

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

# Amino Apps

# It's Kind of like Reddit, Except It Does More and Is Made for Mobile

“Nothing, I suspect, is more astonishing in any man’s life than the discovery that there do exist people very, very like himself.”

—C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*

“Never before in the history of telecommunications media in the United States has so much indecent (and obscene) material been so easily accessible by so many minors in so many American homes with so few restrictions.”

—U.S. Department of Justice (*from 1996*), as reported [by Covenant Eyes](#)

There’s nothing quite like having a fervent interest in an obscure hobby and then meeting someone who loves that hobby just as much as you do. The more specialized or unusual your interest is, the harder it is to find someone who even knows about it, much less cares about it as much as you do. So an app like Amino can be a useful resource if you know how to use it well. The whole purpose of Amino is to connect you to people throughout the world who are passionate about the same things you are.

But like most things, a benefit taken too far has its hazards. It’s incredible to think that the Department of Justice published the above quote roughly ten years before the iPhone reshaped our daily habits. If dangerous content was accessible to young people in the mid-1990s, it is exponentially more so today. Amino can be a great tool for connecting with like-minded people, but it definitely comes with its dangers. Here’s what we think you need to know when it comes to this new app.

## What is Amino?

[Amino](#) (not be to confused with [this app](#) that helps people save on healthcare) is a social media app aimed at teens. It bills itself as a “network of communities” that “lets you explore, discover, and obsess over the things you’re into.” While it’s possible to view the different communities, known as “aminos,” on a desktop, the app is designed for use on mobile. The platform states it’s intended for users 12 and older and is available on Android and iOS.



In 2012, [Amino co-founders Ben Anderson and Yin Wang](#) happened upon an anime convention. The thousands of excited attendees helped the two realize they could meet a need by using the smartphone to connect these fans to each other. If strangers could so quickly bond in real life over something they loved, why not use technology to give them the chance to connect even more easily and without having to pay hundreds of dollars to get to and attend a conference?

Amino began as a network of separate apps, each with its own area of focus and community. While the company has since created one portal through which users can access each amino, there are still separate Amino apps available for download apart from the main Amino application. These standalone apps function in the same way as the aminos on the main platform. [Put another way](#), Amino is an “ecosystem of mobile apps,” some of which stand alone and all of which are governed by one master app.

The ability to download some aminos separately from the main portal isn’t going to disappear. As aminos on the main platform grow, Anderson says that the company will turn the larger

ones into their own apps.

## What can I do on Amino?

Topics of interests on Amino include games (like *Overwatch* or *Subnautica*), learning how to draw, being plus-sized, reptiles, paganism and witchcraft, and sexuality. [Ben Anderson notes](#) that some teens have extremely specialized interests or hobbies and have difficulty finding any friends in their real-life communities who have the same interests. Through Amino, people can instantaneously connect with others throughout the world who love the same things they do. As of the beginning of February 2018, Amino members have created more than one million new aminos on different subjects.

Because it fosters online communities on particular topics, Amino has provoked many comparisons to [Reddit](#). However, Amino differs from Reddit because of its mobile focus, its aesthetic design, and the variety of features it has.

On Amino, users can: look at news feeds; post blogs, links, and quizzes; participate in public and private chats; and enter “screening rooms” where they can watch live videos with other users. Amino users can also live chat anonymously by means of an avatar.

As with other social media platforms, there’s incentive for users to grow their followings. And while Amino is intended to help people find communities based around any interest, the platform definitely skews toward the more “fringe” interests. K-pop (Korean pop music), anime, and gamer communities predominate.

## How popular is it and where is it going?

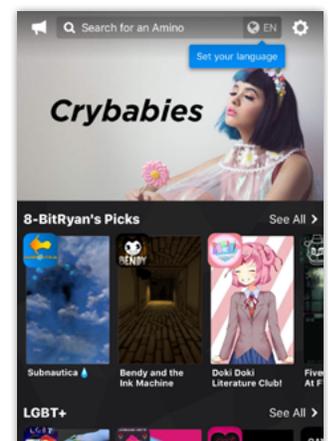
Amino puts the average age of its users between 14- and 24-years-old, but [won’t release the number of users on its platform](#). They will say that people have downloaded Amino and its companion apps tens of millions of times. What’s even more notable is how long its users spend on the app. People currently spend an average of 70 minutes at a time on the platform, which is the same amount of time users spend on both Facebook and Snapchat.

So far Amino has been completely funded by investors, but Anderson says the company plans to generate revenue through selling digital goods. Leaders of the different Amino communities will get shares of the revenue. Anderson also says that Amino is now focusing on its live features and working on maximizing what users can do together in real time.

## How does the platform work?

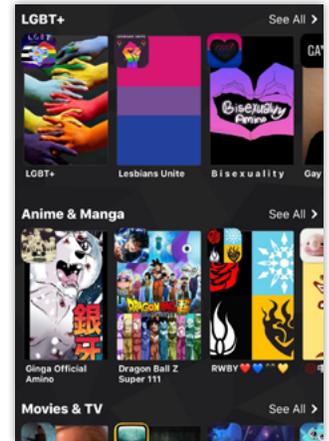
Downloading Amino is free, and one can create an Amino account with a Facebook account, email address, or phone number. Upon sign up, users are prompted to create a profile with a username and image. When we joined Amino, we were asked to share our location. We opted not to do so and would encourage others not to as well.

