

Important Parent Information About Social Networking

What is Ask.fm?

Ask.fm is an online social networking, question and answer site based in Latvia. You sign up via Facebook, Twitter or email. You can also download the free app and use the mobile version. Users respond to questions by text or by posting video responses. Individuals with or without an account, can ask users questions anonymously. At no time do they have to reveal who they are. The default option for asking any question is to do so anonymously.

Why do children like this site?

Ask.fm allows users to be interviewed or questioned by others. The more likes and questions your profile has the more popular you seem. Ask.fm and other sites allow students to feel validated and receive affirmation.

So what is the problem with Ask.fm?

The overall concept around Ask.fm is asking other users questions, most often anonymously. This is different from Facebook where friends are identified when posting comments. For students, who might be connected to most of their classmates on Facebook and may pull those friends over to Ask.fm, this opens the opportunity for being anonymously embarrassed, questioned, or bullied online.

Many questions on the site are abusive and there's a LOT of pornographic and hateful questions, e.g. "Why don't you Kill yourself?" Which then encourages 'fans' to defend the profile being abused. You can imagine the online drama created.

But there are age restrictions and protections, right?

Ask.fm doesn't ask for any age verification in its sign-up but users can add their date of birth to their profile if they wish. As part of its Terms of Service Agreement, it states that you must be 13 years old. Protecting a child's privacy is the Children's Online Privacy Act (COPPA) which states that a website allowing children under the age of 13 must comply with a number of procedures to protect that child's privacy. This is why many popular social networking sites have a minimum age of 13. That way, they don't need to comply with COPPA requirements.

How does my child use this site safely?

There isn't a way to be completely safe on Ask.fm. You can disable anonymous questions in the privacy settings, but your profile details, questions and answers can all be seen publicly without the reader even having an Ask.fm account. You can hide your answers from the public 'stream' but if your account is searched for, the questions and answers will not be hidden.

My child is going to use this website, what do I need to know?

1. Whether you allow your child to use this site or not, have a discussion with them about participating online and how anonymity might change how people act. You can give them examples. The Public Opinion used to allow anonymous comments but changed that after comments were getting so negative.
2. Show them how to use the privacy tab in their settings to block anonymous posts. Go to 'settings'- 'Privacy' and choose "Do not allow anonymous questions".
3. Ask.fm also has a 'Stream' where recently posed questions and answers are highlighted. It is a good idea to opt out of the 'Stream' to reduce the likelihood of receiving unwanted contact.
4. Show them how to create a 'blacklist' to block comments and posts from those known to be cruel online.
5. If your child links Ask.fm with their Facebook account, they can adjust the settings in Facebook so that posts are seen by the following: public, friends, only me or custom settings (allowing them to choose specific friends).
6. If your child is involved in a bullying incident on Ask.fm, tell them not to respond. The best option – delete the app and the account.
7. Ask.fm states that you can block a person that is harassing you. Once you get a question from them – press "block" next to each question.
8. Click here to see the privacy policy for ask.fm: <http://ask.fm/about/privacy>

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Privacy settings for questions

☒ Allow anonymous questions
☐ Do not allow anonymous questions

Email notifications

☒ Notify me when someone asks me a question
☒ Notify when someone gives me a gift
☒ Notify when a friend has a birthday
☒ Ask.fm Monthly Digest

Stream

☐ Do not show my answers on the "Stream"
Your posts will no longer appear on the "Stream", so your profile will attract less unexpected attention.

Blacklist
[View blacklist](#)

Save Cancel

These are the default settings

Additional Resources to check:

Webwise: <http://www.webwise.ie/AskFMExplained.shtm>

Kidspot: <http://parenting.kidspot.com.au/fatal-connections-a-parents-guide-to-askfm/#.UvQ1gO-YaUk>

Chicagonow: <http://www.chicagonow.com/tween-us/2013/10/facts-about-ask-fm-parents/>

KidsPrivacy: <http://kidsprivacy.wordpress.com/2013/05/28/what-parents-need-to-know-about-ask-fm/>

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16. Click here to see the privacy policy for ask.fm: <http://ask.fm/about/privacy>

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Privacy settings for questions

- ☒ Allow anonymous questions
- ☐ Do not allow anonymous questions

These are the default settings

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