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 video-sharing social media app available on iOS and Android which lets users create, share, and view user created videos much in a similar manner to Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. It’s main draw, however, is that users can record and upload bite-sized looping videos of themselves lip-syncing and dancing to popular music or soundbites, often with filters, emojis and stickers. TikTok has been designed with the young user in mind and has a very addictive appeal. At the beginning of 2019 it skyrocketed in popularity to become the iOS store’s most downloaded app with over 33 million downloads. Estimates suggest that it now has anything between 500 million and over 1 billion monthly active users worldwide.

What parents need to know about TikTok

MATURE CONTENT
On the iOS store, TikTok is listed as 12+. On the Google Play Store it is rated as Parental guidance recommended'. When signing up for the app, it’s possible to lie about your age without any form of verification. As children scroll through their feed, most of the videos they’re likely to come across are lighthearted or funny takes on dance routines which are designed to make people laugh. However there has been a slew of videos which have been reported for featuring drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm and sexual content, including young teens dressing overtly sexually and behaving suggestively. Given the deluge of material uploaded to TikTok every day, it’s impossible to moderate everything and it can be quite easy to come across explicit content on the ‘for you’ feed when logging into the platform.

INAPPROPRIATE MUSIC
TikTok revolves around creating music videos through lip-syncing and dancing. Inevitably, some of the music featured by users will contain explicit or suggestive lyrics. Given the undeniably young user base, there is a risk that users will take to imitate the explicit language they hear or the suggestive actions they see when using other users’ videos on the app.

ONLINE PREDATORS
As a social network, TikTok makes it easy to connect with other users. This includes the ability to comment on and react to other user’s videos, follow their profile and download their content. Be aware that by default, any user can comment on your child’s video if their account is set to public. Most interactions are harmless enough but as an app, TikTok is prone to predators because of the abundance of younger users.

INAPPROPRIATE NATURE
Social media is designed to be addictive and TikTok is no different. It can be fun and hugely entertaining. However, it is also because of this that it can be hard to put down. In addition to the short, punchy nature of the looping video format, the app’s ability to keep you guessing what will come on screen next makes it easy to turn a five-minute visit into a 45-minute visit.

ADDICTIVE NATURE
TikTok is very image focused and there is a notable preoccupation with looking cool and attractive. Many teenagers now attempt to go viral to become the next big ‘TikTok’ famous. TikTok (and its predecessor musical.ly) has spawned its own celebrities – social media stars Loren Gray and Jacob Sartorius have been catapulted to fame through their initial exposure on the app. Obviously, budding influencers looking to become the next big thing will be disappointed, but this may have the knock-on effect of making them go more and more drastic lengths to get noticed.

IN-APP PURCHASES
Aside from the content, there’s also the option to purchase in-app extras called ‘TikTok coins’. Prices range from £0.99 for 100 coins to an eye-watering £93.99 for 10,000 coins. TikTok coins are used to purchase different emojis to reward content creators that a user finds funny or entertaining. In the iOS version of the app you can disable the option to buy TikTok coins but this sadly doesn’t seem to be a feature in the Android version.

TALK ABOUT ONLINE DANGERS
Assuming your child is above the age limit to use the app, make sure you talk to your child about ways to connect and protect their content. Be aware that by default, any user can comment on your child’s video if their account is set to public. Most interactions are harmless enough but as an app, TikTok is prone to predators because of the abundance of younger users.

USE PRIVACY SETTINGS
Undoubtedly, the easiest way to safeguard your child on TikTok is to make sure their account is set to private. This means only those users your child approves can view, like and comment on their content.

ENABLE RESTRICTED MODE
In the digital wellbeing section there’s the ability to turn on restricted mode using a PIN. Restricted mode filters out content that is not age appropriate although it should be noted that this isn’t always 100% fool proof. When enabling restricted mode, parents should still be vigilant to what their child is watching and take note that the algorithm moderating content is not infallible.

EXPLORE AND LEARN YOURSELF
Understanding and learning the app yourself is a major chance to turn it into a bonding opportunity with your child also. You could even unleash your brilliant chance to turn it into a bonding opportunity with your child also. You could even unleash your brilliant chance to turn it into a bonding opportunity with your child also. You could even unleash your brilliant chance to turn it into a bonding opportunity with your child also. You could even unleash your brilliant chance to turn it into a bonding opportunity with your child also. You could even unleash your brilliant chance to turn it into a bonding opportunity with your child also. You could even unleash your brilliant chance to turn it into a bonding opportunity with your child also. You could even unleash your brilliant chance to turn it into a bonding opportunity with your child also.

LEARN HOW TO REPORT AND BLOCK INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT
With the proper privacy settings in place, TikTok can be a safe way for your child to express themselves. However, just in case something does manage to slip through, TikTok allows users to report offensive and inappropriate content within the app. You can also block individual users by going on their profile.

MODERATE SCREEN TIME
As entertaining as TikTok is, you can help your child moderate their time on the app by making sure of the digital wellbeing section. Under the screen time management setting, you can limit the daily allotted time allowed on the app in increments ranging from 40 to 120 minutes. You can also lock this setting behind a PIN number which has to be inputted in order to then exceed the daily time limit. This way your child can get their daily dose of memes without wasting away the day.

Meet our expert
Pete Badh is a writer with over 10+ years in research and analysis. Working within a specialist area for West Yorkshire Police, Pete has contributed work which has been pivotal in successfully winning high profile cases in court as well as writing as a subject matter expert for industry handbooks.

NEW FOR 2020* FAMILY SAFETY MODE
TikTok Family Safety Mode allows parents to link their own TikTok account to their child’s. It’s a great way to oversee your child’s digital wellbeing by giving you direct control over their safety settings and being able to remotely turn features on and off. This includes managing screen time, the ability to send and receive direct messages (and with whom) and the ability to restrict the appearance of content that might not be age appropriate.

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Sources: www.tiktok.com

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