

PARENT'S GUIDE TO TikTok



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- TikTok's Parental Supervision Tools
- Talking to Your Teens About Social Media
- Tips for Staying Safe on TikTok



WHAT'S INSIDE

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TOP 4 QUESTIONS ABOUT TIKTOK FROM PARENTS <<

- 1 Should my teen's TikTok account be private?** There are pluses and minuses to having a public account on TikTok. Our research shows that many TikTok users, no matter their age, derive significant joy from interacting with a large global audience. More communication and collaboration can spark greater creativity and lead to a more satisfying online experience. However, a public account will not be appropriate or desirable for every user; making an account private is a way to restrict interactions to only accounts you have approved. Ultimately, this is a personal decision and one we encourage parents to make together with their child, based on open communication about their use of technology. The accounts for TikTok users under 16 are set to private by default and—in most cases—we recommend they remain private until at least the teen's 16th birthday.
- 2 Does TikTok have a minimum age?** TikTok's Terms of Service state that users must be at least 13 years old to sign up for an account and have full access to the platform, in compliance with the U.S.'s Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. Some countries, including Ireland, impose different age restrictions, so if you're outside the United States, check with your local laws.
- 3 Is TikTok appropriate for children?** While TikTok may be appropriate for most teens, it is not primarily aimed at children under 13. The app, however, provides several ways for users and parents to restrict mature content that may not be appropriate for younger users. Additionally, TikTok has created a separate "experience" that allows users under 13 access only to curated, age-appropriate videos. Users under 13 cannot comment, search, or post their own videos.
- 4 I've heard that TikTok is a Chinese company. Is that true, and how does that impact teens who use the app?** TikTok is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, which was founded in 2012. ByteDance owns and operates numerous products in China, including the popular news platform Toutiao and Douyin, which is a separate app and available only in China. In 2017, A version of the TikTok app as it exists today became available in the United States in August 2018. The TikTok app is not available in China and, according to a company blog post, stores all TikTok U.S. user data in the United States, with backup redundancy in Singapore. TikTok data centers are located entirely outside of China.



TikTok is an entertainment platform that lets people create and share short videos. People love using the platform's tools, filters, and special effects to combine video, music, and graphics into funny sketches, informational videos, and creative shorts.

The app's users often emphasize quirkiness and novelty, and in that respect, TikTok is helping expand the creative frontier of the internet. Although you can view TikTok videos at [TikTok.com](https://www.tiktok.com), downloading the mobile app is the best way to learn about the service. New users create an account using their phone number or email, or their Apple, Facebook, Google, Instagram, or Twitter accounts.

New users enter their birthdate when they sign up. Kids under 13 are placed in TikTok for Younger Users, a limited viewing experience with strict privacy and safety protections. Users 13 to 15 years old get a private account by default, though they can change it to public at any time.

TikTok and other digital platforms provide special features and protections for younger users that are updated and improved all the time so it's important for young people to enter their correct birth year when signing up. TikTok, for example, restricts teens ages 13 to 15 from receiving push notifications after 9 p.m. to encourage healthy sleep. Also, accounts ages 13 to 15 are set to private by default, and they cannot send or receive direct messages. Features like suggesting your account to others or video downloads are off by default for 16 and 17 years olds. Again, these safeguards only work if the account holder's birth year is correct.

Understanding TikTok feeds

After signing in, the first feed you'll see is the "For You" feed, with videos recommended by TikTok. As you watch, linger on, and "heart" (similar to "like" on other platforms) videos, and follow accounts, TikTok's algorithm recommends what videos and accounts may interest you. The search icon at the top right of the Home tab lets you search for videos, other creators, sounds, hashtags, and effects.

The other feed is "Following." Accounts you follow appear here. Follower relationships are not mutual by nature, meaning you can follow someone without them following you back and vice versa. This is different from some other apps with a "friend" model where the two people agree to share content.

When you view a TikTok video, a series of icons appear on the right section of the screen.

- The top circle takes you to the profile of the video's creator.
- The Heart icon lets you like the video.
- A Comments icon lets you view and post comments on the video.
- The Send/Share icon (an arrow) lets you share the video to other platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, or share via text message or email. You can also report the video here or select "not interested" if you'd rather not see similar videos in your feed.