Once we created our account, we were taken to the **Explore** page (right) where we could browse different aminos to see if we wanted to join them. There was a slider at the top of the page featuring aminos on *Black Panther*, the music group Twenty One Pilots, and the show *Steven*

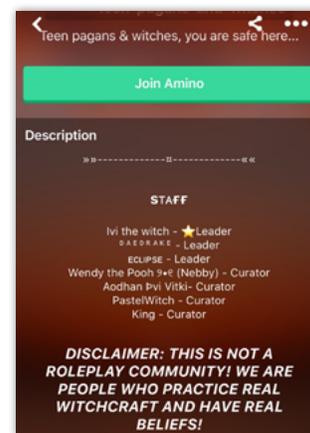
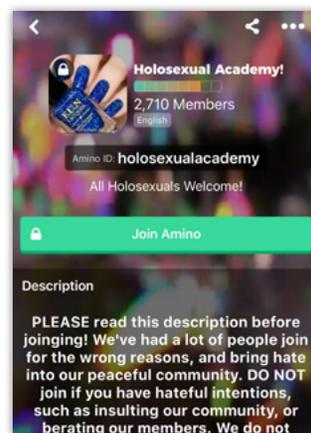
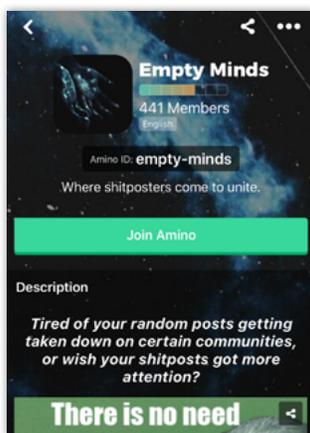


Universe. Below that was a carousel of aminos featuring the top picks of 8-BitRyan, a well-known online gamer and YouTuber.

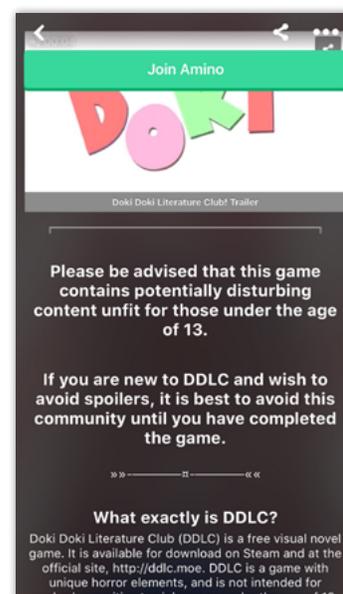
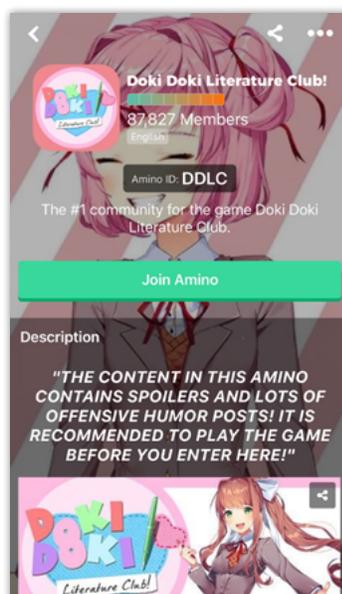
His recommended aminos include ones on anime and several video games, including *Bendy and the Ink Machine* and *Five Nights at Freddy's* (both horror video games). The second carousel on the home page featured aminos entirely on LGBT+ topics. The carousel below that featured [anime](#) and [manga](#).



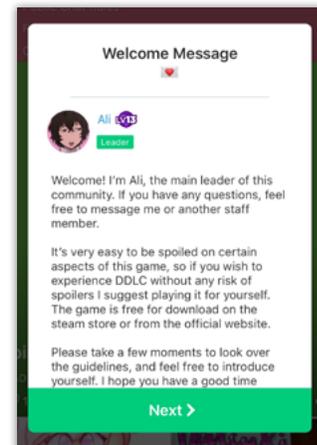
We saw lots of gaming, movies/TV, and anime aminos. We ran across several communities for paganism and witchcraft (see below), one of which was specifically aimed at teens and said it had a mentorship program. We pretty quickly found an amino for “holosexuals,” people who are sexually attracted to holographic images, as well as one for “[yaoi](#),” a genre of Japanese fiction focusing on romantic love between boys. There were communities on anything from tea, Oreos, and *Hamilton* to the Zodiac, sneakers, and how to learn Japanese.



