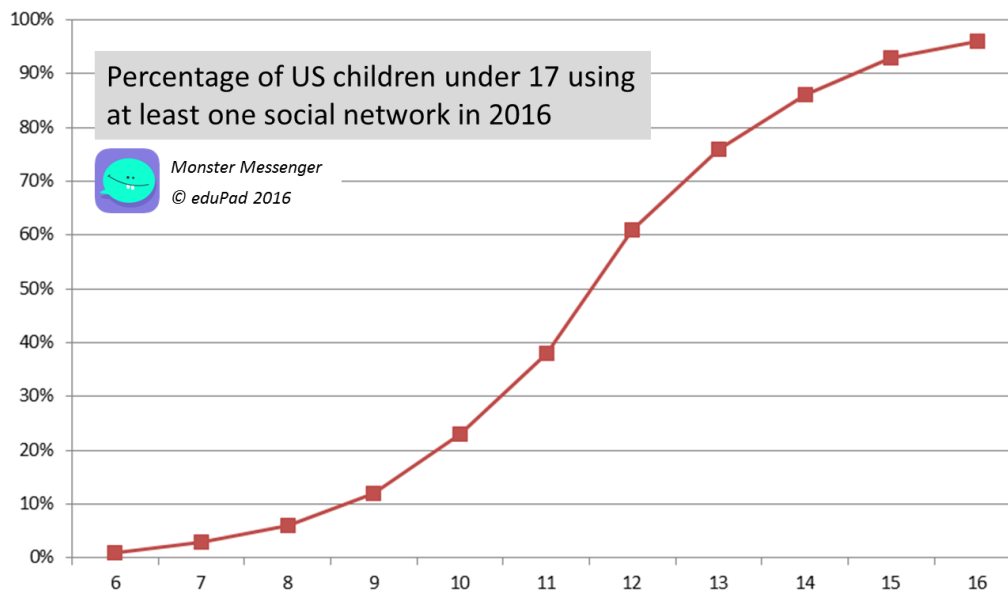
1. [Denial: "My children are not on social networks"](#)
2. [Complicity: "I chose to let my kid sign up for \[my-favorite-social-network\], I prefer to know"](#)
3. [Being over-restrictive](#)
4. [Ignorance: not knowing the dos and don'ts](#)
5. [Not educating your children about social networks](#)



## Monster Messenger

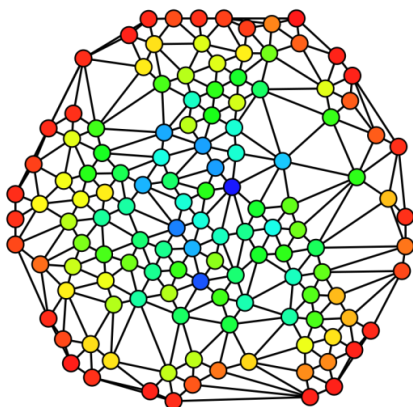
### 1- Denial: “My children are not on social networks”

The sad truth is, more than 20% of kids under 13 use at least one social network, and more than 60% of children at the age of 12. Ignoring this fact exposes a lot of parents to deceit.



Have a conversation with your child, and ask him or her frankly if he or she is on a social network. You could be surprised by the answer.

We often hear parents asking: **“How did it happen? I saw nothing coming!”**



The power of social networks comes from the network effect: if the coolest kids in the class are on Facebook (or Snapchat or any other social network), odds are high that within weeks they'll “contaminate” the whole class and school. And the more people around you join a given network, the more pressure you get to join.



## Monster Messenger

This phenomenon is so powerful that it's been theorized in 1993 by George Gilder and Robert Metcalfe in what is commonly known as the [Metcalfe law](#), which states that the value of a network is proportional to the square of the number of connected users.

We've observed clusters of 5th grade classes in the same elementary school which had turned to Facebook or Snapchat only weeks after the most popular few had signed up for these networks. For kids, "not being there" soon becomes synonymous with being excluded.

