Keeping Kids Safe on

Discord

A Guide for Parents

**CYBER SAFETY COP**
TOTAL SAFETY SOLUTIONS, LLC

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Why This Guide Matters

The online world moves at a rapid pace, and it can be challenging for parents to stay informed about the latest platforms their teens are using. Discord, originally designed as a chat app for gamers, has become one of the most popular social spaces for middle and high school students, expanding beyond gaming to include communities for school groups, hobbies, and general socializing.

However, like many social platforms, Discord has its risks—some of which may surprise parents who are unfamiliar with its structure and limitations. Understanding these potential dangers is crucial for safeguarding teens' online experiences. This guide will introduce you to Discord, explain the risks, and provide practical advice for creating a safer environment for your child on this platform.

For a deeper dive, we encourage you to watch our webinar, **"Parent's Guide to Discord."**
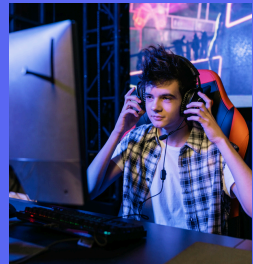
What is Discord?

Discord is a free chat app where users can communicate through text, voice, and video in various community spaces called "servers." Originally designed to allow gamers to connect while playing, it has now evolved into a platform for all sorts of communities and interests, ranging from hobby groups to school organizations and more.

Key Features

- **Servers:** Servers are like community hubs within Discord, each dedicated to a specific group, topic, or interest. Servers can be private (invitation-only) or public (open to anyone).
- **Channels:** Within each server, there are channels or specific spaces for conversations on designated topics. Some channels are for text chatting, while others are for live voice or video conversations.
- **Direct Messaging (DMs):** Discord also offers private messaging, where users can send DMs or create small group chats with friends outside of servers.

This layered structure makes Discord a versatile tool for communication.
For teens, it's a way to stay connected with friends, participate in communities they care about, and chat in real time.

Why Teens Love Discord

For many teens, Discord is more than just an app; it's a key social hub.
Here's why:
- **Instant Communication:** Discord allows for real-time conversations, whether it's texting, video calls, or voice chats.
- **A Mix of Private and Public Spaces:** Teens can join public servers for general interests or create private servers to chat with close friends.
- **A Sense of Community:** Discord offers a social connection that helps teens stay in touch and share common interests, from school projects to gaming strategies.

Understanding Discord's Structure

Discord's design can feel complex, but understanding its layout will help you supervise your child's usage more effectively.

Servers and Channels

- **Servers:** These are community spaces organized around specific topics. Some servers are private and require an invitation, while others are public and open for anyone to join. When teens join a server, they enter a community focused on that specific interest.

- **Channels:** Inside each server, channels function as separate rooms dedicated to conversations on specific subjects, making it easy for users to navigate between discussions. Channels can be text-based for written conversations or voice-based for live audio communication.

Direct Messaging and Privacy

- **Direct Messages (DMs):** Discord allows users to privately message others outside of servers. DMs can include text, images, voice calls, and video chats. Parents should be aware that teens can use DMs to chat with friends privately, which is often how they prefer to interact with close friends.

- **Family Center and Parental Controls:** Discord's Family Center feature is designed to give parents insight into who their teen interacts with. However, the Family Center doesn't show the actual content of conversations, meaning parents won't see what's being discussed in DMs or on servers. Some content can be blurred or hidden, but teens can reveal it at their discretion, limiting parental oversight.

The Risks of Discord

While Discord has many positive qualities, it's important for parents to be aware of potential risks:

Exposure to Inappropriate Content:

Many public servers are unmoderated and may contain content that's inappropriate for younger users, such as explicit language, violence, or adult content.

Interactions with Online Predators:

In public servers, there's a risk of strangers reaching out to teens. Some may try to build connections or friendships with harmful intentions, especially in large gaming communities where teens might be less guarded.

Limited Parental Controls:

Unlike some other platforms, Discord offers limited parental controls. Parents can't view the conversations or see exactly what their child is accessing, which makes it difficult to fully monitor their teen's experience.

*Understanding these risks is essential for setting boundaries and using additional tools to monitor your teen's activity on **Discord**.*

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Parental Monitoring Tools and Techniques

Given Discord's limited parental controls, third-party tools can be a valuable way to supervise your child's online interactions and prevent exposure to inappropriate content.