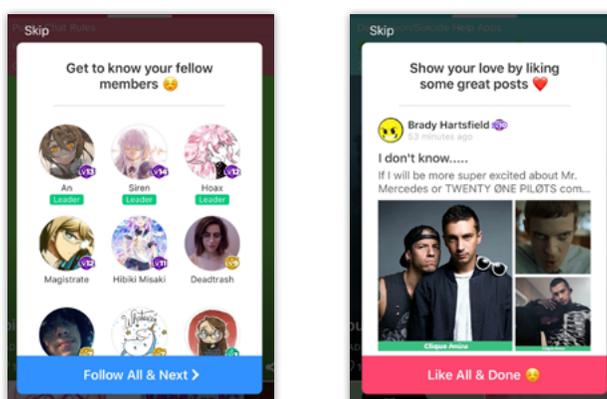
As you explore various aminos, you can read descriptions that will (theoretically) give you an idea of the purpose of each community. Below are some images of the description for the *Doki Doki Literature Club!* amino. (By the way, *Doki Doki Literature Club!* appears to be a lighthearted dating simulation involving teenage girls, but is actually a [psychological horror game](#).)



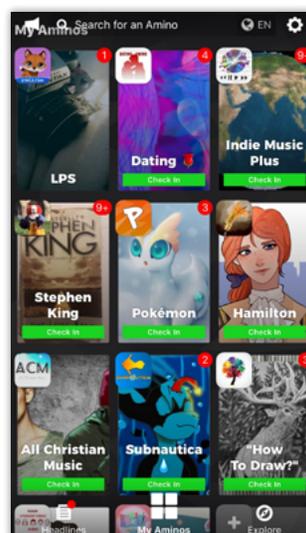
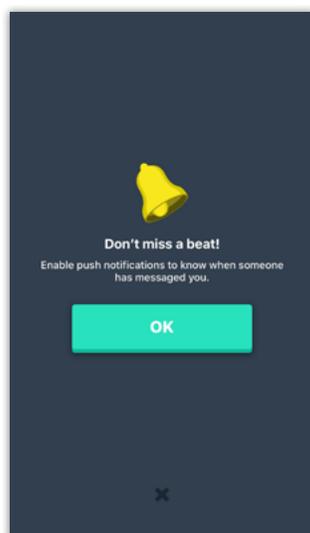
To join an amino, all a user has to do is tap on the  button. A message (see example, right) will pop up thanking you for joining and encouraging you to read the community guidelines so you know how users are expected to behave.



Each amino has various rules, such as how much swearing they allow, what you're supposed to talk about or not talk about, etc. Then the app offers the option to automatically follow a selection of members and to like certain posts (below). As we joined different aminos, an amino leader would comment on our bios in each one, giving instructions and guidelines for how the community operates.

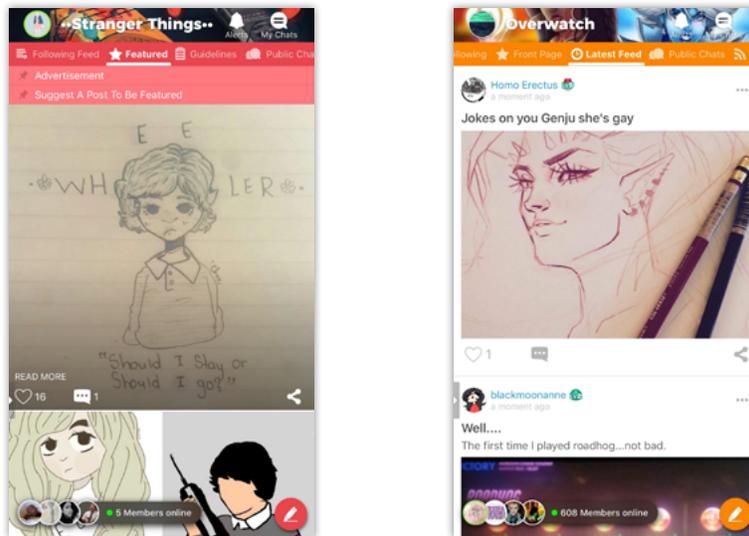


When joining an amino, the app will either prompt a user to enable push notifications (below, left) or will simply enable them by default. If notifications are on, the user will be notified immediately when someone has followed them, messaged them, etc. in each amino. Note that if a user allows push notifications and becomes active in multiple aminos, he/she will end up receiving **a lot** of notifications (below, right). If he/she allows them and decides later to turn them all off, he/she will have to go to the Settings for **each** amino, and individually turn off the notifications for every community joined thus far.



## What's in an individual amino?

When entering an amino, a user is taken to the **Featured** page (below, left), which has, well, the current featured posts. One can also view the **Latest Feed** (below, right), which shows posts in chronological order.



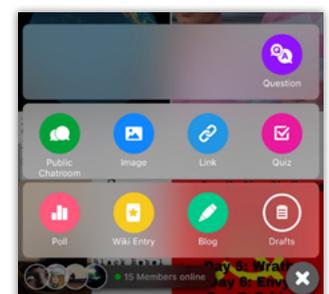
Each amino is configured differently, but they all have some variation of the following features:

- Q&A
- Public Chat Room
- Image
- Link
- Quiz
- Poll
- Wiki Entry
- Blog

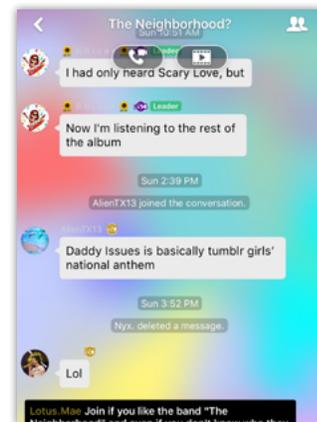
The options for interacting with other members look different depending on the amino. The Indie Music Plus amino has a section for linking to YouTube, a Polls page, and a Community Chat where members can talk to each other on any topic. The amino for Stephen King has a Quizzes page next to its Featured page and then a page where users can view public chat rooms on various topics.

