

The Parent's Guide to

After School



Top Questions Parents Have About After School

What is After School?

After School is a smartphone app that allows high school students to connect and share with fellow students only from their school.

Why do students like After School?

Students like After School because it allows them to socialize with their friends and make new friends at their own school. They can use it to get feedback from their peers on all sorts of issues and get involved in social campaigns aimed at improving their school, their community, the nation, and the world.

After School can serve as an outlet for students' concerns and frustrations, and get them through some stressful times, whether from school, interactions with their friends and classmates, or their families. Because students are not required to reveal their name when posting, they can avoid preconceived assumptions and judgments from peers about reputation, grade level, body type, sexual orientation or identity, race, or other factors.

How do students use After School?

Users select an avatar as their 'identity' on the app. This can be changed at any time. Posts are typically between 1-60 characters of text followed by an image (GIF) that generally relates to the text. Any student at the school can like or comment on any post, and report posts that they feel are inappropriate or abusive. Posts can be positive "shout outs" to other users, "Would You" questions that help connect two students for a joint activity like seeing a movie, "Ships" that show support for relationships, or just general thoughts or daily observations.

Is bullying an issue on After School?

Bullying can and does happen in real life and online and, yes, it can happen on After School, just as it can on all social platforms. However, the company has a "zero tolerance" policy against bullying, with tools to try to eliminate it, ban those who do it, and support students who are affected by it.

After School uses human moderators and technical moderation, both of which review posts before they go live on the service. Even this can't catch more nuanced scenarios, so if an abusive post does get through, any student can instantly remove any post by clicking Report in the bottom left-hand corner of the post.

Why aren't parents, teachers, and other adults allowed on After School?

After School restricts a student's network to only fellow students at their school. This keeps out non-students and potential predators, while allowing students to feel safe, comfortable, with a sense of community. Students can help monitor and police the After School community both by reporting and removing posts, and by reporting potential fake students if they notice clues that a user may not be an actual student at their school.

While parents aren't allowed on their child's school network, After School does have parental controls, allowing parents with access to their child's phone to restrict access to the app, and password-protect both access to the app and settings within the app (see more on this below).

Why does After School allow users to remain anonymous?

After School users have the option to use their name when posting, or they can post anonymously, allowing them to interact in a more private way on sensitive issues such as sexuality, religion, politics, problems at school or home, and both physical and mental health issues. Anonymity also alleviates the need for teens to maintain a carefully curated online identity, which can generate pressure and anxiety and impact them later when it comes to school, jobs, and relationships.

While students can be anonymous from each other, they are held accountable and can be banned for violating the app's community guidelines or engaging in illegal activity. In instances involving the safety of a student, school, or community, the company cooperates with relevant school and law enforcement officials. If presented with a court-ordered request for information, After School will provide any available and relevant information to assist the authorities. For more on anonymity, see ConnectSafely's Tips for Safe and Civil Use of Anonymous Apps.

How does After School protect students' safety?

All posts are moderated by both humans and software to prevent bullying, harassment, threats, self-harm, and other unacceptable behaviors. Anyone caught bullying others will be banned from the service. After School also has a tool for reporting abuse and, if a student reports an abusive post about himself or herself, it is removed immediately. This gives students control over what is said about them on the app. Users can also report someone they believe is not a student at their school.

After School also offers 24/7 access to crisis counselors, and works with non-profit safety and advocacy organizations, including ConnectSafely, Crisis Text Line, DoSomething.org, Peace First, Youth Service America, and others.

After School is an app for both Apple (iOS) and Android devices that lets high school students interact with other students at their school. Because it's limited to fellow students at their school, it's essentially a private network. No one other than fellow students can see what students post. Based in San Francisco, After School was founded in 2014 by Michael Callahan and Cory Levy "as a place for teens who want to be themselves, make new connections, and participate in positive activities - both online and offline," according to its founders.

Using After School

Students start by downloading the app from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. When they first run the app, students are asked to pick their school from a list of nearby schools. After School employs an algorithm to analyze an array of factors, including data in a Facebook profile, to verify that the students are who they say they are.

If the app fails to verify the student's school, students can submit a copy of their school ID to enter the school's After School network. While not impossible, After School says it's difficult for an imposter to access a school network. If, at any time, a student at a school suspects that an After School user isn't a student at the school, they can report that person to After School staff, who will investigate and take appropriate action.

Next, the student is asked to pick a character, called an avatar, or upload one to represent him or her. At that point the student can post text, an image, or a video, or view posts from schoolmates.

