

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

Spotify

axis

Spotify Puts a World of Music at Your Fingertips—All 250 Years of It

It's a rough estimate, but if you were to listen to every song on Spotify, it would take about 250 years to get through it all. And that's not including the 24,000 new songs uploaded every day.

Spotify is the world's most popular music streaming app, competing with services like Apple Music and Pandora. Long gone are the days of counting out your allowance money and choosing between albums at the record store. With Spotify, you can search for any song, create custom playlists, and discover new music through curated playlists. For free.

Chances are, your child is using this service to listen to anything from Top 40 hits to 1970s German Disco. Maybe you've noticed a recurring \$9.99 fee show up on your credit card ("I thought it was free!"). And as a parent, you might be wondering how Spotify works, whether it's like other social media apps, and how to keep your children safe from inappropriate content.

— What is Spotify?

At its most basic, Spotify is a music streaming service. It began in 2006 as a small, Swedish tech company, but just last year it went public and was [worth just under \\$30 billion](#). It boasts 191 million active users across the globe. The app seems to only be growing in popularity. For example, in March 2019, Spotify India [added 1 million new users](#) in under one week.

— On what platforms is it available?

Virtually all of them. [It's available](#) in a web browser, a desktop app (for Windows, MacOS, and Linux), and a mobile app (for iOS and Android). It's also [compatible with](#) many smart speakers, smart TVs, wearables, car systems, gaming consoles, and smart displays.

— Who uses it?

Out of all the different music streaming apps, Spotify appeals to the youngest demographic. Users under the age of 24 [made up 26% of total listeners](#). This is important because the chances that your child is using Spotify [is disproportionately high](#) compared with its competitors, of which there are many, but [the main ones](#) are Apple Music, Google Play Music, Pandora, Tidal, and Amazon Music Unlimited. (Keep in mind that these statistics are from Q4 2017, so preferences may have changed some since.)

— Why is it so popular?

Spotify is known for its unique music recommendation features. On a basic level, Spotify allows users to see what their friends are listening to. If Becky is listening to a new song, your child will be more likely to also listen to it. Call it subtle peer pressure. Call it a music community. Either way, Spotify is going to recommend music based on friends' listening history.

But a friend's listening feed is not what makes Spotify unique. It's services like Discover Weekly that set it apart from other apps. Spotify uses computer algorithms to create custom playlists based on songs and artists you listen to. These playlists update weekly so you've always got new, relevant music to listen to.

In "[How Does Spotify Know You So Well?](#)" a writer from Medium describes the feature this way: "This Monday—just like every Monday before it—over 100 million Spotify users found a fresh new playlist waiting for them called Discover Weekly. It's a custom mixtape of 30 songs they've never listened to before but will probably love, and it's pretty much magic." The author goes on to say how these playlists make her feel "seen" and "delighted." Clearly, Spotify's popularity rests on the way it makes users (especially teens) feel unique and understood in their music tastes.

Another recommendation service is Spotify Wrapped. At the end of the year, Spotify collects all of the songs you've listened to over the past 12 months and wraps them up in a pretty playlist. The Spotify website puts it this way, "Back by popular demand, [Wrapped](#) allows you to rediscover and share the music and podcasts that formed your personal soundtrack in 2018." Users can share these playlists with friends and say, "This is who I am."

As humans, we share and curate music naturally. In the past, we would go over to a friend's house to listen to new records, or a friend would lend you a CD to listen to. If a good buddy asked you to a concert, even though you'd never heard of the band, you'd go based on the strength of his recommendation. We create community through music tastes. Now more than ever, teens build identity and friendships through music. And Spotify puts these connections on steroids.

Guess what? It works. Statistics say that [44% of users](#) listen to Spotify on a daily basis. That means users have developed strong habits and loyalty to the platform. (For an in-depth discussion of why Gen Z loves music so much, check out our [Parent's Guide to Gen Z's Love of Music](#).)

— If it's free, why am I paying for it?

