

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE TIK TOK APP

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Tik Tok

What Tik Tok App is

It is a short-form video app, available for iOS and Android devices. Videos are fifteen seconds long and replay in a continuous loop.

One of the world's biggest social apps with more than 300 million monthly active users.

Kids can post stuff without reviewing or editing it first. In 2019, TikTok paid millions to settle with federal regulators who charged it violated children's privacy law.

The app has been the subject of troubling reports about its "dark" side, which is reportedly filled with child predators, devious algorithms, dark patterns, and teens bullying and harassing one another.

Tik Tok is an app that is open to the world, so mature content can (and does) appear in the stream. Thankfully, the app has privacy settings available. You can decide whether or not you want others to find you; set your account to private so other users cannot view your uploaded content; and select who can send you a message, leave comments, and singalong with you.

Tik Tok is rated 12+ on the Apple app store and "teen maturity" on Google Play. However, there is no system in place to verify a user's age, so anyone can download it. Because of the access to inappropriate content, and the use of popular music that may contain explicit language, this is not an app for young kids. Concerned parents can use the parental control settings on their children's devices to prevent them from downloading the app.





ABOUT PRIVACY

When you sign up for TikTok, your account is public by default, meaning anyone can see your videos, send you direct messages, and use your location information. Parents should make sure to turn on all privacy settings for accounts kids are using, so only people you know can interact with your videos or message you on the app. That means either opting for a private account or changing the settings for comments, duets, reactions, and messages to "Friends" instead of "Everyone." You can also turn those features off completely.

Some experts recommend the app for age 16+ mainly due to the privacy issues and mature content. TikTok requires that users be at least 13 years old to use the app and that anyone under the age of 18 must have approval of a parent or guardian - but there are plenty of young tween users. If your younger kid or tween wants to use the app, the account should belong to an adult who can monitor what younger users are browsing and sharing. There's also the section of the app mentioned above that's meant for kids under 13 that restricts access to mature content and comments, but since entering a false birthdate is easy, it's still best for older teens.

To make your TikTok account private, go to your profile page and select the three-dot icon in the top-right corner. Select Privacy and Safety. There, toggle the switch for "Private Account." You can also select who can send you comments and direct messages, and who can do a duet with you. Using the "Friends" setting or turning those features off completely limits contact with strangers.

Reactions are limited to the heart symbol to encourage positivity within the community, but open forum comments can, unfortunately, promote negativity. That said, older teens who love making videos will likely enjoy using Tik Tok and may already be active on it. However, parents should definitely still talk with their children about appropriate online behavior, and make sure kids understand what kind of content is OK to post and what is not. Kids should also know to come to an adult if they see something that disturbs them.

One reputable aspect of the Tik Tok app is the "Digital Wellbeing" setting. It is a screen time-management mode that holds users to a two-hour limit on the app per day when turned on. A pass code is required to continue using the app past that time limit. The pass code is a perfect opportunity for parents to step in and set limitations around excessive screen time.

Because of TikTok's emphasis on popular music, many videos include swearing and sexual lyrics, so it may not be age-appropriate for kids to use on their own. It's also easy to find people wearing revealing clothing and dancing suggestively, although TikTok won't let you search for objectionable content such as "sex" or "porn." If you supervise your kids and stick to songs you already know from the radio, TikTok can be a kid-friendly experience. In 2019, after settling with the Federal Trade Commission for child privacy violations due to all the children under 13 on the site, the developers created a separate section of the app for kids that only allows them to access curated, clean videos: They can't comment, search, or post their own videos. However, bypassing that section only requires entering a false birthdate. Users can also earn TikTok Reward points by inviting friends to download the app, and then they can redeem those points for coupons from brands like Sephora and Uber. It's also possible to spend real money by adding virtual coins to your Wallet.