Some aminos have a section called **External Content**. The one in Indie Music Plus links to Reddit. Tapping on anything in this section opens Amino's built-in web browser, **meaning that even if a device's web browsers (such as Safari and Chrome) are disabled, one can still browse the internet via the Amino apps**. As mentioned earlier, there is also a feature called Screening Room that enables users to watch the same video simultaneously.

In the bottom right corner of the screen, there's an icon that looks like a marker . Tapping on the icon allows user to post any of the following within the amino: Question, Public Chatroom, Image, Link, Quiz, Poll, Wiki Entry, Blog, or Drafts (see image).

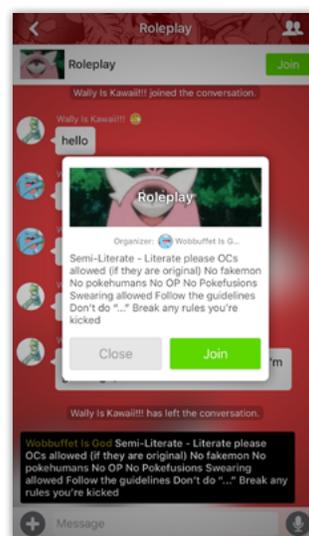
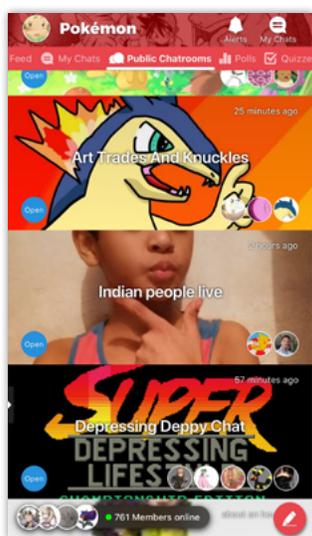


Joining an amino gives you immediate access to strangers, including the ability to talk to them over text chat, voice chat, or video chat. To the right is a picture of a chat we joined in the Indie Music amino called “The Neighborhood?” Note the options for audio and video at the top of the screen.



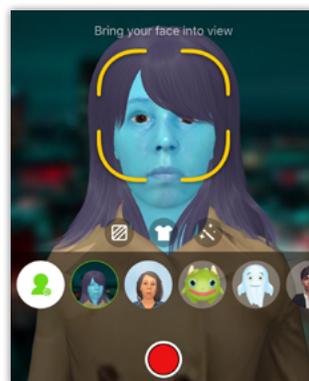
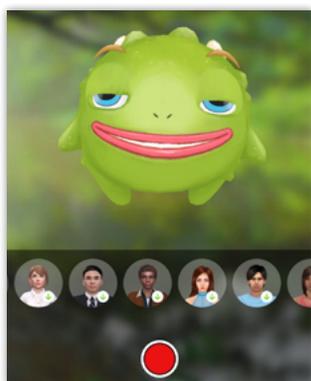
These chat rooms typically come with rules about behavior, e.g., no role playing allowed. Role playing (RP) seemed to be a common focus in many of the aminos we explored.

Below are two examples of different chat rooms within the Pokemon amino.



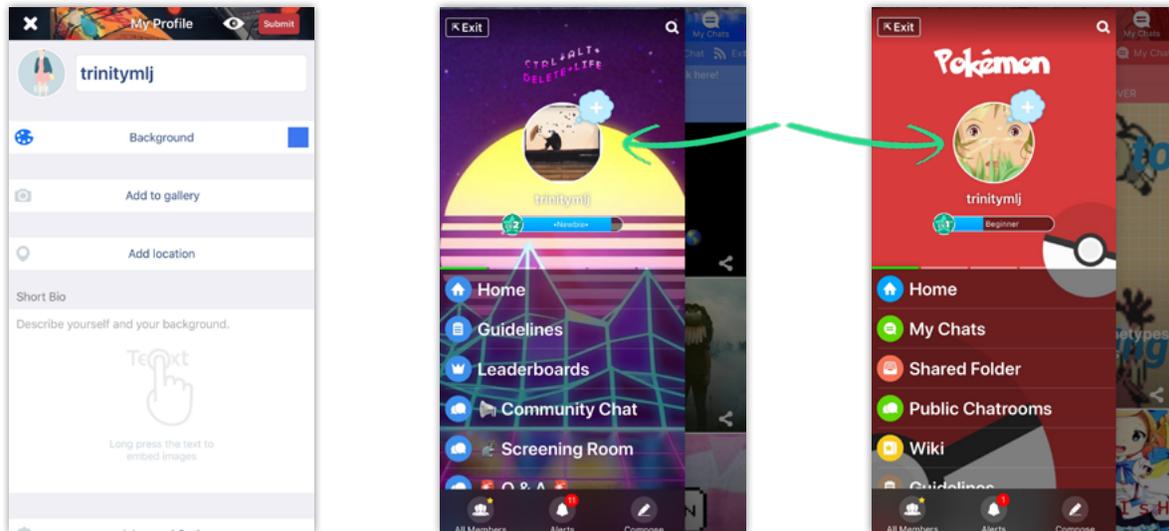
Something that stands out about Amino is its focus on privacy. Even though video chat is possible, the app requires you to use avatars so that no one can see what you really look like. The app also prevents users from putting the camera anywhere but on their faces.