That could be because Spotify has made it quite desirable to pay for [Spotify Premium](#). With Spotify Free, all you have to do is sign in with a Facebook account or an email address to get access to their entire library of music and playlist capabilities along with recommendations, but you will have to listen to ads every third song or so and you don't get unlimited skipping of songs.

With Spotify Premium (\$9.99/month for individuals, \$5.99/month [for college students](#), and \$14.99/month [for families](#) of up to 6 people), you're able to download songs to listen offline, eliminate ads, have unlimited skips, get high quality audio, and get access to Hulu.

Free music? Is Spotify legal?

An important question. Many of us remember the illegal downloading era of the early 2000s. Websites like [Napster](#), [Limewire](#), and [Pirate Bay](#) (also Swedish) allowed users to download any song imaginable without cost and without compensating the original artist, which is why so many of them ran into legal issues and were even shut down.

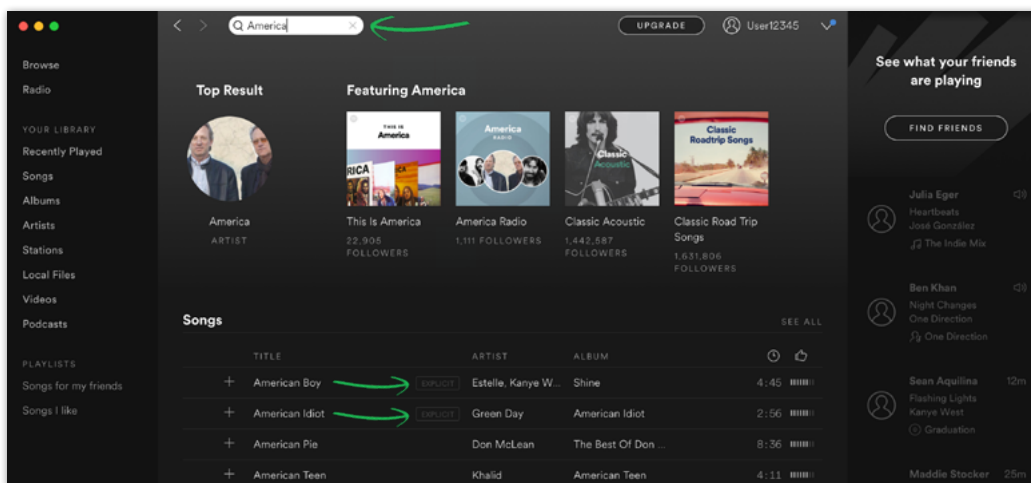
Obviously, Spotify had to be different or risk the same fate as others, so the company pays artists through ad revenue and subscriptions. But that isn't to say they've solved the problem; some artists claim Spotify doesn't pay enough. Pop star Taylor Swift [has been outspoken against](#) their pay structure and is a huge advocate for fair pay, [removing her music](#) from all streaming services (except Apple Music) from 2014-2017 in protest. So while Spotify is legal to use, it may be worth having a conversation with your child about what it means to support ethical businesses.

How does it work?

Because Spotify is more or less a digital library of music, you can search for almost any song, artist, or album. And you can sort "your" music into playlists (we say "your" because you never actually own any of the music—as soon as you close your account, you lose access to everything). With that in mind, there are three main features of Spotify's interface: Search, Playlists, and Browse.

Search

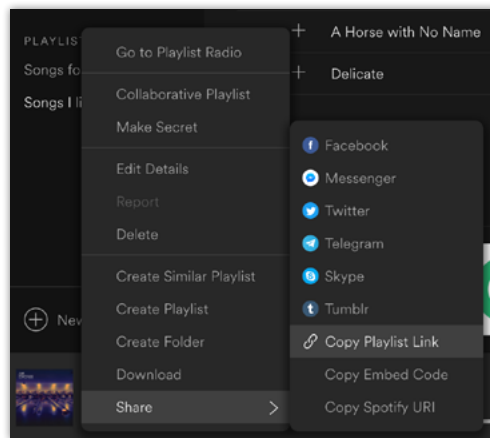
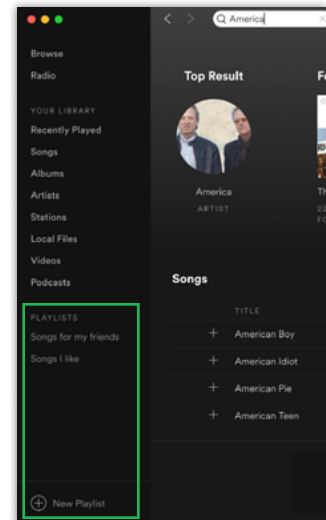
A straightforward-but-powerful feature. Search allows users to find songs, artists, and albums based on a specific term. In the screenshot below, we searched for "America," and Spotify presented us with all the related content. Note that even benign searches will bring up Explicit content in the top song results (unless changed in Settings; more on that below).



