Snapchat ‘family center’ might let parents know who is in their teens’ DMs

While Instagram and Facebook face increased scrutiny on how they manage their teenage audience, Snap is taking steps to ensure a safer experience for its youngest users by working on a set of family safety tools.

In an interview this week on *WSJ Tech Live* (via *TechCrunch*), CEO Evan Spiegel spoke of his vision for allowing parents to hold their teens’ hands while the kids are navigating Snapchat. “One of the goals with the product is to open up a dialogue between parents and their children about their experiences on the app,” said Spiegel, hoping to align with parents in a time where similar platforms are negatively affecting young teens. During this interview, Spiegel also mentioned that there is an in-house parental control system in the works called the “Family Center.”

While the company is not ready to share details on those expanded parental controls yet, a statement given to *The Verge* says “the parental tools we are developing are meant to give parents better insights to help protect their kids, in ways that don’t compromise their privacy or data security, are legally compliant and offered at no charge to families within Snapchat.”

Last month, Snap announced hiring a “Global Head of Platform Safety,” who will be in charge of keeping the company’s safety strategy organized and proactive. In a statement, a spokesperson says “Our overall goal is to help educate and empower young people to make the right choices to enhance

their online safety and to help parents be partners with their kids in navigating the digital world."

Evan Spiegel: "…regulators are always going to be playing catch-up"
Current parental tools for Snapchat exist but they aren't as invasive or in-depth as third-party services such as Bark or the systems proposed recently by Apple for iMessage. Still, third-party tools currently have limitations on popular devices such as iPhones, and that isn't the only drawback.

Allowing a third party to collect information on teens in the name of child safety sets dangerous precedents for privacy and the security placed on that collected information. The potential for advanced monitoring to eat away at overall privacy and security was a key factor in the September delay of Apple's CSAM scanning tech in iOS 15. If Snapchat ends up allowing other users (parents) to see what their kids are doing remotely, a privacy hole gets punched somewhere that could have additional consequences.

While parents would find it beneficial to have more options to monitor their children, Spiegel is correct in stating parents should open up conversations about the technology kids are using and learn how to navigate disconcerting communications on these platforms.

Spiegel also spoke positively about the company's human factor and how companies should do more to help regulators: "Unless businesses are proactively, you know, promoting the health and wellbeing of their community, regulators are always going to be playing catch-up." In May, the company was hit with a lawsuit due to the death of a teenager who succumbed to cyberbullying. At the time, the company responded by yanking API access from two anonymous messaging applications; although allowing them seems like an oversight for a company that houses communications for minors. Family Center, Spiegel hopes, will bring Snapchat into parents' good graces and

protect teens without compromising everyone’s privacy.

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