### **2- Complicity: "I chose to let my kid sign up for [my-favorite-social-network], I prefer to know"**

Strange as it may seem, some parents decide to sign up their children themselves on social networks before they're 13. The most frequent reasons quoted by these parents are the following:

- "The best way to learn how to swim is to go where the water is deep"
- "I'll have more control and it'll be easier for me to protect my kid if I'm his 'friend'"
- "I've taught her what she needs to know about social networks, and my child knows we can talk if things start going out of control"

By acting so, these parents make a huge educational mistake, for at least 3 reasons:

1. they give a bad example to their children by breaking a law which is all the more supposed to protect children
2. they expose their children to an open environment, where they can link and talk to anyone, including hurtful or dangerous people
3. they have, in fact, close to no control over what their children will do on the social network once registered, as well as whom they link with and talk to

**When it comes to social networks, being a "cool" parent is a bad decision and potentially a very, very dangerous one. Under the age of 13 (and in a lot of cases afterwards, but the law has stated 13 as the legal limit), children are not emotionally and mentally armed and prepared to be exposed to social networks designed for older people.**

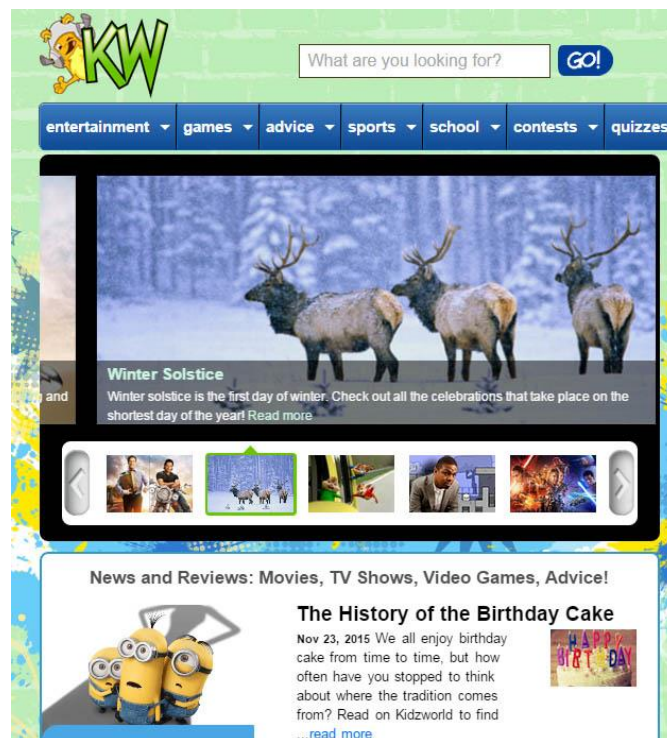


## Monster Messenger

The good news is, there are dedicated, family-friendly social networks on the market. Here are the most prominent players:



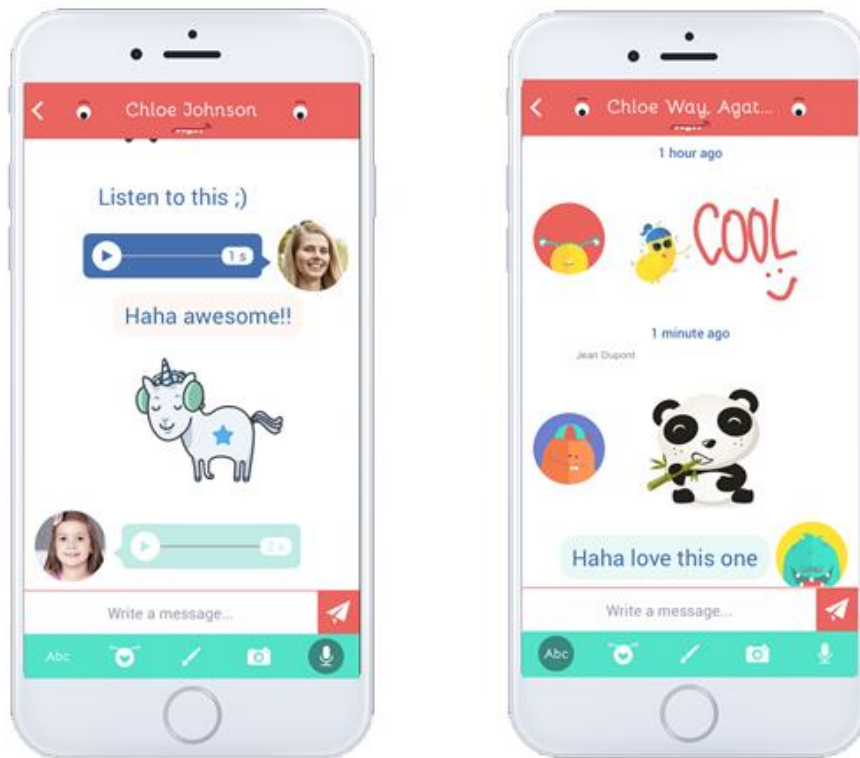
### [Clubpenguin](#)



