Safeguarding Training Centre from The Key

Child safety on TikTok: parent factsheet

TikTok is a video-sharing app. Users can upload and share short videos of themselves lip-syncing to songs or acting out comedy sketches, and add special effects. They can gain followers ('fans') and browse other people's videos.

You may have heard of the app by its previous name: Musical.ly. Everything that was on Musical.ly is now on TikTok. If your child previously had a Musical.ly account they will be able to access their content on TikTok.

The age recommendation is **13 and above**. However, you don't have to prove your age when creating an account, so younger children can still use it easily. It's most popular with under-16s.

TikTok **is free to download** on Android and iOS devices (Apple phones and tablets). It carries ads and offers in-app purchases. It has about 150 million active users worldwide and is available in over 30 languages.

What are the concerns?

On the surface, nothing. TikTok has a reputation for being unusually free of trolling and danger.

But you may have seen news reports or heard concerns about some users harassing children for nude images and videos.

What should I look out for?

- User profiles which talk about 'trading' or swapping pictures/videos
- Use of emojis that are commonly considered to be sexually suggestive (such as the aubergine)
- Hashtags, such as #tradefortrade, which clearly suggest the user is looking to trade illicit content
- The lyrical content of some songs – parents have raised concerns that it's not always age-appropriate

Users cannot exchange images and videos via in-app messaging, but once they've made contact they move on to another platform to trade, such as Snapchat.

TikTok has taken steps to remove users who it suspects are soliciting underage users. However, there are still many suggestive profiles and TikTok has committed to almost doubling the number of content moderators it employs to 10,000 to address this.

What safety options are available to parents?

Control who can view your child's videos

Set your child's account to 'private' so that your child can control who sees their videos or keep them completely private. Your child will be able to approve or deny people as 'fans', and will only be able to accept messages from followers.

Instructions for this are here:

Setting up a private account, TikTok
http://support.tiktok.com/knowledge-base/setting-up-a-private-account

Remember:
- Accounts are set to 'public' by default. Public profiles can be viewed by anyone
- Even with a private account, your child's profile information can be seen by all users. Make sure your child doesn't reveal personal information on their public profile

Restrict how your child uses the app

Use TikTok's **digital wellbeing feature** to control the time your child spends on the app and limit the appearance of content that may not be appropriate:

Digital wellbeing, TikTok
http://support.tiktok.com/knowledge-base/digital-wellbeing

Most devices also allow you to **set time limits** on game play, **set age limits** for content, and **restrict in-app purchases**. Check the user instructions for your child's device.

Make sure your child knows how to report inappropriate behaviour

Your child can use the app to report content that makes them feel uncomfortable, including accounts, videos, comments and chats. You can too. Instructions for this are here:

Report inappropriate content, TikTok
http://support.tiktok.com/knowledge-base/report-inappropriate-content

You or your child can also **block 'fans'** at any time:

Delete fans, TikTok
http://support.tiktok.com/knowledge-base/delete-fans

What else can I do?

Further tips

- Read more about privacy and safety on TikTok at http://support.tiktok.com/article-categories/privacy-safety
- Download and use the app to help you understand it
- Talk to your child about what they're doing online, and make sure they know they can talk to you about anything that upsets them
- Check your bank statements regularly for in-app purchases you're not happy with, and to make sure your child isn't getting around any passwords you've set up

More sources of support

- Non-profit organisation Internet Matters has put together 5 top tips to manage children's screen time: *https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/guidance/5-top-tips-to-manage-childrens-screentime/*
- The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) has advice and resources for parents on online safety:*https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/*
- The NSPCC has also teamed up with O2 to offer advice to parents on setting up parental controls, privacy settings, etc. Call the free helpline on 0808 800 5002, or book an appointment with an 'O2 Guru' in an O2 store: *https://guru.secure.force.com/O2DeskStoreLocator*

Sources for this factsheet

- TikTok app safety – what parents need to know, Internet Matters
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- TikTok, the app super popular with kids, has a nudes problem, Motherboard, 6 December 2018
  https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/j5zbmx/tiktok-the-app-super-popular-with-kids-has-a-nudes-problem

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