Playlists

Spotify allows users to customize their own playlists. These are accessed on the bottom left side of the interface (see image) and aren't limited by genre or artist. Literally any song in the Spotify database can be added to an unlimited number of playlists, and if a user makes their playlists public, they can be found by anyone else. A few of the playlist titles we found across the platform: "I'm Not Going to Teach Your Boyfriend How to Dance with You," "70s Brasil—Samba Soul, Brazilian Disco Funk... e mais—The Best Brazilian Music of the 1970s," and "Rainy Day Worship Jams."

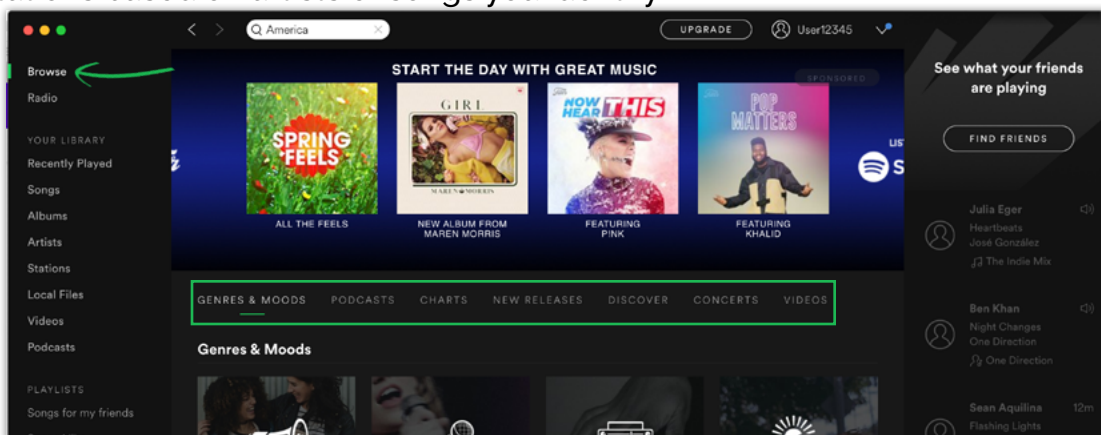
You can also share a playlist with a friend by right-clicking the playlist name and selecting the method of delivery (see image below).



Browse

This feature, which is where Spotify provides its music recommendations like Discover Weekly, can be accessed via the top left corner of the interface (see image). You can discover new music by Genre, Top Charts, New Releases, Discovery, and more. As a user listens to more music and create playlists, Spotify will use algorithms to create playlists based on similar artists.

The radio feature, which is below the Browse button, is similar. It will create custom radio stations based on artists or songs you identify.



— So it's just music?

Not anymore, though it's still mainly focused on audio (at least for now; it hasn't announced plans to venture into video content...yet). The platform recently branched into the podcast space, [purchasing some of the biggest names](#) in podcasting. If you're not familiar yet, podcasts are basically internet radio shows that typically include one or two speakers who interview guests or investigate a topic. These can be *anything*: politics, comedy, religion, sports, entertainment, history, etc.

This can be both a positive and negative experience for your child. Spotify enables access to a world of beneficial content. He/she can learn about God's creation through a nature podcast or jump deeper into theology with a podcast hosted by a well-respected pastor. But of course, this almost means that content opposed to a Christian worldview and/or filled with crass content is plentiful and easily accessible.

