Child safety on TikTok

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.

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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)

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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)

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)

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)

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

Child safety and cyber-flashing

Cyber-flashing happens when a stranger sends an obscene picture, unsolicited, to your phone via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth. It's a form of sexual harassment and there have been prosecutions for it under existing laws.

The term 'cyber-flashing' first hit the news in 2015, after a woman on a train received explicit pictures on her iPhone

Cyber-flashing is not new – it has been possible since the introduction of Bluetooth. However, the growing trend for smartphone use among children means that there's more risk of it happening to them. It's also not just an iPhone issue. There are many file-sharing apps that make it possible on Android and Apple phones.

What are the concerns?

You may have seen news reports or heard concerns raised about:

- The large number of young women receiving unwanted images: a 2018 YouGov poll found that 41% of young women had been sent an unsolicited photograph of a penis

- The potential for large-scale abuse of children: most 12 to 15 year-olds (83%) and a growing proportion of 8 to 11 year-olds (39%) owned a smartphone in 2017. In 2017-18 there were almost 12,000 prosecution procedures for sexual exploitation of children through photographs

- The range of file-sharing apps freely available: most people don't have time to keep on top of the latest apps/features and their potential issues – for example, SHAREit is a very popular file-sharing app for Android users, with over 500 million downloads worldwide, but do you know its features?

What safety options are available to parents?

Restrict who can send files to your child's phone

Most file-sharing apps will allow users to restrict who can send files to them via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth. Check the settings and user instructions for your child's apps, and make sure your child knows how to operate these controls.

Turn off file-transfer apps

Advise your child to do this when they're not using the apps (including Bluetooth). If the apps need to be on, advise your child to use PIN protection and only allow contact from people they know. Tell your child never to open files from someone they don't know.

Make sure your child knows how to report a cyber-flashing incident

If your child does not feel in immediate danger, they should take a screenshot and report the incident to the police via the non-emergency numbers:

- If it happens on public transport, text 61016 or call 0800 40 50 40
- If it happens anywhere else, call 101. If your child feels scared or in immediate danger, they should call 999 straight away. They may also want to move to a place of safety – find someone in authority to talk to, e.g. platform staff, a security guard or a shop manager. If the incident occurs on school premises, your child should talk to an adult they trust at once.

Child safety on YouTube

What's the problem?

- Videos that look like they're child-friendly can include violent or disturbing content, and it's difficult for YouTube to catch all of these videos before children see them. They might be suggested videos, or appear in search results
- There's a risk that adults can use YouTube to contact children and 'groom' them into sharing explicit pictures or videos of themselves

- Children can share personal information which could put them in danger, such as which street they live on or their school

What safety options are there on YouTube Kids?

The YouTube Kids app automatically filters out most inappropriate content. YouTube explains that it can't manually review all content, and "no automated system is perfect", so it may "miss" some videos.

Set parental controls to help protect your child from seeing inappropriate content

- Tap the 'Lock' icon in the bottom corner of any page, enter your custom passcode (or complete the multiplication problem/read and enter the numbers that appear) and click 'Settings'
- Toggle 'Search' to off, so your child can only see recommended, curated videos under each category on the home screen
- Select 'Timer' and use the slider bar or the '+' and '-' icons to set a time limit for how much time your child spends on the app, then tap 'Start Timer'

You can also limit the videos, channels and collections your child can watch to ones that you have chosen, and prevent them from searching for videos:

- Go to 'Settings', select your child's profile and enter your parent account password, then select 'Approved content only'
- Read the 'Getting started' popup, select 'Start', then tap the '+' icon on any collection, channel or video to approve content that you're happy for your child to see
- Select 'Done' in the red box at the bottom of the screen

You can edit the list at any point by tapping 'Manage' under the 'Approved content only' setting'.

Block videos or channels that you don't want your child to watch

- Tap the 3 dots ('more') at the top of the video, tap 'Block' and select 'Block this video' – or choose 'Block this channel' to block the whole channel associated with the video
- Tap 'Block' again, then enter the numbers you see written on the screen, or your custom passcode

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Report inappropriate content

- Tap the 3 dots ('more') in the video player, then 'Report'
- Select the reason for reporting the video (inappropriate visuals, inappropriate audio, or other)

Make sure your child knows how to do this too.

What safety options are there on YouTube?

Turn on 'restricted mode' to hide videos that may contain inappropriate content

- On the website: click on the icon in the top-right corner that represents your YouTube account; in the drop-down menu look for 'Restricted Mode'
- In the app: tap 'Settings', then 'Restricted Mode Filtering', and turn it on

Flag inappropriate videos and comments to YouTube

Use the 'flagging feature' to prompt YouTube staff to check content and decide whether to block or restrict it in line with its community guidelines:

- Tap the 3 dots ('more') icon next to a video or comment, select report, and then select the reason for flagging

Turn off autoplay and manage recommendations to help prevent your child from seeing upsetting or disturbing videos by accident

In a video page in a browser, toggle the 'Autoplay' option to off. Depending on your device, this may show in the top right of the screen, or below the video.

From July 2019, YouTube started rolling out a 'Don't recommend channel' option that you can use to remove channels from your recommendations. To do this, click the 3 dots next to the 'Up next' video title, and select 'Don't recommend channel'.