

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
G U I D E

Discord

axis

Through Discord, Unity?

If you have a gamer in your family, you've probably heard of Discord, the increasingly preferred method of chat for gaming communities. In fact, the platform has become so popular in the last year or so that many have flocked to it for all kinds of communication around every imaginable subject.

And while Discord solves many problems and even makes communication easier and more fun, it brings to the table interesting problems—some seen throughout the internet and some entirely unique. Not only do we need to know about these issues to protect our kids, but also to utilize them in our efforts to disciple our kids into wise, Christ-like, loving citizens of our increasingly virtual world.

— What is Discord?

An “all-in-one voice and text chat for gamers that’s free, secure, and works on both your desktop and phone,” according to [its website](#). Basically, it’s a way to chat specifically with other gamers about, well, video games (though it’s not limited to that). According to their [description on the iOS app store](#):

Discord is the only cross-platform voice and text chat app designed specifically for gamers. With the iOS app you can stay connected to all your Discord voice and text channels even while AFK [away from keyboard, a common PC gaming slang term]. It is perfect for chatting with team members, seeing who is playing online, and catching up on text conversations you may have missed.

The app works on iPhone, iPad, Android, Mac, and PC (on the last two via browser or desktop app) and therefore can be used in tandem with all sorts of video games, including mobile games.

[According to the company](#), as of May 2017 they had 45 million active users and had doubled that number to 90 million by the end of the year. They attribute this growth in part to their ability to solve a major communication problem that PC gamers specifically had. Competitors like [Ventrilo](#) and [TeamSpeak](#) are clunky, costly, and frankly outdated, so Discord stepped in with a user-friendly, intuitive, beautiful, and free alternative.

Its growth might also be attributed to hip-hop artist Drake and popular video-game-streamer Ninja, who [played Fortnite together on Twitch](#) (see our [Parent’s Guide to Twitch](#) for more info). During the stream, Drake had been trying to communicate with Ninja by phone, which wasn’t working well, so Ninja ended up explaining to him (and therefore the thousands of viewer) how to use Discord, which Drake signed up for and began using.

— How does it work?

Think of Discord itself as a massive lunchroom at school with 90 million students (of any age). The lunchroom is filled with tables around which students congregate in order to talk with each other. These tables are called “[servers](#)” and are typically built

around a certain game, interest, or group of people. Users can hop from server to server easily and quickly, just like a student can move from table to table with ease. (But what a Discord user can do that a real person cannot is look different in each server they're part of.)

The conversations had by different people at the table are called “channels.” Sometimes, everyone at the table is participating in the conversation—called the “General” channel by default, but can be renamed—whereas other times 2 or 3 students at a table are talking about one topic, while 2 or 3 other students at the same table are having a different conversation simultaneously (that may or may not be able to be overheard/seen by others). These smaller conversations are also channels, but can be named based on their topic and can be set to only allow certain users to access them if desired.

Finally, sometimes people at the table just want to talk one-on-one. These are called “Direct Messages” (as is the case with other platforms like Instagram) and cannot be overheard/read by others in the server.

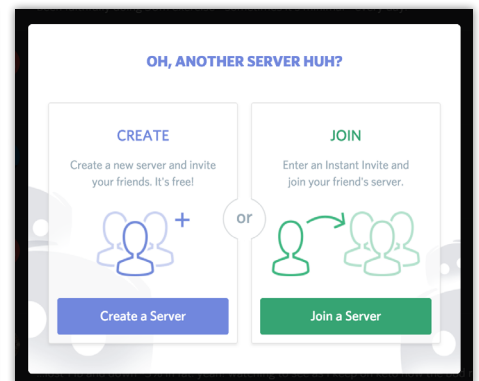
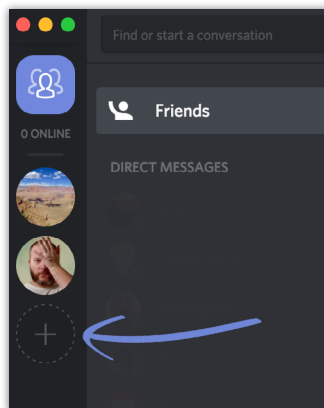
Just like there's a social hierarchy in all teenage groups, there's a hierarchy in the servers, though it's less about coolness and more about who started the server. Each server is controlled by its creator, and they can determine: other users' roles within that server; the ability to delete images or messages; the ability to remove or ban users; the rules for engagement in that server; and the settings and permissions for each channel.