Users can create and customize their avatars based on their actual faces, or they can use one of the avatars that Amino provides.

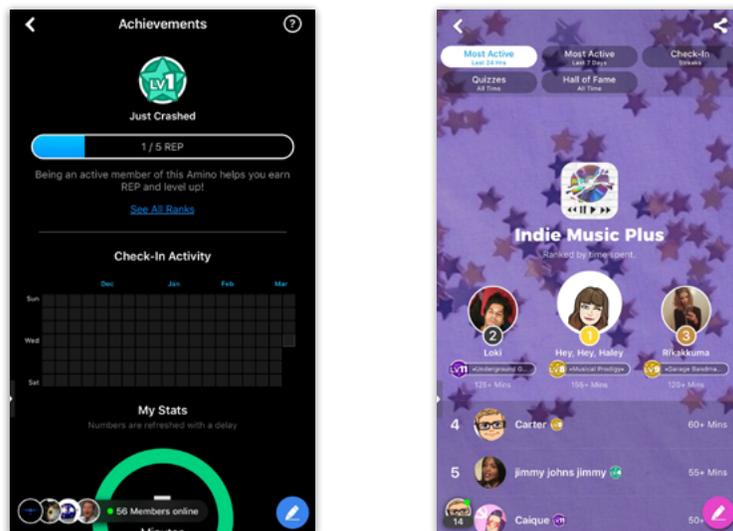


By tapping on **Profile** in the top left corner of an amino, users can customize their profiles, including the image, avatar, and bio description.

Users can also customize their bios for each amino they join. If so desired, a user can create an identity with a different gender and personality for every community he/she is in. This ability to keep user identity fluid is something else that stands out about Amino.



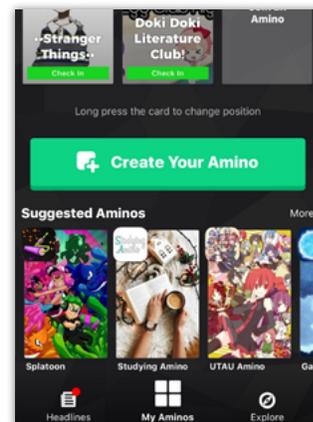
Amino gamifies your participation in each community. If you tap the “**Check In**” (located in the same sidebar once an amino has been joined), you earn REP (reputation) points and “level up” (below, left). The more often you check in to each amino, the faster you will increase your REP. The sidebar where you can edit your profile is also another way of accessing features of the amino, such as chats, guidelines, the shared folder, and Wiki Entries. Tapping on Leaderboards allows users to see which users are the most active in that amino (below, right).



One interesting characteristic of the public chats we joined was that navigating away from them didn't mean we stopped getting notifications about the latest messages in the chats. We continued receiving new comments from those chats as we explored other aminos.

To stop receiving chat messages, we had to go to **My Chats** in that amino and delete that chat. Something similar happened when we joined a screening room. After joining, when we clicked out of the room, we continued to hear audio for the video. We had to go back to the room, tap on the video, and click on the X that appeared in order to stop participating in the screening.

Users can create their own aminos (there's a button for this under the aminos you've joined in "My Aminos," far right), but must download the app **Amino Creator and Manager** to do so (icon pictured right).



We were able to successfully delete our Amino account in our main settings (we left all the aminos we'd joined before doing so). However, Amino apparently stores user information on its servers even after accounts are deleted. When we tried to create our account again using the same email address, Amino informed us that account had been deleted and asked us if we'd like to restore it. When we did, it pulled up our last profile pic and the avatar we had created and customized.

## Why do people like Amino?

After getting involved with several aminos, it's easy to see how teens could get sucked into this app, especially since it was always encouraging us to explore and join more aminos.

You get connected right away to communities of people who love what you love—provided that an amino was what it claimed to be, of course. When it came to aminos we were genuinely interested in, it was fun to see what other people liked and to make posts of our own about the topics we enjoyed. There are lots of opportunities to interact with people, and it was entertaining to explore an area of interest in depth.

Especially for teens who are less into mainstream or popular things than most of their peers, this can feel like a safe haven. Often, most teens at a school tend to like similar things (sports, movies, music, etc.). But there are inevitably some students who are into things that few, if any, students at their school even know about. This can lead to them feeling like (and sometimes being called) outcasts or rejects, or, at the very least, that they don't belong. Amino helps them find and connect with a community in which they feel they belong and are accepted.

