TikTok: a parent's guide

Since TikTok merged with the popular karaoke app Musical.ly in August 2018, it has quickly become the most popular video-sharing app with more than 500 million users worldwide. Here are the things you need to be aware of when your child is using TikTok.

What is TikTok?

TikTok describes itself as the go-to destination for short-form video — you can think of it as a crossover between YouTube and Instagram. It is a video publishing platform that allows users to view shared 60-second clips and music videos as well as produce short pieces of video which can then be edited and embellished by using the in-app production tools. The content runs across all kinds of subject matter — pets, arts, comedy, music, games etc. — and users can ♡ content they like. Users have complete creative control over their videos, but some popular trends are:

- **'Reacting':** Users film themselves reacting to another user's video, putting their own video and the original side-by-side.
- **Challenges:** Users can participate in weekly challenges by clicking the 'Discover' button and adding hashtags to their videos.
- **Sharing:** Users can easily share videos on other social media platforms — Instagram and Facebook — to build up a following.

What should I know before my child signs up?

The app has the age rating 12+ in app stores and TikTok's policy states that anyone over the age of 13 can sign up. However, there is no age-verification in place other than having to confirm an email and children can sign in using their Facebook or Instagram account. TikTok urges parents to ensure their child is the appropriate age to use the app and recommends that you read the Community Guidelines (https://bit.ly/2wbkxs3) before their child signs up.

If you find out your under-13 child is using TikTok you can contact the developer at privacy@tiktok.com and they will help you block the account. However, nothing stops children from signing up again with another email address.

What privacy settings are available?

The app has come under fire for a lack of privacy settings in the past but they have become more sophisticated. The app lets you:

- Make accounts private
- Choose who can comment on videos and filter out unpleasant ones
- Control who can get in touch by direct message
- Block users

All of these options can be found by clicking the three-dot menu in the top-right corner of the screen and go to the 'Privacy and Settings' section. You can look at TikTok's safety videos to learn more (https://bit.ly/2EvkkEG).

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Are there any parental controls?

There is a 'Restricted Mode' function which filters out all video content from the feed that can be seen as explicit or inappropriate or otherwise unfit for younger users. You can do this by going to the profile, tap the three-dot menu in the top-right corner, go to the 'General' section and you will find it under 'Digital Wellbeing'.

TikTok — like Facebook and Instagram — has introduced a screen time limit in a feature called 'Screen Time Management'. Parents can control how much time their child spends on TikTok and can choose to put in place a 40-, 60-, 90- or 120-minute limit. To continue after the screen time limit or access the settings, the user will have to put in a password.

What are the best ways to help children stay safer?

Staying informed and up-to-date on the app's features will help make you aware of the things your child is exposed to and help guide them towards safer use. Here are a few practical considerations to keep in mind:

- **Personal information:** Make sure that you talk to your child about keeping his/her personal details private. Tell them they should not put their address or phone number on their profile for everyone to see, that they should not reveal it to people contacting them via private message or include it in any way in their videos.

- **'Public' vs 'private':** If your child has their account set to 'public', be sure they understand what this really means. The 'private' setting, allowing your child to share their content only with approved followers, may be the safer option. Be sure to discuss with your child whom they allow to follow them.

- **Blocking and reporting:** By clicking on the three-dot menu in the top right corner of the profile page, you can click on a tab called 'Report a problem' and the app will give you a list of normal queries involving internal problems with the app itself as well as abuse. If your child is receiving inappropriate messages or comments from a specific user, or just unwanted contact, the first thing you would want to do is to block the user. If the user's contact borders on abuse, make sure to report it to TikTok as well as blocking.

- **Microtransactions:** The app does contain microtransactions as users can purchase TikTok coins in exchange for real money. Make sure your child does not have a credit/debit card linked to the App Store or Play Store as children can unknowingly spend large amounts on these coins in exchange for in-app features.