— What can one do within the platform?

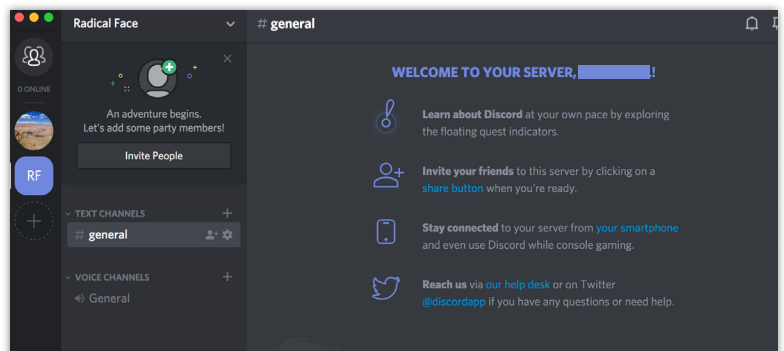
Note: All screenshots in this PDF are from the desktop app. The screens will look slightly different in the mobile apps.

Create a Server

When logging into Discord, the servers a user has joined will appear in the far left sidebar. Below these is a circle with a plus sign in it. Clicking on that allows a user to create their own server (see images).

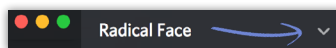


This newly created server automatically comes with a general text channel and general voice channel. The creator can make as many channels as desired within that server.

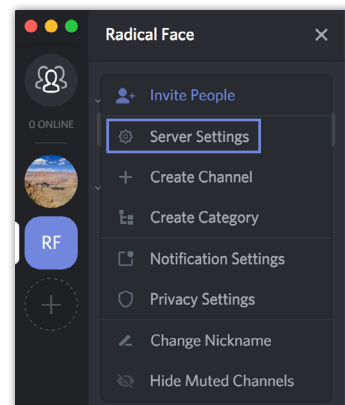


Customize Your Server

Click the down arrow next to the server name, then click “Server Settings.”

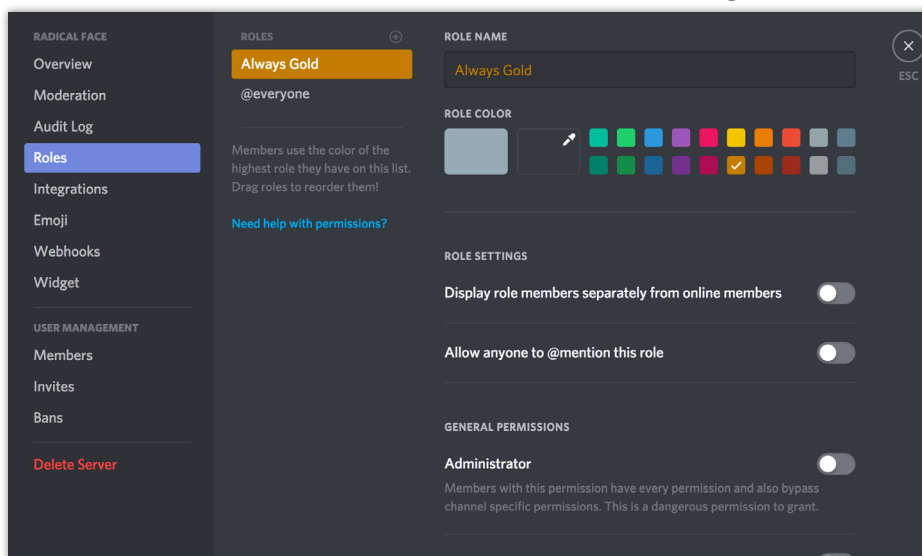


You will see many different options, including choose an image for the server, change permissions, add [different integrations](#), customize emoji, and more. For detailed instructions for every setting, check out [Discord’s support blog](#).