Something to be aware of is that their recommendation process also applies to podcasts. If a child gets hooked on a podcast of which you don't approve, Spotify will recommend similar podcasts, making it all too easy for your child to find unhealthy ideas and viewpoints. This doesn't necessarily mean that it's bad, just that it might be appropriate to listen to podcasts with your child so you can have conversations about what they hear or to require them to get your approval before listening to a new podcast.

— Is it a social media app? Can my child interact with strangers on it?

Whenever our teenagers sign up for a new app or website, we want to know what interactions they might have with other users. Seemingly innocent apps like TikTok (a lip-syncing app) opens the door for inappropriate conversations with strangers. (Curious about TikTok? Check out our [Parent Guide](#).)

Currently Spotify does not include Direct Messaging. Users can connect with friends, and if they sign up through Facebook, they can connect with Facebook contacts. But interactions are limited to sharing songs and seeing public listening feeds. In other words, your child could send and receive music recommendations from other users, but they wouldn't be able to chat or send photos. If settings are set to public, other users can see what your child is listening to.

Rarely, if ever, would a complete stranger target another Spotify user and send them inappropriate content. In our use of the app and in research, we haven't come across instances of this happening.

— What about data privacy?

Like nearly every other app connected to the internet, Spotify collects and sells user data. It connects with advertisers and let them know a user's likes, usage habits, and

interests. This happens each time a song is played. [Researchers have found](#) “no less than 22 mostly advertising-related companies in that cacophony, tracking listening habits and providing real-time analytics. This data is packaged and resold.”

Is this a major cause for alarm? Probably not. Most data aggregation is anonymous for most intents and purposes, and the data collected is related to music searches and listening habits, not personal information like names, addresses, and financial information. Still, parents should be aware that data privacy is a serious issue in our modern world.

Moreover, Spotify has been [accused of manipulating users' emotions](#). Obviously, the company wants users to use its service, so it consistently skews its curated playlists toward “happy” music. Happy music gets listeners coming back for more. This might not be inherently problematic—no one wants their kids to never be happy—but it could lead to your child listening to shallow “happy” music or leading your child to seek out short-term, “feel good” stimuli.

— Are there parental controls?

Long gone are the days of hiding an explicit CD under the bed in the hopes mom won't find it. Now, children and teens can hide behind deleted search histories and separate accounts.

For Spotify, the answer to whether you can filter out explicit content is yes and no. The reason for this is that Spotify has an inconsistent approach when it comes to parental controls.

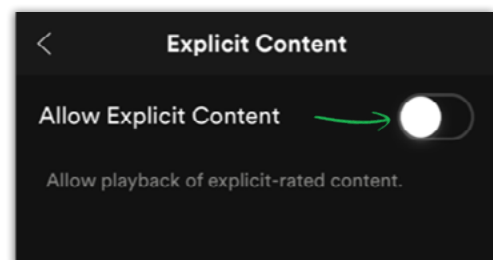
For most songs with profanity and adult content, Spotify will mark it with “Explicit” or “E.” (It's worth mentioning that the Explicit tag is added to a song [based on](#) information given to Spotify from the rights holders, so they don't guarantee that all explicit content will be marked as such.) But this won't deter kids from listening to it, and it takes quite a bit of maturity for a child to self-police. In addition, many songs and podcasts may be profanity-free but still be full of ideas that could be unhealthy, not God- or others-honoring, and lead to long-term consequences if internalized. The converse is also true; there are many songs that are beautiful, thoughtful, and helpful but also contain a word or two that we consider inappropriate. So simply marking things as explicit based on words is a fallible system.

With that said, here are the options for blocking explicit content.

Smartphone/Tablet:

From the Home screen, tap Your Library > Settings > Explicit Content. Turn the “Explicit Content” toggle off. It should turn gray (see image).

