

STATEMENT: THE APP RATINGS SYSTEM NEEDS A COMPLETE OVERHAUL AND SHOULD INCLUDE THESE FOUR PROTECTIVE PILLARS



The app rating systems used by Apple and Google are **inaccurate, lack sufficient details, aren't highly visible, are inconsistent, and there are few penalties for misrepresentations.** For the protection of children using these platforms, we believe an effective app ratings system must contain these four elements:

1. ACCURATE RATINGS

The content and features in many apps used by millions of children are **inappropriate, harmful, and dangerous.** TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, and Instagram are rated “12+” by Apple and “Teen” by Google, yet these apps contain frequent and intense sexually explicit material, content promoting suicide and eating disorders, alcohol, tobacco, drug use references, and excessive profanity. Hashtag searches surface thousands of results on these topics and algorithms drive children to this potentially harmful content. Predators can also easily communicate with children through direct messaging. The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) requires children to be 13 years old to use social media and Apple's 12+ rating for most social platforms does not comply with this standard. These ratings inadequacies present real consequences to parents who depend on accuracy when making decisions for their children. Both app stores are facilitating the deception of consumers on a massive scale. **A universal standard for ratings must be created with penalties for misrepresentation.**

2. ACCURATE CONTENT DESCRIPTORS

Currently, app content descriptors are generic and do not describe an app's true risks to children. In the Apple App Store ratings descriptions are broad and use deliberately vague terms like “infrequent,” which can confuse parents and create a false sense of security about an app's safety. Google Play descriptors are scant and hidden within support articles. **App descriptions must be expanded to include detailed content descriptors, interactive elements, and feature summaries of the risks unique to the app.** The Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) provides 30 easily understood content descriptors, under eight categories, to ensure that parents fully understand the potential risks in video games. App content descriptors should be similar to those used by the ESRB and consequences should be created for missing descriptors.

3. HIGHLY VISIBLE RATINGS

Current app descriptions are hidden deep within the app store listing and in support articles. The Apple ratings descriptions are located at the bottom of the App Store listing, obscured in drop-down menus. Google ratings descriptions aren't included in the app store listing itself and must be found within its “Help” articles. These practices contrast with the Motion Picture Association of America system, which reveals the anticipated rating and type of content in a movie *before* the movie begins. **App ratings and descriptors must be prominent so that parents and children are fully informed of the risks.**

4. UNIFORM AND ACCOUNTABLE SYSTEM

At present, there is no uniformity in the rating systems or accountability to consumers who are harmed through deceptive ratings and descriptions. Google and Apple represent a duopoly of app store content and yet the two companies cannot agree on a uniform app ratings system, penalties for inaccuracy, or what constitutes an appropriate warning to parents for the enormous risks their children may face in an app. **It's time for Apple and Google to work together to protect children and provide consumers with the accuracy and transparency they deserve by creating a uniform and accountable ratings system.**