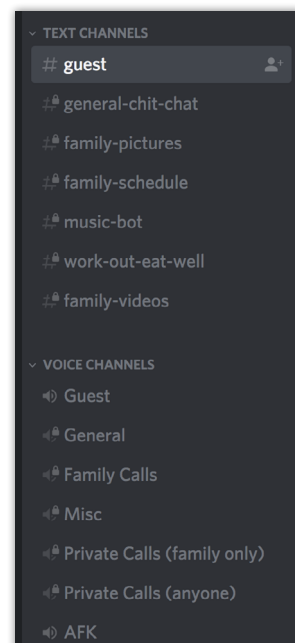
Customize Roles

Within settings, one can manage the [roles](#) for everyone in the group. These roles are entirely up to the server’s creator. He/she can make roles like “administrator” or “secretary” or make up a title that is completely arbitrary. They’re also customizable, with different limitations for each user if so desired. People who are totally new to a server might only be able to see the general channels. Someone who is a secretary could be able to access all channels that no one else, not even a higher officer, can see.



Create Different Channels

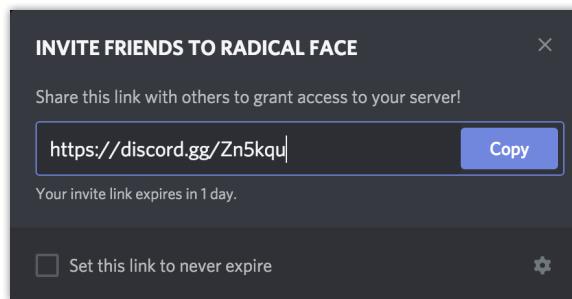
In the server’s settings, you will also see the options to “Create Channel” and “Create Category” (see image above). Remember, channels are just different topics of conversation. So creating a channel just creates a place to discuss a new topic and (hopefully) only that topic. Categories are simply ways to organize all the different channels, especially in larger servers with many different channels. For example, if you have a server dedicated to a specific game, eventually there may end up being multiple channels that discuss strategies for different aspects of the game. You can organize them under the category “Strategy” so users can easily find or ignore those channels.




Share the Link to One's Server

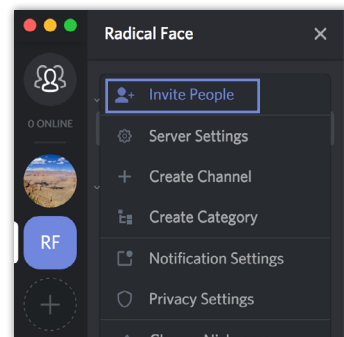
When creating a server, the app will ask the user to name it. Then the user will get a link to the server that can be used to invite others to it. (This link can be customized to only work for a set time or to only be usable a certain number of times.

[More here.](#))



Invite Specific People to One's Server


Selecting  on the top left of the screen reveals how many of a user's friends are online, under which are the icons for any servers the user has joined or created. Once a server is selected, a user can simply click/tap on the "[Invite People](#)" box, which generates the server link. Copy the link, then find the user's profile, right click, and paste the link to send it to that user. He/she will then have the option to choose to join your server.

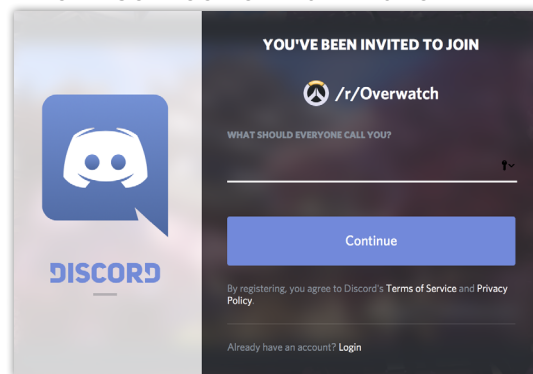


Delete Your Server

A server's creator can easily [delete the server](#) in the server's settings.

Join a Server

A user can only join an already-existing server if they have an invite link. To do this, click the  on the left side, then choose "Join Server." The app will ask you to enter your invite link. The idea is that one would get this link from someone within the server because they've been invited to join. But many servers are really big, and it's easy to search online for a link to a server you're interested in. We know someone who wanted to play Grand Theft Auto on Discord, so he went to Reddit, found the GTA Discord links, and joined. We tried this same strategy with Overwatch. It took a few minutes, but we pretty quickly found a way to connect with an Overwatch group on Discord that we hadn't been personally invited to by another member.



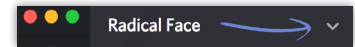
You can also search in the app for a server related to a topic you're interested in by typing in a term. When we typed in the word "overwatch," we were immediately plugged into a server call "Official Reddit Discord of Overwatch," and the new server appeared on left-hand side of the screen next to our other servers.

This didn't work with every term we searched, however, which is likely because some servers have no stipulations for initially joining, while some want you to take action first.

Note: Some servers are public and can be joined without a link. Those servers can be found [here](#).

Leave a Server

Simply click/tap on the down arrow next to the name of the server and select “Leave Server.” Even though we got a warning at that point that we wouldn’t be able to rejoin unless we were invited, we tried joining again by the same means we joined in the first place and got right back into the server.



Add a Friend



In the friends list, click the “Add Friend” button, then add a user via their full username, the # symbol, and their 4-digit number (the example Discord’s support offers is: HelpyHelpnotbot#8877). You can also invite them from their profile in two different ways, [described here](#).

Search

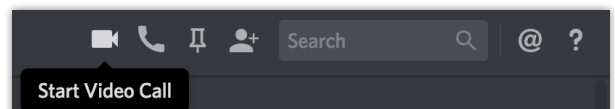
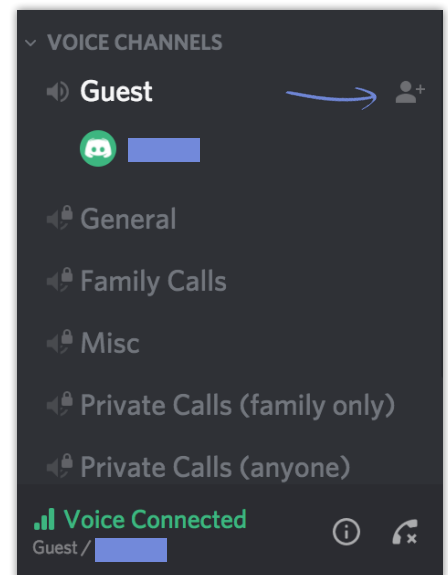
The search bar in the top right corner only searches your messages history (which can be really helpful if you have a ton of threads going on a bunch of different servers). It doesn’t search the Discord database. You can search for friends in the “Add Friend” section.

Make a Phone Call

Phone calls work differently than they do on Skype or other video-chat apps. Instead of “making a call,” when you are in a particular server on Discord, there is a place in the left-hand sidebar for Voice Channels (text channels can only contain text and images, not voice). These voice channels are what gamers utilize to talk to each other during games. A user [can set theirs](#) to “Voice Activated,” which transmits audio any time it hears a voice, to “Push to Talk,” which requires a user to push a button (or use their chosen keyboard shortcut) to transmit audio (thereby reducing the chance that something would accidentally be overheard!).

To start this kind of call, click  to the right of the channel, and you’ll immediately connect to that channel and whoever else is on it. To disconnect, click  in the bottom right-hand corner (see image).

Also, you can start an audio or video call with a specific person from your direct message thread them. Again, it’s a bit different than Skype because with Skype, you call and the “phone” rings until the other person does or does not pick up. On Discord, you simply click on the video chat icon, and the call starts whether the other person is there or not.

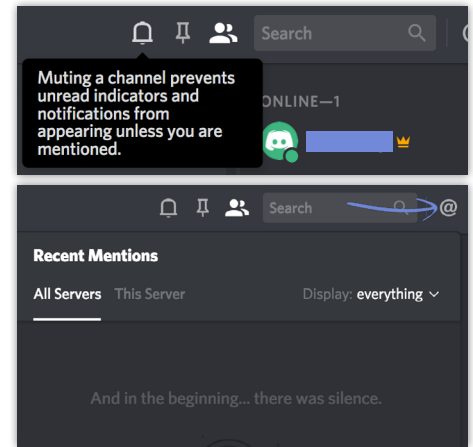


Organize Groups

One major advantage of Discord is how easy it is to organize groups. You can create channels and subchannels, easily sorting topics of conversation, instead of putting everything you’re talking about into a single thread. Voice chat integrates extremely well with these threads. If someone wants to leave a channel, you can just remove them, instead of creating an entirely new group without that person and renaming it.