This will make Explicit songs inaccessible. However, **because there's no Parental Control Password, if**

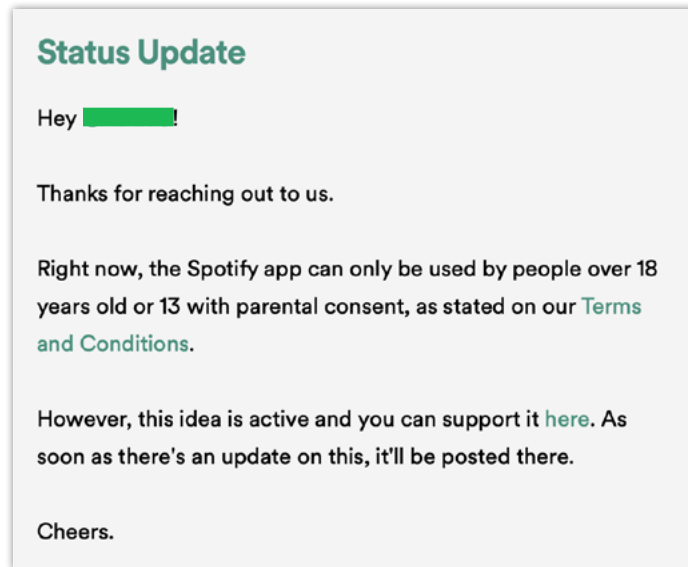


your child knows about this feature and has access to their account, they can go in and change it when you aren't around.

Desktop:

At the moment, Spotify says the best way to avoid Explicit Content on desktop is to not listen to Explicit Content. In other words, **there is no filter for desktop**. Though their [support site says](#) "more devices coming soon!" for the Explicit Content Filter, they also recommend seeing if a song has a "clean" version available, then choosing that one.

As for the rollout of more robust parental controls, the Spotify website gives this response:



For updates on parental control, head to [Spotify's official site](#).

If you have kids ages 3-8 who would like to listen to music, check out [Fruit Punch](#). The app offers a kid-friendly experience with no explicit content. Its music selection isn't as large as Spotify's and other streaming services', and it could cause older children to feel belittled and controlled, but it's a viable option if you're worried about what they can access.

— Is there anything else I could or should do to help my kids make wise decisions regarding what they listen to?

It's helpful to think of Spotify as a platform rather than an app. In other words, it's like the Walmart of music: It offers everything, and it's not trying to push a specific genre. It isn't interested in actively pressuring your child into listening to Satan-inspired death metal or rap music about killing cops. But if your child shows an interest in these genres, it makes it easy to find and listen to these types of music...and it will recommend others like it.

Because of this, we recommend taking the following actions with regard to your child's music habits.

First, set a good music-listening example. If there's music you believe is life giving, consider playing it in the car or while making dinner. Don't force it on your children. Give them a say in the family playlist. But your music choices will rub off on your children one way or another.

Second, don't freak out if they don't like what you choose or aren't particularly into "Christian" music. In the past, Christian music has focused so much on the message that it's sacrificed the method. Music isn't just supposed to *tell* us about God; it's also supposed to gently point us to Him through its beauty, its craft, and its quality. And if Christian music doesn't do that, it won't appeal to your teens because Gen Z often cares more about whether something is well made and beautiful than if it's true. Help them find music that cares about both its truthfulness and its quality, then be willing to listen to it with them. (For a more in-depth discussion of this and other aspects of music, check out our [Parent's Guide to Gen Z's Love of Music](#).)

