

Press Advisory
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For Immediate Release

Time for App Rating Accountability

Child advocates call for accurate app ratings due to online grooming for abuse, sex trafficking, pornography, and self-harm. #fixappratings

The National Center on Sexual Exploitation, Utah State Senator Todd Weiler, Protect Young Eyes, child advocate Melissa McKay, and dozens of other organizations, are calling for a solution to the current system for rating apps. Because app developers currently self-rate their products, the present system is often misleading, inconsistent across platforms, and does not appropriately warn parents of the potential dangers found in apps.

“Parents are empowered with rating information to keep kids out of R-rated films, but when it comes to apps, parents are left in the dark about the kind of content their children are accessing,” said Dawn Hawkins, Executive Director at the National Center on Sexual Exploitation. “Apps such as Instagram, Facebook, and GroupMe need to be more transparent with families about the risks associated with their platforms, particularly regarding grooming for child sexual abuse and sex trafficking. Long ago, our society recognized the importance of accountability and clarity in rating systems for video games and movies, and it’s time to apply that same logic to apps.”

According to Chris McKenna, Founder of Protect Young Eyes, “Parents often depend on parental controls provided by Apple or Google that prevent downloading apps with certain mature ratings. **But, when apps are rated inaccurately and app descriptions aren’t fully transparent, parents are deceived into thinking they’re preventing sexually explicit and dangerous content when in fact, they aren’t.**”

Advocates call for the following actions:

- **The creation of an independent app ratings board.** This board would have powers similar to the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) and MPAA for movies, which use a rating system that is clearly understood, enforced, trustworthy, and exists to protect the innocence of minors.
- **The release of intuitive parental controls on iOS, Android, and Chrome operating systems.** These controls should at a minimum include default settings based on a child’s age, easy set-up, and one-touch screen time controls (e.g., school and bedtime selective app shut-off).

Supporters believe that if these two steps are done properly, parents would have what they need to make informed decisions about the appropriateness of the digital places where their kids spend time.

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About NCOSE

Founded in 1962, the National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) is the leading national organization exposing the links between all forms of sexual exploitation such as child sexual abuse, prostitution, sex trafficking and the public health crisis of pornography.

About PYE

Protect Young Eyes (PYE) is a digital safety education and curriculum organization, working to help families and schools create safer digital environments.