Control Notifications

Similar to other apps, people can tag you with the @ symbol, and you'll get a notification. Unlike other apps, Discord allows you to leave notifications on for some channels and turn them off for others. You can look up your recent mentions by clicking on the @ icon in the top right of the screen.



Connect Other Platforms

Things like [Twitch](#) and [YouTube](#) can be integrated with a Discord account. So if your favorite streamer goes live on Twitch, Discord will send you a notification. The streamer can customize the message you get, so you never know what you'll see. It could say, "Ninja went live!" or "Get your a** out here!"

There are many, many other functions within Discord, but these will help you understand and navigate. Again, to learn about other functions, see [Discord's Support Blog](#).

— Why do teens like it?

Price. With a price tag of free, it fits into teenagers' budgets much better than the alternatives. But even more specifically, it's a place where gamers can go to communicate and connect specifically with the gaming community. Unlike texting, Snapchat, Instagram, and other communication apps, it's possible to have servers with only other gamers, so they can talk solely about gaming without having to sift through other conversations. Because so many gamers are now on it, Discord helps them know when their friends are online so they can join their games. If your teens have recently gotten into [Fortnite](#) (and trust us, if they're gamers, they've probably played at least once), Discord will help them keep track of who's playing and when.

Quality. As one user we talked to put it, "Discord doesn't do anything poorly." He uses Discord all the time and compares the way it has surpassed other platforms to how Facebook became more successful than MySpace. It's convenient, user-friendly, and resolves some of the issues that other similar apps have. It's extremely easy to create a server on Discord. As the author of [this Lifehacker article says](#), "It took longer to take screenshots of the process than it did to create the server itself."

The platform has some similarities to Skype (one of its competitors), but it also offers several key features that set it apart and make it more appealing. Some similarities are that both platforms allow users to chat one-on-one or in groups, make audio calls, and make video calls. Discord is also similar to Skype in that users can put their status as offline while still being active on the app. But where Discord shines is its servers, which contain multiple text and voice channels (i.e. group chats) at once, keeping everything

more organized, easier to access, and easier to mute if needed.

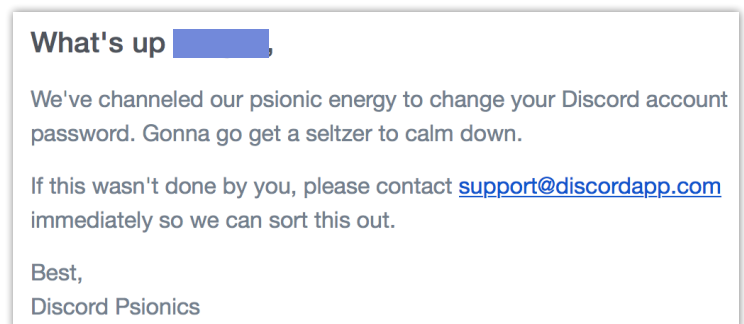
Volume. [One Discord user on Reddit](#) observes that Discord servers are useful for huge numbers of people. If you have a very small group, you probably only need a group chat (although creating a server is super easy and sets you up right away with your own text and voice channels). Group DMs (direct messages) on Discord have a limit of 10 users. However, the user points out that with a server:

You can have multiple voice channels so everyone can have their own specific conversation, multiple text channels, and the permissions system. There is no limit on how many people can be on a server. Servers are great for managing communities and holding multiple conversations while remaining together.

Anyone who uses Skype regularly will have experienced poor connections or calls dropping. Early on, Discord did have issues with lagging, so people would TeamSpeak. But Discord fixed that issue and can now handle extremely high numbers of users. We spoke to a user who watches a movie every Saturday “with” four to five thousand people. There is currently no limit to the number of people who can be in a particular server.

Style. Perhaps most important is that it’s clever and goofy, never taking itself too seriously, which adds to the app’s “cool” factor. Discord’s creators have come up with playful ways to help users as they learn the platform, and they’ve built in gamer slang and references to video games throughout. For example, if a user clicks on “Friends” but no connections are online, it says “No one’s around to play with Wumpus,” alluding to [Hunt the Wumpus](#), a computer game released in 1972. When opening the desktop app, as it’s loading it’ll say things like “Ensuring dankest memes” or “[Constructing additional pylons](#)” (a reference to [Starcraft](#)) instead of the much more vanilla “Loading.”