— Discussion Questions

- **What are your favorite bands/artists?** This can be a good introduction question. It shows you're interested and gives your child a chance to speak on a topic they're passionate about. If they're visibly uncomfortable, it's likely they're listening to something they know they shouldn't be.
- **What playlists are your friends listening to?** This asks your child to face the idea that their music tastes might not be the same as their friends'. It might also allow them to open up about peer pressure and feeling uncomfortable with what their friends listen to and share on Spotify.
- **Have you ever looked for Christian music playlists? Did you know that there is Christian music that doesn't sound like what we listen to at church?** Kids don't know what they don't know. One problem with 250 years of music at one's fingertips is that good content gets buried. This simple question could open your child's eyes to a whole world of life-giving music.
- **What's a topic you're interested in learning more about? Did you know Spotify offers podcasts in which experts are probably talking about that topic?**
- **How would you define the word "explicit"? Based on that definition, is explicit music something you would want in your life?** Rather than opening with rules and restrictions, lead your child to the conclusion themselves. If they define "explicit" in their own words, they might see for themselves that this music is not beneficial to their spiritual walk.
- **Do Spotify's recommendations ever make you feel uncomfortable? Like, "Why does Spotify think I'd like this?" or "Is this really what I'm into?"** Perhaps explain that Spotify makes recommendations off user data—which isn't always accurate.

Just because Spotify recommends a song doesn't mean it's because your child is unconsciously dirty or sinful. Encourage your child to be confident in their identity and say no to poor recommendations.

- **Have you ever added up the time you spend on Spotify each day? Is it more than you thought?** Most teens don't know just how much time they spend on their phones and computers. Many are caught in unintentional digital addictions. There are apps online that can track app usage for an accurate number.
- **How does the amount of music available on Spotify make you feel? Do you see it as an opportunity for discovery or is it overwhelming?** This question can bring up very important conversations about curation and choice. How do we sort through all this music? Who do we ask for recommendations? How can we be discerning in this area?
- **Have you ever felt like you *have to* listen to music? Could you take a day without listening to music?** Again, many teens don't think through the implications of listening to music 24/7. It feels good, so they do it. They never stop to realize that too much of a good thing can be detrimental. Encourage them to take weekly or monthly sabbaths from music.
- **Do you think artists are being paid fairly through this service? If not, does it change whether or not you'll use Spotify?** Just because a thing is legal doesn't make it right. Younger generations are more interested in social issues, so this can be a good way to engage in your child's passions and to help them consider how our current systems have an effect on others.
- **Are there other industries or companies that aren't paying their employees well? As a family, what should we do about that?**

— Recap

- Spotify is the largest music streaming app in the world.
- Its users are overwhelmingly young people.
- Recommendations are what make it powerful.
- It's more a music player interface than a social media app.
- While children can come across inappropriate content on the platform, there's also an opportunity to find beautiful, life-giving music as well.
- It's now becoming a major player in the podcast community.
- It **does not** currently have a robust parental control system.

— Related Axis Resources

- [The Culture Translator](#), a **free** weekly email that offers biblical insight on all things teen-related
- [A Parent's Guide to Gen Z's Love of Music](#)

- [A Parent's Guide to TikTok](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Profanity](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Drake](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Kendrick Lamar](#)

Additional Resources

- "[How Does Spotify Know You So Well?](#)" Medium
- "[How Does the Spotify Algorithm Work?](#)" Spotify
- "[Best Music-Streaming Service for Kids,](#)" Spyzie
- "[Announcing Fruit Punch Music—Spotify for Kids,](#)" Fruit Punch
- [Parent Reviews for Spotify,](#) Common Sense Media
- "[Spotify's New Kids Playlists Help Parents Turn Everyday Moments Into Memories,](#)" Parents
- "[Spotify Introduces Explicit Filter for Child-Friendly Music Streaming,](#)" Routenote
- "[Spotify Stock Pops in IPO Debut, Before Cooling Down to \\$26 Billion Market Cap,](#)" *Variety*
- "[Spotify and Apple Music Should Become Record Labels So Musicians Can Make a Fair Living,](#)" CNBC
- "[Should Spotify Change the Way It Pays Artists?](#)" *Rolling Stone*

Support Axis to Get More Resources Like This!

Thanks so much for purchasing this Parent Guide from Axis! As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit ministry, Axis invests all proceeds from your purchases back into the creation of more quality content like this. By purchasing this and [other content](#) from Axis, you support our ministry, allowing us to come alongside you in your parenting and/or discipleship journey. We couldn't do it without you!

We're creating more content every day! If you found this guide helpful and valuable, check out axis.org/guides each month for new Guides covering all-new topics and for other resources.