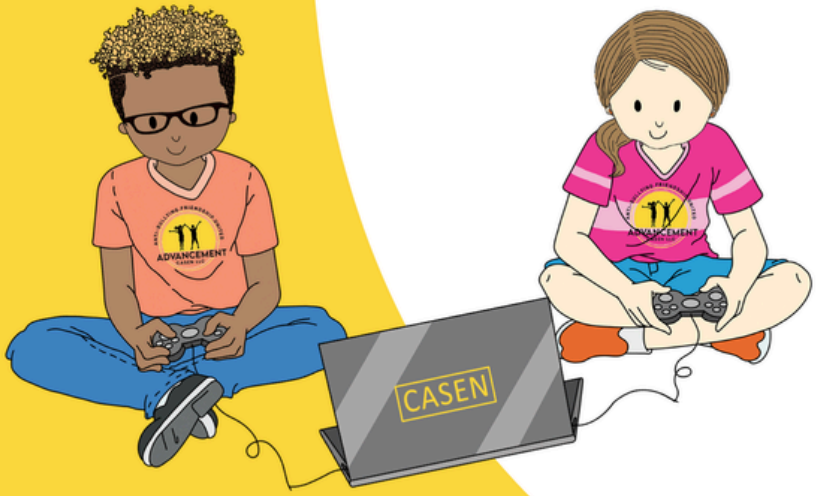
CASEN APPS AND TOOLS GUIDE

Choosing and using monitoring tools for your neurodivergent child

By Dr. Myava Clark
& Chris Clark Jr.









LETTER FOR THE PARENTS

Dear Parents,

I know what it feels like to have a teenage child bullied online. Parents often tell me they want one app that will make the whole problem go away. If you are reading this, you may be looking for that app too.

Here is the honest answer I wish someone had given me. No app can make the internet safe. The right tool, set up the right way, can give you an early warning, more time to teach, and more peace of mind. The wrong tool, or the right one used in secret, can cost you your child's trust. That is the one thing you need most when something goes wrong.

This guide will not tell you which app is "best." It will help you decide what your family actually needs, start with the free tools you already own, and choose a paid app only if it fills a real gap. It will also help you talk to your child about it, so monitoring feels like support and not like spying.

Our son Chris needed the skills, not just the safeguards. So does your child. Tools buy time. Skills keep them safe when no tool is watching.

Sincerely,
Dr. Clark



Which CASEN Guide Do You Need?

This guide picks up where *Before Something Happens* leaves off. That guide prepares your family. This one helps you choose and use a monitoring product.

If you are asking	Open
How do I set my child up safely before anything goes wrong?	*Before Something Happens: Essential Tools to Protect Neurodivergent Children in the Digital Age*
How do I help my child speak up and tell me when something is wrong?	*Speak Up, I've Got You: The CASEN Family Speak-Up Plan*
Do we need a monitoring app, and which one fits our child?	This guide
What is bullying? Is this bullying or ordinary conflict?	*Is This Bullying? The CASEN Guide to Bullying, Cyberbullying & Online Safety*
Something happened. What do I do now?	*What to Do When Something Happens: The CASEN Guide to Understanding Bullying & Cyberbullying*

Prepare. Build a speak-up plan. Choose your tools. Recognize. Respond.

Before You Buy Anything

Answer these six questions first. Your answers tell you whether you need a paid app at all, and which kind.

1. **What am I actually worried about?** Strangers, bullying, adult content, too much time, overspending, or not knowing where my child is? Pick your top two. No app does everything well.

2. **Where does my child spend time online?** Name the devices, games, and apps. A tool that cannot see inside the places your child uses will not help.

3. **Which devices are iPhones or iPads?** Apple limits what outside apps can see. Many features advertised for Android are missing or reduced on Apple devices.

4. **What does my child already know how to do?** Can they block, report, and take a screenshot? Do they come to me when something feels wrong? The more skills they have, the less monitoring they need.

