A Quick Guide to
TikTok (for Parents)

What is TikTok?

TikTok is a social media app for creating and sharing short videos. It offers users easy to use in-app visual editing and sound effects to produce imaginative memes and creative content that mostly feature lip-sync, comedy and talent videos of between 3 – 15 seconds long or looped videos of up to 60 seconds long.

Users create and upload videos in which they sing, danc, lip-sync or talk to camera (their phones) The variety of content is wide-ranging in topic and style and can be grouped by hashtags that often correspond to TikTok challenges or subject memes.

Introduced in September 2016, TikTok has gained enormous popularity throughout the world in a short number of years, particularly with younger users (ie those born after 1991). According to an article published in Business Insider Australia, TikTok gained rapid uptake in Australia throughout 2020, with Roy Morgan estimating there are now 2.5 million Australian users on the platform over any average four week period.

In the article, Roy Morgan CEO, Michele Levin, said that 'the highest rate of usage is amongst 'tweens' with nearly 40% of those aged 10-13 years now on TikTok and those aged 14-17 years accounting for almost 30% of users on the platform.

Source: https://www.businessinsider.com.au/australia-now-has-2-5-million-tiktok-users-adding-nearly-a-million-in-the-first-half-of-2020-2020-10

Considerations for Parents

TikTok allows users to have private accounts, but the social nature of the app and the rapid success of other TikTokkers 'going viral' is a huge enticement for young people to use the app in ways which may not always be positive. The desire to get to a larger audience through followers, views and likes may encourage kids to do things they wouldn't normally do. The app also plays on stimuli with use of short videos, sounds, music and graphics that can quickly become quite compelling for a young developing brain. Given this, limiting the time and amount of content your child consumes on TikTok may be the wisest approach. Prohibiting a TikTok account may encourage your child to seek ways to create one without your knowledge. Think about opportunities for sharing screentime together and enable device-level 'Parental Controls' until you are confident your child is aware of the pitfalls and challenges of the app. Encourage younger teens to share what they find funny on TikTok with you as a way of demystifying the platform and getting involved with the content they are viewing.

TikTok Age Rating as listed on the App Store:

12+

Infrequent/Mild Sexual Content and Nudity

Infrequent/Mild Profanity or Crude Humour

Infrequent/Mild Alcohol, Tobacco or Drug Use or References

Infrequent/Mild Cartoon or Fantasy Violence

Infrequent/Mild Mature/Suggestive Themes

App Privacy

The developer, TikTok Pty Ltd, states that the app's privacy practices 'may include handling of data' in the following ways:

Data automatically linked to each user includes:

- Location
- Identifiers
- Contacts and Contact Info
- Purchases

- Search History
- Financial Info
- Browsing History
- Usage Data

- User Content
- Diagnostics

Data Used to Track a User

- Contact Info (Email address and phone number)
- Identifiers (Device ID aka face ID or fingerprint

Top ten tips to ensure your child's TikTok is child safe

1 ENABLE device-level parental controls

TikTok states that the app is intended for users aged 13 years and over and has a 12+ App Store rating. If you enable 'Parental Controls' from Google and/or Apple the App will automatically be blocked on any underage children' devices that you have identified.

2 SET the account to private

By default, a TikTok account starts as a public account – but you can easily enable a private account in the privacy and safety settings. A private account means the account operator (your child) can approve or deny follower requests, and only allow users you have been approved as followers to see the content your child is posting onto their account.

3 FILTER who can follow the account

If you set your child up with a private account, they can manage who follows their account by removing followers or blocking users at any time, for any reason. Removing a follower will curtail that user's ability to send your child's account a direct message. 'Blocking' a user will also stop them from interacting with or viewing any of your child's account content.

4 LIMIT the content seen on the account

If any inappropriate or unwanted content does get displayed on your child's account, you can show them how to simply long-press on that video and tap 'Not Interested' to see less of that sort of video in the future.

5 RESTRICT mode

Under 'Privacy and Settings' you can click 'Digital Wellbeing' to enable 'Restricted Mode'. This will limit the appearance of videos that may not be appropriate for all audiences and also enable a 2 hour 'Screen Time Limit' per day.

6 CONTROL the comment section

Whether an account is private or public, your child can decide whether they want to allow comments to be made about their videos from everyone, followers only – or be restricted so that no comments can be made. Comment filters can also be used to block custom keywords. This option can be found under 'Privacy and Safety' in Settings.

7 SET messaging preferences

On TikTok only accounts that follow one another can send 'Direct Messages' (DM's). That means accounts need to follow each other for your child to communicate privately with another child or adult who may be following their account. To prevent a following from sending a private message, your child can simply unfollow or remove them from their account followers. You can also show them how to disable Direct Messages (DMs) entirely from the 'Privacy and Safety' page.

8 DISABLE duets

Duets allow users to build on content appearing on other TikTok accounts by recording new videos alongside the original as it plays. Sometimes this can lead to inappropriate mockery of what was originally innocent content. To disable duets by or of your child's content show them how to go to the 'Privacy and Safety' page and select 'Who Can Duet With Me'.

9 REPORT anything that violates TikTok guidelines

Anything that violets TikTok 'Community Guidelines' can be reported directly through the app. This can be content or a profile displaying self-injury, harassment, bullying, hate speech, nudity, copyright infringement or spam, and can be done using the 'Report' button.

10 MONITOR with family pairing

Family Pairing links a parent's TikTok account to their child's account and once enabled, a parent/carer will be able to control many of the 'Digital Wellbeing' features mentioned above including Screen Time Management, Direct Messaging, Discoverability, Comments, Linked Videos and more.

Read TikTok's Community Guidelines, Transparency Reports and Safety Centre resources for further information. App functions and settings are constantly evolving.

For more information see TikTok's safety resources for parents: https://www.tiktok.com/safety/resources/for-parents ?lang=en&appLaunch=web

Or visit the e-Safety Commissioner's website of the Australian Government: https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/how-to/ social-media-online-chat