After School sometimes asks students questions about other students that are designed to elicit positive responses. For example, students can select a pre-crafted positive message to post about someone in their school. Students are also prompted to "shout out" nice things to other students.

One type of post, called a "Would You," allows users to pose a question like "Would you sit at lunch" with a specific student. If both users say yes to each other, they are alerted with a graphic saying "He/She would too!"

The "Would You" feature helps make the offline activity a reality by allowing users to schedule activities with each other. For example, if two classmates decide to see a movie, they can schedule a time to watch it together.

After School uses the "Would You" feature in partnership with organizations like DoSomething.org to encourage users to work together on positive projects in their communities.



Students can also create surveys or polls, such as “What is your favorite movie?” or “What’s the best song out now?” A pie chart showing results appears under the poll.

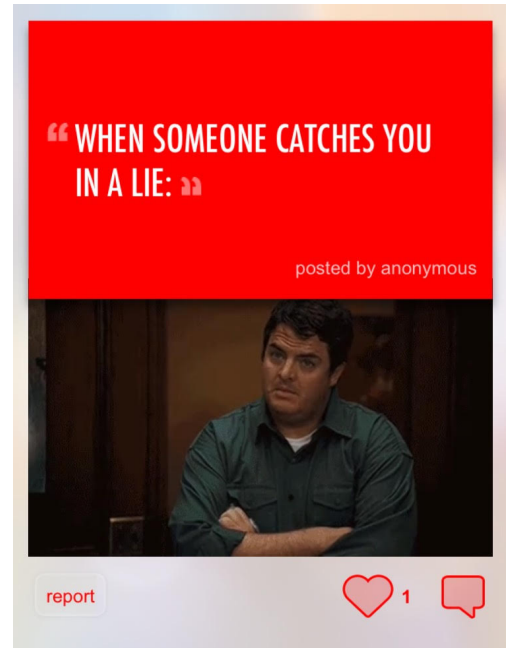
Unlike other services, there is no “friends list” or “follower count.” This allows all students to be on an equal footing, regardless of perceived popularity. Students can post messages on a feed that is seen by other students who attend their school, but ONLY those who attend their school.

Moderation and abuse reporting

After School has community guidelines in place to guide students toward being positive and helping other students on the app. The guidelines set forth a “zero tolerance” policy when it comes to bullying or threats. The app also prohibits “content that is explicitly sexual, violent, or intended to promote physical or emotional harm to an individual or group.”

To enforce these policies, After School uses both human moderators as well as software to detect language that is dangerous or harmful. The moderators look at every post before it’s shared with other people to make sure it doesn’t violate the company’s community standards.

Finally, a Report button on every post allows content to be removed instantly if a student deems it to be offensive or inappropriate. If the post is found to not violate the company’s guidelines, it can be restored, but After School staff say they “err on the side of caution,” when it comes to removing content that someone reports as offensive.



Dealing with threats, emergencies, and personal crisis

After School prohibits threats, and the company does all it can to prevent students from using the service to threaten others, including using software and human moderators to detect and delete threats. In the rare cases where threats are detected, the company immediately notifies school officials and law enforcement so that appropriate action can be taken. There have been cases where prompt notification by After School has helped local authorities ensure student safety.

After School also has relationships with crisis counselors and organizations, such as Crisis Text Line, to connect students, anonymously if they wish, with a live crisis counselor at no cost.

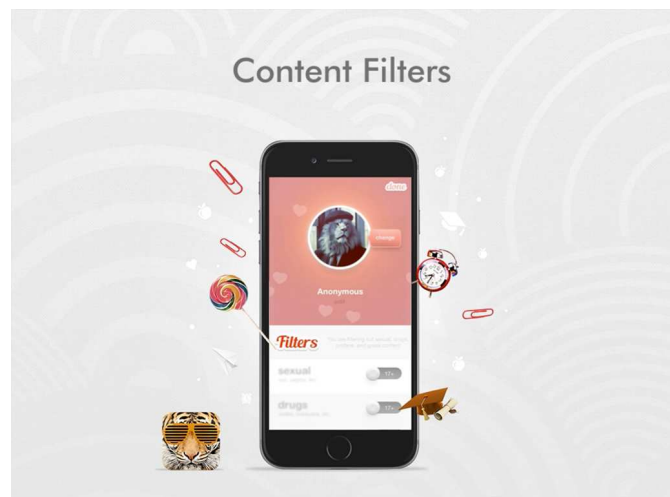
Limits of anonymity

Even if an After School user doesn't indicate who they are, students at their school might be able to figure it out. It's also important to know that anonymous doesn't mean unaccountable. After School, like all reputable online services, must comply with legal orders, which means that anyone who breaks the law using online services can be held accountable.