As one astute mom said to us, if a parent disagrees with his/her teen about anything, the teen can easily and quickly find a community of people who support the teen's position, therefore validating the teen and, in most teen's minds, undermining the parent's position. It can quickly become a case of "your truth vs. my truth."

## What are Amino's dangers?

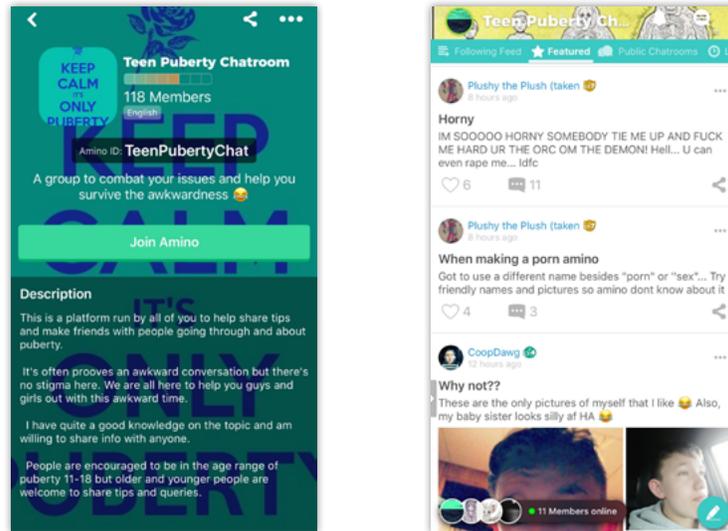
The most dangerous aspects of Amino are how easy it is to connect with strangers and to find (or stumble upon) mature content or inappropriate behavior.

Though pornography is against Amino's rules, the author of the Wired article we linked to above says she was able to find content on sexual fetishes within minutes of exploring Amino. Thankfully, nothing appeared in the search results when we looked up the words "fetish," "porn," or "BDSM," though we found quite a few results when we searched "sex," which is to be expected because there are many aminos for people who are bisexual, pansexual, and so on. We did pull up an amino called "Sex You Cant Get Mad About ;)" with the tagline "You can chill and rp [roleplay] sex with peeps." There was a softcore pornographic anime image in the

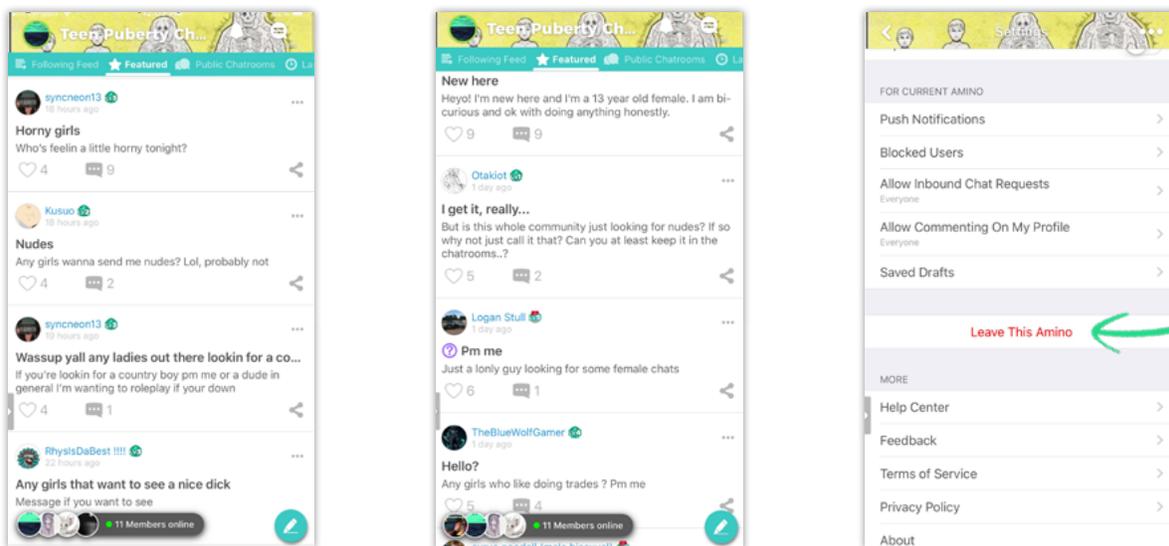
profile of this amino.

As we explored various posts and chats, it was pretty common to see profanity, including the f-word. Most of the aminos we ran across were what they claimed to be, but we did find one amino that was a goldmine of inappropriate content, contrary to its description.

The amino was called Teen Puberty Chatroom, and its description claimed it was a place for teens to support each other as they deal with puberty. What it turned out to be was a community for people who wanted to do sexual RP [roleplaying] and send each other nude pictures (see below; *beware: graphic language*).



We had not yet tried to leave an amino before joining this one, and figuring out how to leave it wasn't as intuitive as it could've been. Amino's support page was only moderately helpful. It turns out that to leave an amino, you click on Settings in that amino, and then scroll till you see the option to leave.



After we flagged this amino and left, we couldn't find it again, even when we searched for it by name. We're not sure if this is because we flagged it or for another reason.

