

# Schools using smart phone technology against sex assaults

May 22 2017, by Robin Mcdowell

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The same technology that keeps kids glued to their smart phones is being used by some schools as protection against sexual assaults . Using apps, victims and bystanders can alert school officials, police or parents to trouble. While the systems can be used by kids pranking each other, app developers and school officials say most claims end up being credible. Reporting happens as events unfold and administrators can respond immediately.

The real challenge is money. Not all schools can afford the apps, some of which base their cost on the number of [users](#) or size of a student population. However, [school](#) insurance companies increasingly are picking up the tab, seeing the apps as a tool to mitigate risk.

Experts also warn that these apps should never be considered the sole way for a school to address the issue of student sexual assault.

Here are a few of them:

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STOPit : New Jersey-based creator Todd Schobel launched this app in 2013. His inspiration was Amanda Todd, a 15-year-old who committed suicide after posting a video on YouTube in which she held up flashcards describing how her topless image ended up on the Internet, triggering a relentless barrage of bullying. The app—championed by Amanda's mom—allows victims and bystanders to report anonymously

to administrators, teachers and virtually anyone the school deems appropriate. There are no parental controls. Users can send either a single text or have a two-way chat, and can attach pictures, screenshots and video. The person who receives the alert can forward the information to law enforcement or suicide response teams, depending on the risk. The app stores all evidence and notes regarding incidents in a secure cloud-based server so school administrators can collect and analyze it over time.

Number of users: More than 2.5 million in K-12, according to the company.

What it costs: Schools pay \$1 to \$5 per head for the app, depending on the size of the [student](#) body. Some school insurers also have begun paying for the software for their clients' use because they see it as a way to mitigate risk.

Available for download: Apple's App Store or Google Play.

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**ANONYMOUS ALERTS:** The name pretty much says it. Students can overcome the social pressures associated with "ratting out" peers by sending in anonymous tips. This app has dropdown menus, asking users what type of school they attend and where the incident took place, where it be a bus, hallway or gym. Students can either send [school administrators](#) a single text or have back-and-forth conversations. They also can attach pictures, social media screenshots or video. The president of the company, Gregory Bender, created his first emergency messaging system after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The computer software for his latest app—launched in 2013 to address all kinds of bullying—also collects alerts from students over time so schools can monitor trends.

Number of users: Around 5 million in K-12 schools, according to the company. It is available only to participating schools with a license.

What it costs: 50 cents to \$2 per head.

Available for download: Apple's App Store or Google Play and Chromebook Store.

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**CIRCLE of 6:** Created by sexual assault survivors, this one was born out of the White House's "Apps Against Abuse" challenge in 2011. Though the company Tech 4 Good initially developed the app for colleges, it now has been customized for use by younger students. After downloading the app, students pick six trusted friends to join a "circle." If they are in a precarious situation, users click an icon that sends a prewritten text message telling their friends they may need help and what kind. The app also includes informative links about sexual abuse and national hot lines. Prince William County Public Schools, the second-largest school district in Virginia with some 90,000 students, signed up its K-12 schools in 2016. The district says it doesn't know how many students have downloaded the app, but developers say it's the first grade school in the U.S. to sign on. Circle of 6 was customized and designed to provide an extra layer of protection for younger kids, with parental permission required for those under 13 to download the app.

Number of users: 350,000 (mostly colleges)

What it costs: \$1 to \$3 per head.

Available for download: Apple's App Store or Google Play.

KNOWBullying: This [mobile app](#) is for parents, aimed at helping initiate difficult conversations about bullying and harassment with kids. It also helps parents look out for different warning signs—not only to help identify if their kids may have been bullied, but also if they might be doing the bullying. It initially was created for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Number of users: Around 30,000

What it costs: Free.

Available for download: Apple's App Store or Google Play.

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