Even the emails they send when a user changes his/her password don’t sound corporate or boring, as seen in the screenshot of the email sent after changing our password.



— How else do teens use the platform?

[According to a poll](#) conducted by a third-party, many of the 1,875 respondents (all of whom were between the ages of 14 and 18) said they use Discord to collaborate on homework or to watch Netflix together. In addition, users can now [connect their Spotify accounts](#) to Discord, thus enabling them to play music directly in Discord and display listening information and playlists for others to see.

There are servers on Discord for just about anything you can think of: cosplay, crafts, science and math, real talk, book club, podcasts, YouTube channels, etc. Finally, some even use the platform for playing tabletop and roleplaying games ([like Dungeons & Dragons](#) and [others](#)) online.

— What are its benefits?

The biggest benefit of Discord is that it builds community around a whole host of topics. One user we talked to noted that one of his favorite podcasts is on Discord, so every time they release a new episode, there's a discussion in Discord about it. He subscribes to a YouTube channel, and every time they post something, he gets a notification on Discord. If done well, Discord servers can be places of vibrant community and discussion, discussion which can (sometimes) be hard to find in face-to-face interactions because 1. It can be hard to find other people who like the same things; 2. It can be hard to find people who are willing to voice their opinions on controversial ideas; and 3. No one has access to this many people interested in the same topics in real life.

In addition, the platform has robust controls over who can see and connect with you, so users can be safe. However, there are no parental controls (see below), so these controls are only useful if used. If a user doesn't enable them, then the app becomes increasingly less safe. (Discord's "[Parent's Guide to Discord](#)" details how set these controls up.)

— What risks does it pose? Is it riskier than other communication apps?

As with any platform on the internet that allows communication between users, there are some inherent risks, especially thanks to this fallen world we live in. However, these risks are (for the most part) not unique to Discord. We should also mention that Discord does not police the content on its servers. It's up to the moderators to enforce their own rules and [remove someone](#) from their channel and/or server, and it's up to users to report behavior that violates the community guidelines and terms of use.

NSFW. According to the [community guidelines](#), **pornography is not specifically banned**, but channels that contain it must be clearly marked NSFW, which normally stands for "Not Safe For Work," but is explained by Discord as meaning "[Not Safe for Wumpus](#)" on their site). Anything marked NSFW will no longer be subject to content filters but will have an 18+ age-gate for entry. Though the warnings are supposed to discourage younger users from joining these servers, it can have the opposite effect, much like the Parental Advisory stickers on songs and albums.

You should know that it's quite possible and even easy to find pornography on Discord if one is determined (though the same can be said of the internet in general). It's possible to [disable any NSFW content](#) in the settings, but **it's not password protected so that only parents can change this setting**. You can set it up, but they can immediately go in and turn it off as long as they can log into their account. One danger is that a server can look perfectly safe, but contain channels within it that are solely for porn. So a weakness of the app is how easy it is to hide something like that. Also, parents should generally expect the content on Discord to be adult in nature (not explicit, but not clean). There can be totally clean servers, but they're more of an exception.

Hatred. 56% of respondents in [the aforementioned poll](#) reported seeing hate speech on the platform. Worse, Discord [was actually the platform used](#) by alt-right, white supremacist groups to organize the deadly “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, VA in 2017. This is mainly due the fact that the chat rooms use invite-only private servers, so organizers were assured to not be bothered. Once it became clear that these groups had used the platform, [Discord responded](#) and began eliminating hate groups as best it could, though [it doesn't read users' messages](#) and therefore relies on users to report inappropriate behavior. Therefore, it's possible for any user to accidentally stumble upon or be invited to similar hateful groups. It's essential, especially for younger users, to talk to them about why the behavior should never be tolerated or engaged in and should be reported right away.

Stranger Danger. It is possible for strangers from anywhere in the world to contact a user directly via direct message. However, [80% of teens polled](#) said they use Discord to chat with people they know, so it seems that they're not simply talking to anyone and everyone (which wasn't the case with teens during the early days of the internet). There are [privacy settings](#) users can change to control who can contact them. We should mention that just because controls exist doesn't mean a teenager will use them. It would require a pretty discerning child to be willing to enable stronger privacy settings on their own, so parental oversight is highly recommended, though monitoring all of their conversations is virtually impossible. (See “Privacy” section below for instructions on how to change these settings.)