### **The companion Amino Apps are not safe**

As we noted earlier, Amino began as a network of applications, and there are still quite few standalone aminos that people can download as apps separate from the main one. When the

standalone apps are on kid-friendly topics or appear visually oriented toward kids, then one might think that they are...well, safe for kids. This, however, is not the case.

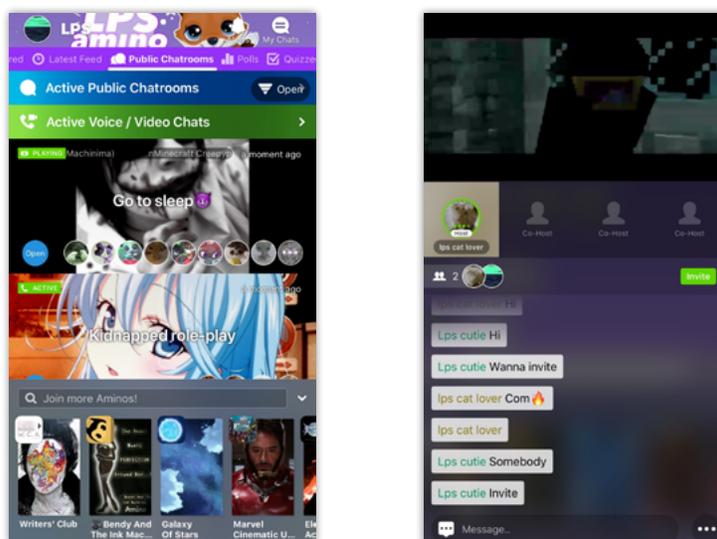
One mother [left a review here](#) about the toxic impact Amino had on her 13-year-old daughter as a result of the girl using the *Littlest Pet Shop* (a cartoon series) amino.

According to the mother, the daughter spiraled into depression and aggressive behavior because of using the app. The mom eventually discovered that her daughter was talking to strangers (which is really a given on *any* Amino app), sexting, and exploring self-harm and suicide.

We downloaded the *Littlest Pet Shop* (LPS) Amino after we'd already been exploring the main Amino application. The image that we'd last used for a customized profile within the main app is the one that appeared when we opened LPS. That alone tells you that the amino apps are connected. LPS also displayed the same username we'd used to sign up for the Amino master app.

At the bottom of the LPS Explore page, we saw the same aminos that had been suggested to us in the main app. These included aminos for *Bendy and the Ink Machine*, an amino on metal music, and a Pagans & Witches amino. In the main Amino app, when you go to the left hand sidebar, you can click "Exit" to leave the amino you're in and explore or enter another amino. In LPS, instead of "Exit," it says "More Aminos!" When you click on that, it takes you to the Explore page of the main app.

So there is absolutely no safety in downloading an Amino app separate from the master app. **Everything you can access in the main app is accessible in the standalone apps.** Another major concern we had about the LPS Amino was there was still access to public chats (below) and therefore easy access to strangers. (Another way of talking to people on Amino is through direct messaging.)



We also joined a screening room in LPS where other users were watching a video. We have no idea what the show was, but the tone was fairly dark. Obviously there's no way for parents to screen in advance anything their kids might watch on Amino. Also, we had to figure out how to actually leave the screening room, which took a minute.

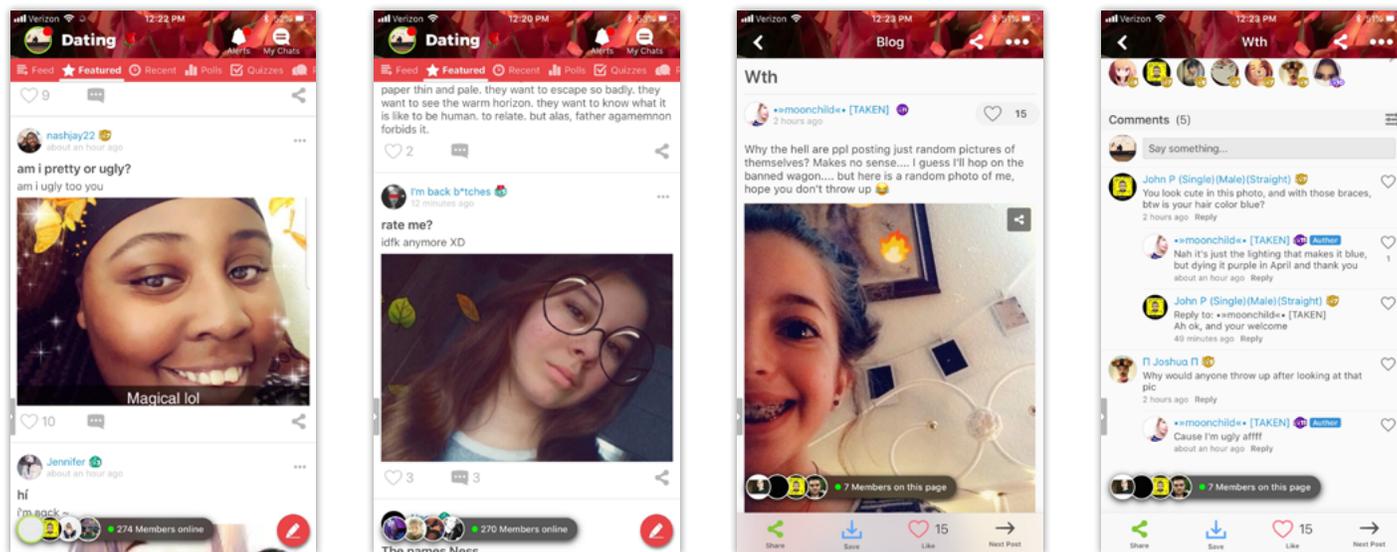
As we mentioned earlier, when we navigated out of it, the audio was still playing. If a child were in this situation trying to get away from a video with disturbing content, it would be scary. Not surprisingly, the LPS Amino appeared under My Aminos when we returned to the master app, and it remained there even when we deleted the standalone LPS app.

