

# Safeguard teen's phone from offensive material

Replacing standard browser is just one way to secure a device

By **Bob Tedeschi**  
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Many teenagers recently opened a new iPhone, Android or iPod touch, immediately downloaded textPlus, a popular free texting app, and headed for their bedrooms.

The app is rated 12+, for "infrequent/mild sexual content or nudity." This may have confused anyone searching recently for certain terms in the Community section, which bristled with chat rooms like "Hothornyan-dbi" and others bearing a crude phrase for people trolling for sex popularized by the cast of "Jersey Shore."

The description on one such chat room read: "Anyone that is done (sic) to talk dirty and send nudes are welcomed."

Perhaps more troubling to a parent is the fact that anyone can join, assuming they tell textPlus they are at least 13 years old when they

register. Members can also be contacted privately by anyone, and judging from the posts, such private communications are common.

Of course, parents who are uncomfortable with such content already have their hands full with apps that come installed on most mobile devices, like mobile Web browsers or YouTube, where laughing babies are a few steps away from oral sex tutorials from pornography stars.

For such parents, it takes less than an hour to safeguard a mobile device from most offensive material. This involves changing the device's settings and replacing the standard browser with a version more suitable for children.

But it also requires some tough decisions, especially with YouTube videos. Apple's devices are automatically set to filter videos deemed "mature" by Google, which owns YouTube. But if users post a sex-related video, viewers can watch it until someone re-

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# Apps

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ports it to Google.

For parents who are uncomfortable letting children browse such content on an Apple device, the first step is to tap the Settings icon.

From there, choose General, then Restrictions. Press Enable Restrictions and enter a password your children won't guess. Next, under the Allow section, switch Safari to Off. On the same page, you may also wish to disable YouTube.

Next, under the Allowed Content tab, change the settings for Music & Podcasts, Movies, TV Shows and Apps to your preferred level. Set Apps to 12+ or less, to prevent children from installing unfiltered browsers, which are rated 17+.

Remember that even the 12+ setting will allow an app like textPlus. If you tap the Require Password setting and choose Immediately, you will have a chance to review any app before it is loaded.

Ilan Goldman, the chief security officer of textPlus, said the company had not been aware of the sex-trolling chat rooms until I asked about them, and the company was working this week to close such chat rooms.

Goldman said textPlus also screened the service for nudity and inappropriate content, but this week the limits of that screening process were on display, as chat rooms devoted to sexting teenagers continued to appear.

If your children want a free texting app, try TextFree with Voice on Apple, or Pinger Textfree on Android.

For Apple devices, install the free K9 Web Protection Browser. Unlike many other alternative browsers, K9 is fast and versatile, with pinch-and-zoom, copy-and-paste and bookmarking features.

Owners of Android tablets and phones can set restrictions with a PIN. (In Settings, scroll to the Set PIN feature.)

Next, click on the Content Fil-

tering tab, and change the Android Market settings so that only apps of certain maturity ratings are displayed. Apps that "include suggestive or sexual references" are rated "medium maturity" as characterized by Google. TextPlus, for instance, is rated medium maturity.

While in the Settings section, parents may also consider clicking the Notifications option so they know when any app has been downloaded. Apps for competing browsers, like the Opera Mobile, can be used to circumvent a filtered browser.

Next, hide the browser that was included with the Android device. To do this, drag the browser icon from the home screen to the trash.

When you find it, press and hold your finger on the icon until options appear. The last on the list will be Hide. If you want to offer your child a filtered Web browsing option on Android, try Ranger Pro Safe Browser (free), at least until K9 introduces an Android version in the coming months. Ranger Pro wasn't as nimble as K9, but an updated version released this week was good at screening pornographic websites, and the browsing experience was adequate.

With Android's YouTube app, users can filter objectionable videos, but in my experience the filter wasn't completely reliable. I set the filter to Strict, which blocked most of the sexually related videos that had appeared on my Apple devices, but on the home page appeared a video with an unprintable title. This is still better than what parents face with the Kindle Fire. The device lacks the internal parental controls of other Android devices, and the only browser filtering app I found for the device, WebNanny (\$4), was marginally effective in blocking pornography.

Kinley Campbell, an Amazon spokeswoman, said the company was working on improved parental controls but she offered no details on timing. Until then, children who play with the device unsupervised may well be playing with the informational equivalent of fire.