Recommended Third-Party Apps

- **OurPact:** OurPact is a screen time and parental control app that allows you to:
  - Regulate screen time, ensuring your child isn't spending too much time on Discord.
  - Block certain apps, including Discord, during specific hours, like study time or bedtime.
  - Monitor app downloads, helping you to identify new apps your child installs.
  - Take screenshots of your child's screen, allowing you to see what they're viewing and discussing on the app.

- **CleanBrowsing:** This is a web filter that blocks certain websites, including Discord, if your teen attempts to access it through a browser. It's useful for devices where Discord is accessed outside of the mobile app.

How to Use These Tools Effectively

- With **OurPact** and **CleanBrowsing**, parents can customize the online experience for each child. You can control screen time, block or limit access to certain apps, and ensure that certain websites (like Discord's web version) aren't accessible if you've deemed them inappropriate.

Talking to Your Teen About Discord

Starting a conversation with your teen about Discord can help them understand its risks and set a foundation for responsible use.

Starting the Conversation

When discussing Discord, it's helpful to ask open-ended questions and show curiosity. For example, try asking:

- *"What do you like about Discord?"*
- *"What kinds of things do you talk about with your friends there?"*

Approaching the topic with an open mind will make them more willing to share their experience.

Using Effective Conversation Techniques

- **Reflecting Their Feelings**: Show you're listening by restating what they've said. For example, "It sounds like being on Discord is important for staying connected with your friends."
- **Validating Their Interests**: Acknowledge their feelings and social needs, then explain any concerns you have.
- **Setting Goals Together**: Establish mutual safety goals, like avoiding public servers with strangers or agreeing to take breaks from the app during family time.

These techniques can help foster an open, respectful dialogue with your teen, making them more likely to follow guidelines for safe online use.

Cyber Safety Cop's Recommendations

Cyber Safety Cop has specific guidelines for managing online activity for teens, particularly regarding social media and chat platforms.

Age Recommendations

- **18+ for Discord:** While Discord's terms of service specify that users must be at least 13, we do not recommend that any child or teenager under 18 use Discord. The platform's limited parental controls and exposure to unmoderated content pose significant risks that younger users may not be equipped to handle. Waiting until 18 allows for the maturity needed to navigate the platform's complexities responsibly.
- **16+ for All Other Social Media:** For all other social media platforms, Cyber Safety Cop recommends waiting until your child is at least 16 years old. This additional time provides an opportunity for teens to develop the emotional maturity and critical thinking skills necessary to handle social media safely.
- **Simple Phones for Middle School:** For younger teens, consider using a basic phone or device without internet access, like a flip phone or smartwatch, instead of a smartphone. These options support communication while limiting exposure to online risks.

Alternative Platforms

If your teen needs a way to chat with friends, there are safer alternatives to Discord that you can supervise:
- **Google Meet:** A free and user-friendly option for video chats that can be easily monitored by parents.
- **FaceTime:** An ideal choice for Apple users, allowing for direct, supervised video calls without the complexities or risks of platforms like Discord.

Tools and Resources

For parents interested in learning more, **Cyber Safety Cop** provides several resources to support online safety education.

Digital Parenting 101

This video series covers online safety fundamentals, such as setting boundaries on social media and dealing with cyberbullying.

Recommended Books

Parenting in the Digital World
By Clayton Cranford offers an in-depth look at online safety and practical strategies for parents.

Screen Time Standoff
This upcoming book by Cyber Safety Cop outlines effective techniques for setting boundaries on screen time, drawing on negotiation and crisis intervention skills.

Membership Benefits

By becoming a **Cyber Safety Cop member**, you gain access to additional resources like webinars, eBooks, and articles to stay updated on online safety trends.

CONCLUSION:
Taking Action to Protect Your Child

Discord can be a fun and useful platform for teens, but it's important for parents to remain vigilant about potential risks. Staying informed, setting clear boundaries, and having open conversations about online safety are key to protecting your child's digital well-being.

By taking a proactive approach, you can help your teen enjoy a safe, balanced experience on Discord and other platforms. We invite you to stay connected with **Cyber Safety Cop** by joining our newsletter, exploring our digital resources, and considering our membership options for ongoing support in online safety.

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