Protect Young Eyes has a [brief-but-helpful review](#) of Amino. They recommend it for kids ages

16 and older. This seems like a good idea, given the easy access to strangers, the availability of mature content, and the ability for people to customize their identities.

## All the Lonely People

Something else that stood out to us as we explored Amino was that there are a lot of lonely, sad people out there who are looking for affirmation online. Some post pictures of themselves and ask for other users to give opinions on how they look (below). While many who respond are affirming, the people asking for feedback are making themselves easy targets of potential criticism and cyberbullying.



We saw numerous comments from users who said they were depressed and lonely. Some wanted sexual RP, and some just wanted to talk to someone else. One user in a Twenty One Pilots amino started a public chat just so he/she could meet people and make friends.

## Should I let my kids get Amino?

We really like the parent review from Amy Mist D. currently at the top of [this page on Common Sense Media](#). This user notes the positives of the app and advises extreme caution without being reactionary. She notes the importance of teaching kids about internet safety and making sure they know they can approach you about anything without fear.

Deciding whether or not to allow your kids to download Amino is part of a larger question of how you are going to handle their smartphone and social media use. Protect Young Eyes has a [helpful article](#) on what to consider when asking whether you're going to allow your kids to use any kind of social media. For example, you certainly need to broach the topic of porn before your kids are teenagers (see our upcoming guides on pornography for further information) and definitely before you let them get on social media.

We recommend that you check out our [“Parent’s Guide to Smartphones”](#) for further information on what to consider before letting your children get a smartphone. You might realize that it’s better not to give your son or daughter one at the moment, which will then help answer your question about Amino.

New apps are coming out all the time, and it can be overwhelming to try to keep up with them. However, as we continue to evaluate these apps for parents, certain principles consistently rise to the surface:

1. No filter or parental control will be enough in and of itself to protect your children.
2. No application is absolutely safe, **no matter the purpose or apparent kid-friendliness of the app**. You should always thoroughly look into any application your kids are using and be aware of its dangers.
3. The most effective way to protect your children, in addition to relying on prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is to have open and ongoing conversations with them.

In fact, a basic premise of all of our parent guides is that open dialogue with your kids is crucial. Based on what we've told you about Amino and based on your kids' ages and maturity levels, you probably already have an idea about whether or not this app is appropriate for your children. If your kids are old enough and mature enough to use Amino, we strongly encourage you to have ongoing conversations with them about it (which you're hopefully already doing with other areas of their lives). We also recommend that you help them to have accountability for their use of the app.

And beyond helping them to avoid mature content, make sure you're talking to your kids about how to draw healthy emotional boundaries online. It can be tempting to look for affirmation on social media because it's so easy to ask for and to get. Online interactions don't require the vulnerability that face-to-face communication requires. Have conversations with your kids about why people post about personal issues online, why that's understandable, and why it's inadequate and potentially dangerous. Talk to them about healthy ways to process their emotions when they feel lonely. Here are some questions you might ask them.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Why do you want to use Amino? What appeals to you about it? What do you hope it will do for you?
- What are you going to do if you run into inappropriate content?
- How do you plan to keep yourself accountable for what you do on Amino?
- How far do you think you should take your interactions with people on Amino, i.e., do you think you should video- or voice-chat them?
- Do you want to start your own amino? What do you want it to be about? What do you hope to do through it? Have you thought through what guidelines you would have?
- Why do people post about personal issues and look for validation on social media?
- Have you ever wanted to complain about or post something personal online?
- What are healthy ways of dealing with frustration or loneliness? Why are these methods harder than posting online? Why are they better?
- How can loneliness actually be a way of deepening your relationship with God?

## **Conclusion**

With all of the dangers present on the internet, it's easy to see every new app as another opportunity for your children to be harmed and corrupted. However, it's important to recognize that there is usually something good at the root of whatever human beings create. The idea behind Amino is good, but its creators did not make it with children in mind, and its perils are real.

Relying on the Lord for wisdom and praying constantly should be our first priority. Then, we must pursue relationships with our kids. More than controlling their behavior, let's make it our goal to disciple their hearts to love what God loves, hate what He hates, and to choose that which brings them the abundant life He promises.

## — Additional Resources

[“Origin and Evolution of Amino Apps,”](#) Amino user

[“How to Understand What Info Mobile Apps Are Collecting About You,”](#) Slate

[Amino Terms of Service](#)

[Amino Privacy Policy](#)

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