Parental controls

After School also allows for parental controls. On both Apple and Android devices, there are ways parents can restrict or limit access to After School:

- For iPhone and iPad users, After School is rated 17+ in the Apple App Store, which allows parents to hide the app by enabling general parental controls.
- On both Apple and Android devices, parents can use After School's custom controls to monitor or restrict their child's use. They must access the settings within the app on their child's phone, and then password-protect the app settings, adjust content filters, or restrict overall access to the app.
- On Apple devices, parental settings can be implemented on your child's device by going to Settings -> General -> Restrictions. Or, view the Apple guide to setting restrictions on your child's phone [here](#).
- On Android devices, parental settings can be implemented by opening Google Play store app on your child's Android device -> Menu -> Settings -> Parental Controls. Turn Parental controls On and create a pin that a user will need to enter in order to change these controls. Filters can then be selected to block access to mature level apps, games, movies, and television shows, and also music and books.



Privacy

After School does not have typical privacy settings because users do not have a profile that can be viewed or shared. All user posts are by default anonymous unless a student uses his or her name in a post. Students also can select other students in shout outs,

"Would You," or "Ship" features. Any user may contact support@afterschoolapp.com to opt out of these features so that other students may not select them.

After School's Community Guidelines state that "sharing personal information of other students is not tolerated." The company encourages users to report posts that contain personal information in them.

As with all connected apps and sites, students are cautioned to be aware that what they post can be seen by others and can be copied and pasted so, as always, the best way to protect your privacy is to be careful what you post.

Communication is the best form of parental control

It is important to remember that software controls can go only so far. If a young person really wants to use an app or service or go to a prohibited website, they will typically find a way.

The best software to help your child use technology responsibly lives not in an app or on a device but in the computer between the child's ears. That's why good communication is so important. Talk with your child about how he or she uses After School, and other apps. Ask questions and give advice, but try to make it a conversation and not a lecture, so you can both learn from it.

If you decide to use parental controls or monitoring tools, talk with your child about why you're using them, and think about when it might be appropriate to wean away from the controls. Eventually, kids grow up and it's important to teach them to protect themselves since parents can't always be there to watch over them. For more, check out ConnectSafely's What parents should think about before using parental controls.

Changing a password

The app allows a user or parent to establish a password to enter the app and/or edit the settings screen.

To turn on the password function:

1. Tap on the upper right hand corner of the app to enter the settings page
2. Scroll down to "lock"
3. Slide the buttons for "settings" or "app" (or both) from left to right
4. Enter password when prompted.

To change the password:

1. Turn the "lock" button/s off by sliding from right to left
2. Turn the "lock" button/s back on by sliding from right to left
3. When prompted, enter a new password

Closing thoughts for parents

It's easy to feel intimidated by all the social networking apps and services that kids use, and even technology experts have trouble keeping up with all the new services. But you don't have to be an expert to understand how to help your child use After School or any other service or app safely. The "rules" for using any site or service are pretty much the same. Be respectful of yourself and others, be careful what you post, and pay attention to any privacy settings, security tools, and blocking and reporting mechanisms.

It's also important to remember that tools like After School are mostly an extension of your child's "real world" social life. Although there are exceptions, kids tend to hang out online with the same people they hang out with in person.

What's most important is to help your kids develop critical thinking skills so that no matter what services they use (online or off), they think about what they're doing, take care to protect their privacy, security, and reputation, and keep an eye out for scams and things that may not be what they seem.

And parents too need to do a bit of critical thinking by not panicking every time you hear a media report about something awful happening in social media. The reason the news media cover awful situations is because they're rare. How often do you see headlines about planes landing safely? Of course kids can get into trouble using After School or any other service, but the same can be said for swimming pools. That's why we teach them how to swim.

As for our job as parents, it's important to keep the lines of communication with your kids as open as possible, and to work together to figure out what's appropriate for them in terms of safety, privacy, reputation, and time management. It generally just works better to talk with our kids about their favorite tools—with genuine interest, not fear—because they're more likely to come to you when they need help, and you're much more likely to be kept in the loop about the technology that they use.

