At National Online Safety we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information they need to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one platform of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

TikTok is a global video community where users create, share and discover 'funny and memorable moments' via short video clips – typically about 15 seconds long. Videos can be 'spiced up' with special effect filters, stickers, music and sound clips. Currently one of the world's most popular apps, TikTok was formerly known as Musical.ly, before it was rebranded by the Chinese company ByteDance that acquired it in November 2017. If your child had previously had a Musical.ly account, all of their videos and personal settings will have automatically been moved to TikTok. In early 2019, TikTok was hit with a record $5.7m (£4.2m) fine in the US over child data privacy concerns for its record keeping while under the Musical.ly brand.

Publish date: 10/10/18
Edit date: 06/03/19

AGE RESTRICTION 13+

What parents need to know about TIKTOK

ONLINE PREDATORS

By default, users accounts are automatically set to public when they first create an account. TikTok encourages users to share creative expression through their videos, but if posted publicly, anyone in the world can see your child's homemade content. There have also been concerns the Chinese government could access data or sway public opinion through the app. If your child's profile is open, strangers can use the app to comment on your child's videos. While this isn't always sinister, it gives potential predators the ability to contact your child through the platform.

IN-APP PURCHASES

As with many apps, there's a paid element to TikTok. Users can buy virtual coins to be exchanged for virtual gifts – for example, if they like a specific video, your child can use coins to purchase emojis to show approval. These can be expensive and easily purchased – there is the option to buy 10,000 coins for £99.99 with a one-click buy button.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

TikTok lets users lip-sync to their favourite songs and produce their own music videos. Some of the music choices contain swear words or sexual themes. So not only can children be exposed to potentially inappropriate content but they can broadcast themselves miming or singing these lyrics. In addition to this, some of the outfits and dance moves in videos can be overtly sexual and provocative. There have also been reports of some users sharing concerning content, such as videos that promote anorexia, porn, self-harm and violence.

BEING INFLUENCED

More than one third of children aged 6-17 consider 'social media stars' to be among their top role models. There are millions of creators on TikTok, showcasing their 'talents, moments and knowledge', from singing to dancing to stunts and comedy skits, which receive thousands of likes and comments from around the world, quickly turning people into 'stars'. There is the danger that children may develop unrealistic expectations of how they should look and behave on the app in order to become the next 'star'. They may have feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem or become swayed by certain opinions. On TikTok, there are always 'trending challenges' and hashtags that users can copy or build upon. Sometimes these challenges can pose risks to young people.

National Online Safety®

Top Tips for Parents

DISCUSS THE PITFALLS OF OVERSHARING

Encourage your child to always think before they do, say, like or post anything online. Explain that their 'digital footprint' shapes their online reputation and the way that other people see them. Something they may find funny and entertaining now may impact them in the future. Talk about how to deal with peer pressure and how doing something they think will impress others could affect them. Remind them that they do not have to do anything they are not comfortable with. To ensure that there's no way of anyone tracking your child's location or identity, make it clear to them that they should never film a video in their school uniform or near a landmark that gives away where they live.

HANDLING CRITICISM

While it's fantastic to see your child being creative and expressive and bonding with people with similar interests, they need to be aware that not everyone will be supportive online. Comments can be negative or even cruel. Make sure your child knows how to comment respectfully and handle negative feedback. In the app's Privacy and Safety settings, your child can decide who can react to their videos, who can comment, and who can send them private chat messages. We suggest altering these settings so only their friends can interact with their posts.

REPORT INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

If you or your child sees something inappropriate on TikTok, you can flag up an account, video, comment or chat by simply tapping 'Report'. In the app's 'Digital Wellbeing' feature, there's also an 'Enhanced Restricted Mode', limiting appearance of videos which may be inappropriate.

USE A PRIVATE ACCOUNT

Setting up a private account means that only people who you and your child approve of can see their creations. To make an account private, tap the three dots at the top right of the screen to access settings. Click 'Privacy and Safety'. Scroll down until you find 'Private Account' and turn this setting on.

SIGNING UP WITH THE CORRECT AGE

When signing up, users are prompted to input a their date of birth. If the inputted date of birth means your child is under 13, the app will block them. However, this doesn't prevent your child from lying about their age. The app is intended for users aged 13+, so explain the rating is there for a reason; to keep them protected from online dangers. It is actually possible to watch TikTok videos without creating an account, so make sure your child, if under 13, hasn't downloaded it.

USE THE 'DIGITAL WELLBEING' SETTING

If you're concerned about how long your child is spending on TikTok, it has a setting called 'Digital Wellbeing' which allows you to manage the amount of screen time your child can have. We also advise that you turn off push notifications in the settings to prevent your child from receiving 'spam-like' notifications from TikTok that encourage users to go on the app.

DISCUSS IN-APP PURCHASES

To lower the risk of your child making accidental in-app purchases, teach them exactly what in-app purchases are and the risks of making them without permission. Tell them that they are not essential to enjoy the app and that if they want to make a purchase, they should always ask you beforehand. In the app's 'Digital Wellbeing' feature, there is the option to disable the function of purchasing coins and sending gifts.

Users can also follow the account @tiktoktips, TikTok's official account fronted by established TikTok users which offers useful online safety tips for promoting safety on its platform, rather than hiding information in FAQs.

SOURCES:
support.musical.ly/knowledge-base/community-guidelines, edition.cnn.com/2019/02/28/tech/tiktok-ftc-fine-children, techcrunch.com/2019/02/27/tiktok-is-launching-a-series-of-online-safety-videos-in-its-app, theguardian.com/technology/2019/feb/28/tiktok-video-sharing-app-fined-for-collection-of-childrens-data, TikTok app - Apple App Store, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TikTok, mediapost.com/publications/article/319720/social-media-stars-influence-kids-but-parents-st.html, metro.co.uk/2017/03/17/musical-ly-everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-app-your-children-are-obsessed-with-6516068/, youtube.com/watch?v=aNO6s4FCcRs, youtube.com/watch?v=YVGZ1ZQ4JqM, static.musecdn.com/website/pdf/creatorPlaybook.pdf, youtube.com/watch?v=8TaiQQCNtaM

Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into.