Lack of Parental Controls. Discord currently does not offer anything in the way of password-protected parental controls. Though there are robust controls for notifications, connecting with users, and content filters, they are all controlled by the user him/herself. There is currently no way to implement true Parental Controls that only the person with the Parental Control password can change. This is why [both kids and parents alike](#) stipulate that Discord is safe to use *as long as there's supervision and it's only used to connect with people they know and trust.*

Revenge Porn. It was discovered in January 2018 that Discord's servers had been used as a way for people [to share revenge porn](#) and images of women against their will. In fact, one activist says that entire servers are dedicated solely to [sharing videos of rape](#). Luckily, if a user is found to be violating the site's terms of use, the account is banned, but it's extremely easy to just create a new account. Though most users don't seek this content out, as these offenders get more and more savvy, it won't be hard for them to send users offensive material unsolicited, unless Discord finds better ways to protect and police.

Raiding, Doxxing, & Bullying. Gamer interactions are already often marked by trash talking, so that kind of talk is quite prevalent on Discord as well. It's important to talk to your kids about when they've crossed the line from “all in good fun” to outright bullying.

At least as of early 2017, many of the servers on Discord [had nothing to do with video games](#), and it seems that many of these servers have been populated by (or are even specifically for) users willing to troll others by “raiding” their chat rooms (acquiring the invite link to a server, posting for others to see, then descending en masse on the

unsuspecting users with a tidal wave of abuse) or by “doxxing” (posting personal information, like addresses or phone numbers, of users for others to find and do with what they please).

Not surprisingly, religious groups and the LGBT+ community have been targets of much of the abuse. Discord has responded by making invite links expire after 24 hours by default unless otherwise indicated by the user; this means that links posted in servers for anyone to see are only useful for a short amount of time. It’s not only important to discuss each of these behaviors with our kids to help them avoid it, but it’s paramount that we also teach them to stand up for the marginalized and do everything in their power to squelch any abuse they see.

Drugs. As with any online platform, it’s possible for users to connect with others for the purpose of buying and/or selling drugs. See our [Parent’s Guide to Teens & Opioids](#) and [Parent’s Guide to Teens & Alcohol](#).

Sexting. This is a risk on almost all (if not all) communication platforms that allow direct/private messaging. See our [Parent’s Guide to Sexting](#) for more on that.

— Anything else I should know?

Not surprisingly, there are many threads on Reddit [like this one](#) in which kids are worried their parents will ban them from using the app because of its risks. In light of all the negative aspects we’ve outlined, it’s logical that parents would be afraid of the platform. And it’s also logical that kids would not be happy about the decision, especially if all their friends are already using it. Though most users are innocent and just trying to use the platform to connect with friends as we’ve pointed out, your teen will face risks if he/she joins.

But straight up banning it without explanation or without being willing to hear your teen’s concerns may not be the answer, either. As the responses on the Reddit thread indicate, it wouldn’t be hard for your teen to simply begin using it without your knowledge, *which would be much worse than you being able to monitor and discipline them as they use it.*

— Should I let my kid use it? At what age?

According to their [terms of use](#), a user must be 13 or older in order to use the app, so we definitely recommend not allowing younger kids to use it (they’d have to lie about their age and violate the terms of use in order to do so, which happens often, but those age restrictions and terms are in place for a reason).

Some sites recommend different ages at which to allow kids to use it. [Saferkid.com recommends](#) no one under 15 uses it, especially not without monitoring. Commonsensemedia.com [compiles recommendations from both parents and kids](#), with the consensus from kids being that it should have an 11+ age rating and the consensus

from parents being that it should have a 14+ age rating. Reading any number of reviews will reveal that there are many different opinions and assessments of the perceived risks.

Because of that, it depends on your parental instincts and on your child's demonstrated maturity and responsibility. If he/she is mature, understands the risks of online predators and bullying, knows what to do if/when either happen, and has given you no reason to think they'd use the app for hiding things or for inappropriate behavior, then it might be worth allowing it to be used. (And the opposite is true: If he/she doesn't meet these criteria, it might not be smart to let him/her use it. BUT make sure to explain why and clearly delineate how they might earn the privilege to use the app.)