5. **Will my child know about the monitoring?** Decide this before you install anything. The next sections explain why it matters so much.

6. **What will I do when I get an alert?** If you do not have a plan, an alert at 11 p.m. turns into panic. See "When an Alert Comes In."

If your top worries are time limits, app downloads, purchases, and adult websites, the free controls in the next section may be enough.

Step 1: Start Free

The controls already built into your child's devices cost nothing and are often the most reliable. Set these up first. Buy an app only for a gap they leave.

Device	Free tool	What it can usually do
iPhone, iPad, Mac	Screen Time with Family Sharing	Daily limits, downtime, app and content limits, ask-to-buy, communication limits, location sharing
Android phone or tablet, Chromebook	Google Family Link	Daily limits, bedtime, and approvals, content filters, location
Windows computer, Xbox	Microsoft family settings	Screen time, web and search filters, purchase approvals, game ratings
Nintendo Switch	Nintendo Switch Parental Controls app	Play time limits, game ratings, communication limits
PlayStation	PlayStation family management	Play time, game ratings, spending limits, communication limits
Individual games and apps	Each app's own settings	Who can message, voice chat, friend requests, purchases

Feature names and menus change. Search the device maker's help page for "parental controls" for current steps.

The last row matters most for many neurodivergent children. A game's own chat settings decide who can reach your child. Phone-level controls usually cannot see inside them. *Before Something Happens* (Tool 5) has a checklist for each game.

What free tools usually cannot do: read messages for warning signs, alert you to bullying or grooming language, or watch activity inside most social and chat apps. That is the gap paid monitoring apps try to fill.

The Big Decision: Will Your Child Know?

CASEN recommends transparent monitoring for most neurodivergent children: your child knows the tool is there, what it checks, and why. Some apps are built to run quietly. Decide on purpose, not by default.

	Transparent monitoring	Hidden monitoring
What your child knows	The tool is there, what it checks, and why	Nothing, until they find out
When they find out	No surprise	Often feels like a betrayal
Effect on telling you things	Keeps the door open	Can lead to hiding, second accounts, or borrowed devices
Fits a child who	Relies on routine, rules, and predictability	Rarely fits; consider only with a specific, serious concern
Teaches skills	Yes: You can talk through alerts together	No: You cannot discuss what you are not supposed to know

Why this matters more for neurodivergent children. Many neurodivergent children see rules in black and white. Finding a hidden tool can feel like you broke the rules first. Children who already feel watched or misunderstood at school may read secret monitoring as "my parent doesn't trust me." That is the opposite of what CASEN works to build.

When hidden monitoring might be considered. If you have a specific, serious concern, such as signs of contact from an adult stranger or threats, talk to a professional and, if needed, law enforcement. *What to Do When Something Happens* walks you through those steps. Even then, plan how and when you will tell your child.

Monitoring is not the same as reading everything. Alert-based tools flag possible problems and show you only those. Full-access tools let you read every message. For most children, alerts protect safety while leaving some privacy, and privacy is part of growing up.

The Apps at a Glance

Each app is strongest at one job. Match the app to the top two worries you named in "Before You Buy Anything." Prices are approximate U.S. annual prices as checked in October 2026 and change often.

App	Strongest at	Check messages?	Approximate cost per year	Watch for
Bark	Alerts about bullying, predators, self-harm, and other risks in messages and social apps	Yes, Premium plan: Flags concerning messages instead of showing you everything	Bark Jr. about $49 (no message alerts); Premium about $99, covers every child	iPhone setup for Premium needs a computer or Bark's home device
Qustodio	Screen time, app blocking, web filtering, and reports	Complete plan: Lets you read texts and see calls	Free for 1 device; Basic about $55 (5 devices); Complete about $100 (unlimited)	Full message access is easy to overuse; iPhone message features need setup