### [Kidzworld](#)



## Monster Messenger



### [Monster Messenger app](#)

Kid-friendly social networks like [KidzWorld](#), Disney's [Club Penguin](#) or [Monster Messenger](#), start to appear on the market. These social networks are designed for children under 13 from the ground up, and comply with **COPPA** and other kid-protecting laws. All of these services require parental consent, give parents control over whom their children are allowed to talk to and do not expose children to e-commerce or behavioral ads.

**There is no excuse for a responsible parent to sign up his or her children on an adult social network as child-appropriate alternatives exist.**



## Monster Messenger

### 3- Being over-restrictive

A lot of parents believe that forbidding is the right way to protect their children from all (internet and) social network risks. They install rigorous parental control on all devices at home, with the settings set at a high level.

Whilst parental control systems are fine, being overprotective is in most cases not a right approach, for several reasons:

Transgression is in human nature. More than anyone else, kids love to find ways to explore what's forbidden. All devices at your home may be protected, but what about the devices at your parent's home? At your children's friends' homes?

When initial parental control settings are too protective, internet usage quickly becomes annoying for everyone at home, and more often than not results in a quick suppression of all protection by the parents, fed up by numerous false alerts and countless inappropriate parental gate prompts. And then it's back to a no-protection-at-all scheme...

Set the limits to the appropriate levels. No kid under 9 should have full internet access without parental control or parental attendance. Most kids 10 and over may access the internet in the presence of their parents or with low parental control settings.

In any case, social networks settings should be set to "OFF" for all social networks designed for people 13 and over. Once again, a better way than blindly prohibiting all social networks and thus generating the urge for sneaked, hidden access, consists in opening access to your children to age-appropriate social networks.

### 4- Ignorance: not knowing the dos and don'ts

Our research showed that a lot of parents have little to no knowledge of the way social networks work and of the risks faced by their children online. Less than one third of parents knew what COPPA law was about.

As a result of this lack of knowledge, parents are apt to let go or to be over-protective, albeit





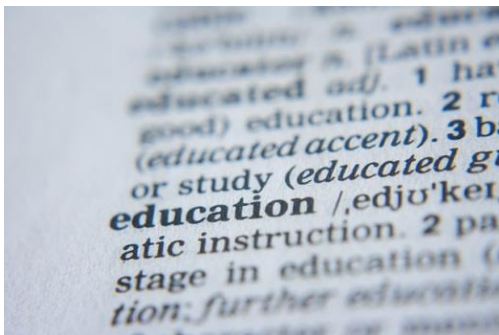
## Monster Messenger

none of these attitudes are appropriate.

There is a lot of information on the internet to train parents about the dos and don'ts, but this information is often scattered amongst several websites, making it difficult for parents to have a one-stop-shop to learn all they need to know to protect their children online.

[This article](#) is a good introduction to the subject. Parent communities like [Cafemom](#) or [Mumslikeme](#), or resources like [ParentToolKit](#) also give a good starting point to become a tech-savvy parent. By the way, you'd be surprised by all that your kids can teach you on the subject!

### 5- Not educating your children about social networks



Just like for sexual education, letting your child educate himself or herself about social networks alone with the sole help of his or her friends and the internet is a really bad idea.

Since you've avoided the four first pitfalls (denial, complicity, over-protection and ignorance), you should now be armed to:

- **educate** your children about the appropriate usage of social networks
- **define and explain** violence, bullying, abuse, identity theft, privacy
- explain to them in simple words the **risks** they face
- tell them what they should do when they are exposed to **inappropriate content**
- remind them that **you are here to help** them sort out the problems they might encounter **and to support** them

And remember, it's not a one-off, clumsy and long discussion with your kid, but rather a continued, pleasurable exchange over time, as his or her questions and needs will change. And the good news is that you can provide access to safe social networks designed for families.



## Monster Messenger

### What should parents do?

Like most issues concerning children, the most important thing parents can (and should) do is educate their children and adopt simple, straightforward and healthy family rules.

Granting your kid access to a kid-friendly social network is a good way to offer a safe first step in the right direction. And best of all: you'll be able to chat with your children at any time in a safe environment!

