App Ratings - What do they mean?
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During a cyber-awareness seminar last week that I presented to year 5 and 6 students, the majority of the students put their hands up when I asked who uses KIK Messenger and Snapchat. I was a little shocked to be honest. I followed that session with a parent evening and when I asked the parents why their primary aged kids were using 17+ apps many of them looked back at me confused, not understanding what I was talking about.

What I find in my parent sessions is that many parents don’t realise that there are ratings for apps, similar to the ratings we have for movies at the cinema! Those ratings determine the suitability for kids.

When an app developer is registering their app with an app store, they must choose the rating themselves, and there are penalties for not adhering to the ratings, so it’s in their best interest to comply.

Below are the ratings that Google uses for Android devices – the Google Play Store, and also for Apple – the Apple App store. When looking for the rating look under the description of the app, it will be there.

**Note:** Apps like KIK Messenger and Snapchat are rated 17+ / High Maturity

I suggest to parents that they don’t need to understand every single app that their child is using, however they should download every app that their kids are using and check out the rating for suitability and also play with it themselves for at least 5 minutes. Then if it’s not suitable, explain to the child why it’s not suitable, rather than just banning it. Parental RESTRICTIONS on Apple devices have an option whereby a parent can determine if an app gets installed or not.

**Google Play Store**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>Applications in this category should not collect user’s location data or contain objectionable material. Applications should not share user content or include social features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Maturity</td>
<td>Applications in this category may include instances of mild cartoon or fantasy violence or other potentially offensive content. Applications may collect user location data for the purpose of providing location specific information or otherwise improving the user experience, but should not share the data with other users. Applications may include some social features but should not focus on allowing users to find and communicate with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Maturity</td>
<td>Applications in this category may include sexual references; intense fantasy or realistic violence; profanity or crude humour; references to drug, alcohol and tobacco use; social features and simulated gambling. Applications may collect user location data for the purpose of sharing or publishing with the user’s consent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Maturity</td>
<td>Applications in this category may focus on or include frequent instances of sexual and suggestive content; graphic violence; social features; simulated gambling; and strong alcohol, tobacco and drug references. Applications may collect user location data for the purpose of sharing or publishing with the user’s consent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>-----</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+</td>
<td>Apps in this category contain no objectionable material.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 9+  | Apps in this category may contain instances of the following content that may not be suitable for children under the age of 9:  
  ● Infrequent or mild occurrences of realistic violence  
  ● Infrequent or mild profanity  
  ● Infrequent or mild mature, suggestive, or horror-themed content  
  ● Frequent or intense cartoon or fantasy violence |
| 12+ | Apps in this category may contain instances of the following content that may not be suitable for children under the age of 12:  
  ● Infrequent or mild medical or treatment-focused content  
  ● Infrequent or mild references to alcohol, tobacco, or drug use  
  ● Simulated gambling  
  ● Infrequent or mild sexual content or nudity  
  ● Frequent or intense profanity  
  ● Frequent or intense realistic violence  
  ● Frequent or intense horror-themed content |
| 17+ | Apps in this category may contain instances of the following content that may not be suitable for children under the age of 17:  
  ● Unrestricted web access, such as with an embedded browser  
  ● Gambling or contests  
  ● Frequent or intense mature or suggestive content  
  ● Frequent or intense medical or treatment-focused content  
  ● Frequent or intense references to alcohol, tobacco, or drug use  
  ● Frequent or intense sexual content or nudity |

Yours in cyber awareness!

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