App	Strongest at	Check messages?	Approximate cost per year	Watch for
Net Nanny	Real-time web filtering of adult and harmful content	No: It filters websites, not conversations	About $40 (1 computer); $55 (5 devices); $90 (20 devices)	Check that it supports every device your child uses
Kids360	Simple screen time limits and earning extra time with tasks	No	Screen time view is free; limits and blocking need a subscription, roughly $20 to $40	Screen time only: No protection from strangers or bullying
Surfie	Chat alerts and location on Android	Yes, keyword-based alerts in some chat apps	Subscription; check current price	Fewer features on iPhone and few U.S. reviews; confirm it covers your child's apps

A note on "best." None of these apps can see everything. Most cannot see inside game voice chat, and many have reduced features on iPhones. An app that claims to protect your child everywhere is overpromising.

Which Kind of Tool Fits Your Child?

Start from your child, not the app. Find the description closest to your child, then look at the type of tool beside it.

If your child	consider	Why
Is new to a phone or tablet and mostly needs limits and routine	Free built-in controls first; Kids360 if you want a reward system	Predictable limits, with no message access needed yet
Loses tract of time or struggles to stop	Built-in controls or Kids360, with visible timers	Warnings and set schedule make the stop expected
Games with online friends or chats in apps	Bark Premium, plus each game's own chat settings	Alerts on warning signs without reading every message
Has trouble spotting manipulation or says yes to keep friends	Bark Premium, used openly, plus practice from *Before Something Happens*	Early warning while they build the skill
Mainly uses a computer for school and browsing	Net Nanny or Qustodio web filtering	Strongest at blocking harmful websites
Uses many devices across a large family	Qustodio Complete or Bark Premium	One plan covers many devices
Has already had contact from a stranger or a threat	Get help first: See *What to Do When Something Happens*	An app is not a response to an active threat

One tool is usually enough. Two monitoring apps on one device often conflict, drain the battery, and double the alerts. Pick one paid tool and pair it with your free built-in controls.

How to Tell Your Child

Tell your child before you install anything. Keep it short, concrete, and calm. Many neurodivergent children do best when they know exactly what will happen and why.

What to cover

1. **What the tool is.** "This app helps keep you safe online. It's like a seatbelt, not a camera."
2. **What it checks, and what it does not.** Be exact. "It tells me if a message looks like bullying or someone asking for pictures. I don't read all your chats." Only say this if it is true for the tool you chose.
3. **Why.** "It's not because you did something wrong. It's because the internet has people who try to trick kids, and that's not your fault."
4. **What happens if it alerts me?** "If I get an alert, I'll come talk to you. You won't lose your device just because something happened."
5. **How it changes over time.** "As you show me you can handle things, we'll loosen it."

Make it visual. Write the five points on one card or page and post it near where devices charge. A child who can see the rules does not have to remember them.

Expect questions and some upset. Your child may say, "You don't trust me." Try: "I trust you. I don't trust every stranger online. This is how we keep you safe while you practice."

Our Family Monitoring Agreement

Fill this in together. Both of you sign it. Post it where your child can see it.

The tool we are using: _____

It checks: _____

It does not check: _____

Parent promises

- I will tell you before I change a setting.
- I will come to you first when I get an alert, and listen before I decide anything.
- I will not take away your device just because you told me something happened.
- I will only look at what the tool shows me, not go through your device without telling you.
- We will review this agreement on: _____

Child promises

- I will not delete or get around the app.
- I will tell a parent if something online makes me uncomfortable, confused, or scared.
- I will tell a parent if someone asks me to keep a secret or move to another app.
- I will use the devices and accounts we agreed on.

As I show these skills, we will loosen the rules: _____

Parent signature: _____ Date _____

Child signature: _____ Date _____

When an Alert Comes In

Most alerts are false alarms or small teaching moments. Read it calmly, check the context, then talk with your child using the CASEN Compass™.

First, sort the alert.

