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## Parenting, Media, and Everything In Between

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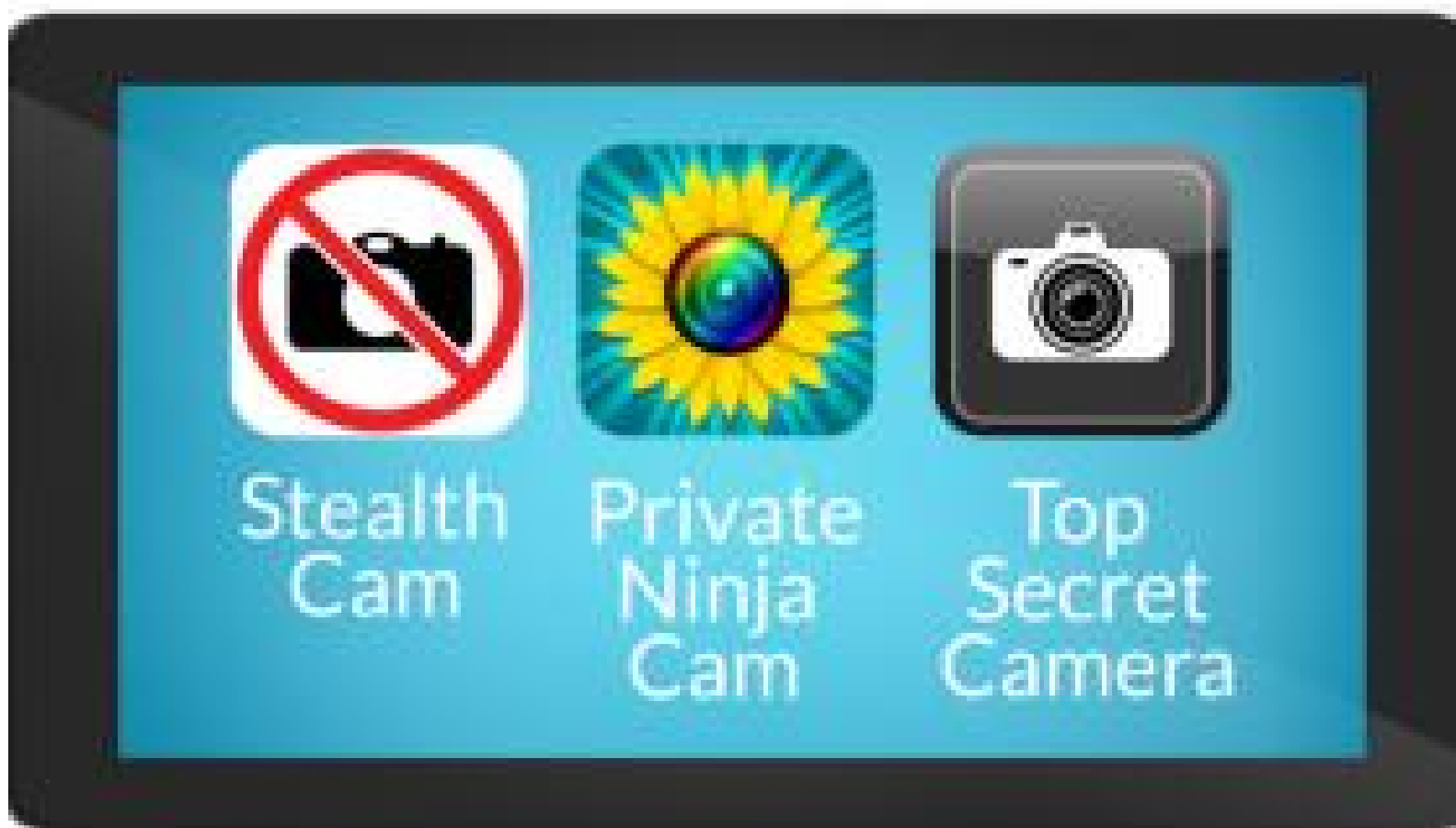
### Sneaky Camera Apps Parents Should Know About

Stealthy teens can use apps with names such as Private Ninja Cam and Best Secret Folder to throw parents off the trail. By [Christine Elgersma](#) 11/9/2015

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Topics: [Cell Phone Parenting](#), [Digital Citizenship](#), [Privacy and Internet Safety](#)

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For kids, the joys of friendship are often expressed in the photos they share on social apps such as [Snapchat](#), [Instagram](#), and [WhatsApp](#). These types of photos -- the group shot from a day at the beach, a selfie at the DMV or the prom -- document kids' lives and strengthen relationships. But as we all know, cell phone cameras can be misused, and a new crop of photo apps are being used to hide photos instead of share them. Sometimes called "ghost apps," these secret-camera and hidden-photo-vault apps let you snap pictures or video without anyone knowing and stash them in secret folders. Use of these apps for sexting is increasing in schools, including [a Denver-area school in a situation that involved hundreds of students](#).

Apps such as *Stealth Cam*, *Private Ninja Cam*, and *Top Secret Camera* can be used to spy on people. Here are some of the methods they use to deceive the unsuspecting:

- blanking the screen so no one knows you're taking a picture;
- muting the phone so the shutter doesn't sound;
- disguising the preview window so it looks like a Web browser; and
- activating the camera to record via motion sensor.

Hidden-photo vaults, such as *Calculator%*, *Keep Safe Private Photo Vault*, and *Best Secret Folder*, are places to keep photos out of view from a prying parent or friend. They share key features, including:

- requiring a password for access;
- hiding their true purpose (fake calculator apps actually do function as calculators but double as a way to input a secret code and stash secret pictures); and
- sounding an alarm or snapping a picture when accessed to catch anyone trying to break in.

Teens -- naturally seeking privacy and independence from adults -- could be tempted to experiment with these kinds of apps, such as the [teen who was caught](#) with an "upskirt" picture of his teacher. But they also might appeal to kids who don't have much to hide, so if you suspect a student of using a secret-camera app, don't freak out immediately. Instead, open a dialogue with parents and students about sexting and using phones responsibly.

Share these tips with parents to help them get the conversation going with their teens:

- Talk to your teens about [using phones responsibly](#). Explain that you respect their privacy (if you don't, you could [drive their activities underground](#)).
- Remind them that taking and/or sharing embarrassing or revealing pictures often comes back to haunt people, so resist the temptation.
- Consider that kids might not be trying to hide photos from you but from nosy friends. If that's the case, try to find out why.
- If you need to do a spot check, on iPhones go into Settings -> Privacy -> Camera to see which apps have used the camera. This will reveal any camera apps disguised as something else.
- Finally, consider that teens like to experiment with technology, and just because they have a secret-camera or hidden-photo-vault app, it doesn't mean they're up to no good.

For even more guidance on helping teens and parents talk about sexting and using phones responsibly, check out our [Sexting Handbook](#) or our [Connecting Families conversation guide and family tips sheet on sexting](#).

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### [About Christine Elgersma](#)

Christine Elgersma started as Senior Editor, Apps and Digital Learning in January, 2015. Before coming to Common Sense, she helped cultivate and create ELA curriculum for a K-12 app, taught the youth of America as a... [Read more](#)

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