



Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

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Advocates Charge Google with Deceiving Parents about Content on YouTube Kids, Request FTC Action App for preschoolers is rife with videos that are potentially harmful to children

Washington, DC – Tuesday, May 19 – Two leading child and consumer advocacy groups [have filed an important update to their Federal Trade Commission complaint](#) against Google’s YouTube Kids app for false and deceptive marketing. In a letter sent to the Commission today, the groups charged that Google is deceiving parents by marketing YouTube Kids as a safe place for children under five to explore when, in reality, the app is rife with videos that would not meet anyone’s definition of “family friendly.” A review by the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (CCFC) and Center for Digital Democracy (CDD) has found a significant amount of content that would be extremely disturbing and/or potentially harmful for young children to view, including:

- Explicit sexual language presented amidst cartoon animation
- Videos that model unsafe behaviors such as playing with lit matches, shooting a nail gun, juggling knives, tasting battery acid, and making a noose
- A profanity-laced parody of the film *Casino* featuring Bert and Ernie from *Sesame Street*
- Graphic adult discussions about family violence, pornography, and child suicide
- Jokes about pedophilia and drug use
- Advertising for alcohol products

CDD and CCFC provided [a video](#) to the FTC today documenting an array of inappropriate content that can be found on YouTube Kids.

“Federal law prevents companies from making deceptive claims that mislead consumers,” said Aaron Mackey, the coalition’s attorney at Georgetown Law’s Institute for Public Representation. “Google promised parents that YouTube Kids would deliver appropriate content for children, but it has failed to fulfill its promise. Parents rightfully feel deceived by YouTube Kids.”

Google claims that YouTube Kids was “built from the ground up with little ones in mind” and is “packed full of age-appropriate videos.” The app includes a search function that is voice-enabled for easy use for preschool children. Google says it uses “a mix of automated analysis, manual sampling, and input from our users to categorize and screen out videos and topics that may make parents nervous.” Google also assures parents that they “can rest a little easier knowing that videos in the YouTube Kids app are narrowed down to content appropriate for kids.”

But, as the complaint explains:

Google does not, in fact, “screen out the videos that make parents nervous” and its representations of YouTube Kids as a safe, child-friendly version of YouTube are deceptive. Parents who download the app are likely to expose their children to the very content they believed they would avoid by using the preschool version of YouTube. In addition to the unfair and deceptive marketing practices we identified in our initial

request for an investigation, it is clear that Google is deceiving parents about the effectiveness of their screening processes and the content on YouTube Kids.

“In the rush to expand its advertising empire to preschoolers, Google has made promises about the content on YouTube Kids that it is incapable of keeping,” said Josh Golin, Associate Director of CCFC. “As a parent, I was shocked to discover that an app that Google claims is safe for young children to explore includes so much inappropriate content from the Wild West of YouTube.”

Today’s letter is an update to [the advocates’ April 7, 2015 FTC complaint](#) that charged Google with engaging in unfair and deceptive practices towards children and their parents. That complaint detailed how YouTube Kids featured ads and other marketing material that took advantage of children’s developmental vulnerabilities. It also noted that the “blending of children’s programming content with advertising material on television has long been prohibited because it is unfair and deceptive to children. The fact that children are viewing the videos on a tablet or smart phone screen instead of on a television screen does not make it any less unfair and deceptive.” The complaint also called on the FTC to address the failure by Google to disclose that many makers of so-called “user-generated” videos featuring toys and candy have relationships with those product’s manufacturers.

“The same lack of responsibility Google displayed with advertising violations on YouTube Kids is also apparent in the content made available on the app,” observed Dale Kunkel, Professor of Communication at University of Arizona. “There is a serious risk of harm for children who might see these videos. It’s clear Google simply isn’t ready to provide genuinely appropriate media products for children.”

Added Jeff Chester, executive director of CDD, “Google gets an 'F' when it comes to protecting America’s youngest kids. The failure of the most powerful and technologically advanced media company to create a safe place for America’s youngest kids requires immediate action by the FTC.”

Today’s letter to the FTC is available at <http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/youtubeletter>.

The coalition’s original FTC complaint is available at <http://commercialfreechildhood.org/sites/default/files/youtubekidslettert.pdf>.

The compilation of YouTube Kids video clips can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/127837914>.