What you see	What it usually means	What to do
A flagged word in a joke, song, or game	False alarm	Glance at the context. Nothing more needed.
Rude or unkind messages between kids	A teaching moment, or possible bullying	Talk tonight. *Is This Bullying? The CASEN Guide to Bullying, Cyberbullying & Online Safety helps you tell the difference.*
An adult or stranger asking for photos, secrets, gifts, or a move to another app	A safety concern	Save the evidence and act now. Follow *What to Do When Something Happens.*
Any threat, including with a picture, or talk of self-harm	An emergency	Stay with your child. Call 911 if anyone is in immediate danger. For a mental health crisis, call or text 988.

Then, talk it through with the Compass.

Compass point	Ask together
❤️ Connection	“Who was this, and how did that conversation make you feel?”
🛡️ Safety	”Was anything about it unsafe for you or someone else?”
📣 Advocacy	“Do we need to block, report, or tell someone?”
🧭 Navigation	“What would you do differently next time?”

Start the talk with: "The app showed me something. You're not in trouble. Can you help me understand it?" Your calm in the first minute determines whether your child will tell you next time.

Step Down as Skills Grow

Monitoring is training wheels, not a permanent fixture. Review your setup every three months and when your child gets a new device, app, or game. Loosen one thing at a time, based on skills your child has shown.

Stage	Your child shows they can…	Monitoring looks like
Learning	Follow time limits with reminders; tell you when something feels wrong	Built-in controls on; paid alerts on in they chat online; you approve new apps and friends
Practicing	Block reports without help; follow online-only friend rules	Fewer content blocks; alerts stay on; regular check-ins replace some limits
Trusted	Pause before acting; come to you after a mistake; spot a trick	Alerts only for serious risks; limits set together
independent	Use the Compass on their own and still talk to you	Monitoring off, or only location sharing the family agrees on

Tell your child the stages ahead of time. A clear path to more freedom is one of the strongest reasons for a child to keep talking to you.

If something happens, it is fine to step back a stage for a while. Explain it as "more practice," not punishment.

How Ready Is Your Child?

An app can tell you what happened. It cannot tell you whether your child has the skills to handle it.

The free **CASEN Social Media Readiness Assessmen**t shows your child's strengths and growth areas across Connection, Safety, Advocacy, and Navigation. Use the results to decide how much monitoring your child needs today and what to practice so they need less tomorrow

TAKE THE FREE ASSESSMENT

About CASEN

CASEN (Collaborative Advancement for Social-Emotional Needs) prepares neurodivergent children to navigate social and digital environments with greater confidence through social-emotional learning, social media readiness education, and guided practice.

How CASEN began. As a college freshman, Chris Clark Jr. struggled with social media. During school, he had moved between special education and regular education classes and often felt caught between two worlds. His dad and his dad's friends guided him through it. When his dad asked what he wished he had growing up, Chris answered: A way for kids with learning differences to use social media well without the fear of being bullied. He took the idea to his mother, Dr. Myava Clark, and together they built CASEN for kids who may not have that village of support.

Dr. Myava Clark, President and Co-Founder, holds a Master of Education in Elementary Education and a Ph.D. in Education, specializing in higher education and leadership and administration. She used her teaching training to help Chris build the skills he needed. She is a college professor and author of *HELP! Support for Parents of Children With Learning and Thinking Differences to Feel Confident, Capable, and Fulfilled.*

Chris Clark Jr., Vice President and Co-Founder, found belonging through track, cross-country, and drama. He studied social work and wants every child to have a safe social space. Learn more at www.casenllc.com.

Disclaimer:

This guide is for education only. CASEN is independent and is not paid by, affiliated with, or endorsed by any company named here. App names are trademarks of their owners. Features, device support, and prices change often; confirm current details on each company's website before you buy.

No app, parental control, or setting can eliminate all online risk. Consider your child's age, developmental needs, and circumstances when choosing safeguards. This guide does not replace legal, medical, mental health, educational, or law-enforcement advice. If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

Sources checked October 2026: *Bark pricing · Qustodio · Net Nanny · Kids360 on the App Store · Surfie-Parent on the App Store*