

What is JusTalk Kids? JusTalk Kids is a simplified version of the adult text, audio and video group-calling app, JusTalk, owned by Chinese company, Ningbo Jus Internet Technology Co Ltd. The adult version has an age limit of 13+ years. The Kids version has a requirement that children under 13 will not register for a JusTalk Kids account themselves and will use JusTalk Kids only with the consent of their parent or guardian.

The app is available in both free and premium versions on both iOS and Android devices. It enables children to communicate with their parents or other users of the app approved by their parents. Children are able to share images, location, schedule a meeting, use in-app emojis, create and share drawings and photos, share name cards (contact details of friends within the app) as well as making voice calls, video calls, video recordings and audio messages. The premium version also provides doodles, stickers and interactive games which can be shared/played with contacts. The 'Memories' folder is a feature which allows you to store conversations or videos on the app.

What do they say? JusTalk Kids is promoted as a safe messaging app for children where they will not receive friend requests, calls or messengers from strangers and where their personal information is, according to their website, "completely safe".

What do we say? Although there are some good safeguards designed into this app, there is no ability to link to a parent account to monitor children's activity. This means that parents are unable to see when their child is active on their account (especially if they have unrestricted access to a device) or to restrict their usage with "quiet hours". In order to see your child's conversations, you must look at the conversation log in their app or log into their account. It's also worth bearing in mind that apps like this are only as safe as the parent who creates the account and monitors it. Care needs to be taken to create safe user names and profiles to avoid revealing a child's details to other users who can search for them. Also, if parents share their passcode and password with their child, they will be giving them full access and removing the protections that would otherwise exist.

The good things:

- When setting up the app, parents must create a 4 digit passcode. This protects account details including child's name, JusTalk ID, links to social accounts, parent's mobile number (if used in setup), country/ region, birthday, gender and password. This prevents users from accessing these details and sharing.
- The passcode also protects admin functions where friend requests are managed - functions such as scanning another user's QR code or sharing the app. New contacts can only be added after the adult has input their 4-digit passcode and approved the request
- Once downloaded, the 4-digit passcode must be used to allow the user to log out and when the app is installed, if logged out, the 4-digit passcode must be applied before the user can log back in or create a new account.
- The app is only active on one device at any time. Users must log out of one app before using a different app.
- Accounts can be created on a tablet using a user ID and password without the need for a phone number.
- In order to contact someone in the first place, you need to know their phone number or JusTalk ID.
- Even if someone knows these details, no-one can communicate with your child unless you add them manually as a friend. Child users will not be notified if someone tries to add them unless the parent inputs their 4-digit passcode and approves the person first.
- There is a reporting feature ("feedback") to report inappropriate content or behaviour.
- There is a "blocking" feature to prevent contact from named accounts and phone numbers if they have been approved but later become troublesome.
- Communications are end-to-end encrypted by default.
- As with most platforms, the terms of use forbid bullying, intimidation or harassment.
- The terms of use state that the owners will not use any content that your child provides on the platform without your and your kids' permission.

The not so good things:

- If a parent shares their passcode and password they will give full access to their child, removing the protections for which they were intended.
- Adults can search randomly for contacts. Therefore, the app could be used for grooming or for adults who wish to use it for personal use.
- Once the 4-digit passcode has been entered, any user can search for a username either known or randomly and invite that user to connect.
- Random users can be searched for. Use of certain words will return users who are adults (images, with usernames that verge on inappropriate. ** Username search can only be accessed once 4-digit passcode is used.
- Children can freely share images either from photos stored on the device or images taken via the app.
- There is no linked parent account functionality. To see your child's conversations, you must look at the conversation log in their app or log into their account. (Conversations can be deleted).
- There is no option to create 'quiet hours' unless the child logs out of the account. You cannot see how much time the child spends online.
- There is a risk that your child's location could be revealed if location services are activated. Location point is shown on the map in the app, and users must drop a 'pin' to share a location.
- Video chatting is immediate – leaving little time to think about the consequences of our actions. Within a family this may not be a problem but allowing young children to communicate with friends unsupervised can lead to upset, either deliberately or through misunderstandings.
- Children can feel disinhibited online and may behave in ways that they would not do offline.
- Even friends can sometimes cause problems online.
- There are no advertisements, but users are encouraged to purchase 'JusTalk Kids Premium' to unlock sticker packs which are promoted in the app.
- Use of personal information – although the app makes great play of being safe, only collecting necessary information and not selling users' personal information, a close reading of its privacy policy reveals that plenty of information is collected and may be used for purposes which are not entirely clear.

What should you do?

- Think first of all if this app is appropriate for the age and maturity of your child.
- If you use it, make sure you create a **safe user profile** which reveals as little information as possible about your child. Do NOT use their full name or photo in the user profile – restrict the name to first name or a nickname and use an avatar or other non-identifiable image.
- Don't use a photo showing your child in school uniform or other personal information.
- Create a username which does not reveal your child's name at all – some memorable but unusual words or numbers will limit the likelihood of someone selecting them from a random search.
- Use privacy settings to disable location.
- Never share your passcode with your child.
- Talk to your child about good digital citizenship, about the sort of behaviour that is never acceptable and how the same standards of behaviour apply online as offline.
- Agree some ground rules about how long they can spend on the app.
- Talk about over-sharing and the need to think carefully about images shared online. Remember that children often take photos of their parents and other siblings – remind them that they should ask permission of the person in the photo before sharing with anyone else, (even within the extended family).
- Remind them that you are there to support them and that they should tell you if they have any problems or if they are worried by anything or anyone on the app.
- Make sure that you are in the same room or very close by your child when they are chatting online.

JusTalk Kids Privacy Policy: For full details see <https://kids.justalk.com/privacy>

The following information is collected and shared with the parent company JusTalk. The purpose for which this information may be used is very general – “to support the use of the app, and to improve the services provided”:

- Registration Information provided when creating a JusTalk Kids account such as the child's name and any account login details (such as a username or password) gender or birthday, their connection with the parent.
- Information about how your child uses JusTalk Kids, such as who they engage with, what features they use, and how long and in what ways they engage with different features on the app.
- Information about the people your child connects with on JusTalk Kids and how they interact with them, such as the people they communicate with the most.

Some images:

