



# Growing up digital: skills, safety, and resilience in an always-on world

Insights from Bark's 2025 Annual Report —  
and what comes next

**Bark's 2025 Annual Report** on Children and Technology analyzed a staggering 11.1 billion digital activities from teens and tweens, spanning texts, emails, and over 30 of the most popular apps and social media platforms among young people.



# **Bark’s 2025 annual report on children, technology, and digital safety for individuals with disabilities**

As youth online safety efforts evolve in 2025, there has been a clear shift from purely restrictive approaches toward empowering students with the skills and judgment needed to navigate increasingly complex digital environments. Policymakers and educators are attempting to create space for early intervention and learning, reflected in global and domestic efforts to limit access while encouraging safer technology use.

Despite these efforts, Bark’s 2025 Annual Report highlights a persistent and concerning reality: students continue to encounter high-risk situations online at scale. As digital citizenship and empowerment become more central to safety strategies, it is critical to examine how these approaches address the needs of students who require additional support.

For children and adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), technology plays a vital role in independence, communication, and community engagement. At the same time, differences in impulse control, social interpretation, and vulnerability can increase online risk when supports and safeguards are not intentionally designed.

Bark’s data underscores the urgency of this challenge, revealing millions of alerts in categories where students with I/DD are known to face heightened vulnerability. These findings reinforce the need for online safety strategies that balance access with proactive guardrails, ensuring students with I/DD are supported, protected, and prepared as digital environments continue to evolve.

# Key online safety considerations for individuals with I/DD

In 2025, Bark identified millions of online safety alerts in categories where children and adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are known to face heightened vulnerability.

These findings highlight the need for intentional online safety strategies that reflect how individuals with I/DD engage with technology — balancing independence with proactive protection.



**54,576**

alerts related to inappropriate behavior or content



**1,349**

alerts for risky app or website usage



**841,495**

alerts involving risky contact



**3.7 million**

alerts related to bullying

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## Takeaways for organizations serving individuals with I/DD

### Plan for impulsivity

Online interactions move quickly and often reward immediate responses.

→ Use tools and support systems that slow decision-making and surface concerns early.

### Address AI-driven risk

AI-generated content increases confusion and exposure to manipulation.

→ Include safeguards and education specific to AI-enabled interactions.

### Use guardrails to support independence

Access and safety are not mutually exclusive.

→ Pair technology access with monitoring and alerts to trusted adults.

### Increase visibility for caregivers and staff

Risk is often underestimated without clear insight.

→ Share actionable data that enables earlier intervention and conversation.

### Shift from reactive to proactive

Policies alone cannot address nuanced risk.

→ Embed online safety into daily support, life skills, and transition planning.



# Bark's 2025 Annual Report on children and technology



## Self-harm/suicide

**37% of tweens** and **64% of teens** were involved in a self-harm/suicidal situation.



## Anxiety

**23% of tweens** and **48% of teens** used language or were exposed to language about anxiety.



## Sexual content

**62% of tweens** and **80% of teens** encountered nudity or content of a sexual nature.



## Drugs/alcohol

**61% of tweens** and **81% of teens** engaged in conversations surrounding drugs/alcohol.



## Bullying

**70% of tweens** and **79% of teens** experienced bullying as a bully, victim, or witness.



## Depression

**45% of tweens** and **51% of teens** engaged in conversations about depression.



## Disordered eating

**15% of tweens** and **34% of teens** engaged with or encountered content about disordered eating.



## Predators

**4% of tweens** and **7% of teens** encountered predatory behaviors from someone online.



## Violence

**68% of tweens** and **84% of teens** expressed or experienced violent subject matter/thoughts.



## About Bark

Bark offers purpose-built devices — the **Bark Phone** and **Bark Watch** — designed to support safe, structured technology use for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Both devices combine robust **AI-driven monitoring** that scans texts, photos, and communication for concerning content with essential **safety controls** like location tracking, contact management, SOS/emergency alerts, app and web restrictions, and tailored access settings that align with individual needs. On the Bark Phone, caregivers and support teams can set boundaries and adjust access over time, while the Bark Watch provides a simplified, wearable option with built-in monitoring and

safety features suited to those who may not need or benefit from full smartphone functionality.

With Bark devices, organizations can help individuals with I/DD engage with technology more safely while promoting independence, communication, and social connection. The combination of real-time risk alerts and customizable safety controls supports positive digital experiences, reduces exposure to harm, and creates opportunities for guided learning and skill development in everyday life.

Learn more at [bark.us/learn/disabilities](https://bark.us/learn/disabilities).

Bark devices are approved for Medicaid purchase in select states. For more information, email [andrea.bucci@bark.us](mailto:andrea.bucci@bark.us).