If you do decide to allow your child to use it, make sure there are clear boundaries around it. How long can it be used each day? On what devices can it be installed? Can he/she use it with headphones? In what rooms of the house can it be used? And what are the lines your child could cross that would result in privileges being revoked? Will you be checking in on his/her chats? If so, why and what will you be looking for? Unfettered access to *anything* isn't healthy for anyone, but it's especially important during these teen years to set healthy boundaries and help them form good habits.

One thing that might help is a contract, similar to a social media or [smartphone contract](#). When first allowing a teen to use the app, they must agree to abide by certain rules and behaviors. If the contract is violated, then the consequences are clearly laid out so they know what's at stake. The contract could indicate what privacy settings a teen must use, as well as time limits and other parameters you require in order to continue to use the app. It could also describe situations and/or conversations (bullying/hateful speech, predators, sexual grooming, pornography, doxxing, raiding, language, etc.) that are considered inappropriate and specify methods for exiting and reporting those conversations/situations in a timely manner. And it could even describe ways in which they can earn more privileges within the app.

— How do I turn on Parental Controls?

Discord's blog [explains the privacy settings well](#), complete with screenshots. **Beyond this, the app lacks any real parental controls because as long as a user has access to his/her account, he/she can change these settings at any time.**

— Can I use the app to connect with my kids?

Great question! Yes, you can, especially if this is your child's preferred means of communication.

One family we talked to has actually decided to do just that, thanks to one son who began using it for games but then realized that he preferred the platform to other communication apps. He asked his parents and siblings (all of whom are grown and on their own, so not teenagers) if they'd give it a shot. They agreed, set up a family server, and then set up different channels within that server for different topics. They even

created one specifically for keeping each other accountable with exercise and eating habits.

A caveat is in order, though. Even though you'd be connecting on your kids' terms and have a presence in their world by doing this, it's not like, say, going to the arcade with them. Because Discord is virtual (and lacks much in the way of parental controls), you have little to no ability screen who they talk to, hear what they say, or keep track of what they see or are exposed to. So again, discernment, wisdom, and prayer are needed. But the above story is a great example of parents—despite their age and despite being digital immigrants—doing what it takes to enter their kids' world, speak their language, and communicate in a way that's meaningful to them in order to show how much they care about them.

— The bottom line

Discord doesn't have to live up to its name; it can be something that brings growth, maturity, good discussions, and trust between you and your teens. As one adult user (who is a Christian) stressed, the best line of defense is giving our kids the tools and strategies they need to make good choices online. If our strategy only consists of filtering, monitoring, and banning things altogether, we have done our kids a disservice by not teaching them how to live wisely and like Christ in our modern day. They will go out on their own someday. We won't be able to restrict them forever.

In light of that, let's endeavor to be wise in **what** platforms we allow them to join, **when** we allow them to join, **what** filters/restrictions/contracts we put in place, and **how** we teach them smart internet behavior and etiquette from the start. Then, when they are older, wiser (Lord willing!), and building their own lives, [they will not depart](#) from the wisdom which leads to true, abundant life that we have modeled and reinforced.

— Related Axis Resources

Find all of these (and more!) at www.axis.org/guides.

- A Parent's Guide to Internet Filtering & Monitoring
- A Parent's Guide to Amino Apps
- A Parent's Guide to Sexting
- A Parent's Guide to Twitch.tv
- A Parent's Guide to Teen Privacy (coming soon!)

In addition, we offer a [Conversation Kit on Gossip](#), which addresses bullying and cyberbullying.

— Additional Resources

[Discord's YouTube Channel](#) (to keep up with new features and changes)

[Parent's Guide to Discord](#), Discord

To report abuse, bullying, and harassment, email abuse@discordapp.com
[Good Digital Parenting resources](#), Family Online Safety Institute
“[This Communications Service for Gamers Has Already Outgrown Slack](#),” Forbes
“[Discord: Chat for Gamers](#)” review, Zift.com
“[Discord: Everything You Need to Know](#),” TomsGuide.com
“[Discord: A Chat App Not Just for Gamers](#),” Cyberbullying Research Center

We’re creating more content every day! If you found this guide helpful and valuable, check out axis.org/guides each month for new Guides covering all-new topics and for other resources.