Some people use TikTok primarily to watch videos, while others both watch and create. As you'll see in the next section, creating and sharing videos is easier than you might think, and there are ways to limit who can see your videos.



For more info, visit
[ConnectSafely.org/
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Creating a TikTok video

Tap the + button at the bottom of the screen, grant the app access to your phone's camera and microphone, and start recording. You can add music or other audio to your video (most users do) by tapping **Add Sound**. Choose from various other tools to make your video unique, including altering the speed and adding Augmented Reality (AR) effects. TikTok videos can range from a few seconds to 10 minutes.

A popular feature for creating videos is "Duets," which lets you film a video alongside an existing TikTok video. The result is a side-by-side video that plays at the same time. To create a Duet, tap the **Share** arrow button on the video you want to Duet with, then click **Duet**. Duet is disabled for 13-15 year olds. If you're 16 or older, you can limit who can create Duets with your videos (to Everyone, Friends, or Only Me). (If you're 16 or 17, the setting is defaulted to Friends.) Go to **Settings and Privacy > Privacy > Duet** to access these settings.

Parental supervision tools

Parents have several options for supervising their teens' experiences on TikTok.

TikTok Family Pairing

For a robust set of parental control tools, parents can enable **Family Pairing**, which links a parent's TikTok account to their teen's TikTok account. With Family Pairing turned on, parents can, for example, select how long their teen can use TikTok, what kind of content they can view, whether they have a private or public account, or who can send them direct messages. Turn on Family Pairing at **Settings and Privacy > Family Pairing**.

TikTok digital wellbeing tools

TikTok has "Digital Wellbeing" tools for all accounts that set daily screen time and limit certain videos with Restricted Mode, which TikTok says "limits content that may not be appropriate for some viewers." Go to **Settings and Privacy > Digital Wellbeing** to access the tools.

Our testing shows that the use of **Restricted Mode** removes videos that may contain some violent and sexual content, resulting in a more PG experience. However, as with restricted modes on all apps, there is always the possibility that something could slip by the filters, and there may be content that might be inappropriate to some but

could be appropriate to others, even in the same age range, which is why parents need to think about the settings based on what's best for their teen.

To set up **Restricted Mode** or establish screen time limits, a parent needs access to their teen's phone to go into the app and enter a code so that only the parent could be able to change it out of Restricted Mode or allow for use beyond the designated screen time.

Device-level tools

Manage access to TikTok and other apps through settings on Apple and Android devices.

- On Apple devices, go to **Settings > Screen Time**. Or, view the Apple guide to setting restrictions on your child's phone [here](#).
- On Android devices, parents can restrict what content can be downloaded or purchased from Google Play based on maturity level. Go to Google Play on your child's Android device. Tap on their profile picture or icon, and navigate to **Settings > Family**, where you can turn Parental controls on or off, set a security PIN, and adjust the settings. Turn Parental Controls on and create a PIN that a user must enter to change these controls. Then select the highest content rating you would like to allow for purchases or downloads. Parents also can use a Google feature called [Family Link](#) to block specific apps on their child's phone.

For general advice about parental controls, see ConnectSafely's [Family Guide to Parental Controls](#), and for device-specific information, see [Parental Control for Devices and Networks](#).

Deciding to use supervision tools

Whether or not to use parental supervision tools from TikTok, the device maker, or an outside company, is personal. There is no "one size fits all" answer, and a lot



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depends on the child. Both age and maturity matter. Some questions to think about:

- Do they generally follow family rules?
- How likely are they to take risks?
- How is their impulse control?
- Are they careful with their device—or a device they borrow, say from a parent or older sibling—and sensitive information like passwords?

Most young teens just starting to use TikTok would benefit from a monitored experience and short discussions about why you chose the settings you did. But the long-term goal should be to wean them away from monitoring tools. As the saying goes, “we’re raising adults, not kids,” and it’s important to teach critical thinking skills to help children make good decisions on and offline now and as they mature.

Also, remember that you are your child’s most important role model. Develop healthy habits around technology and social media that you model for and discuss with your child, such as asking people (including your children) before posting their image online, managing your screen time, especially when around other people, including family members, keeping online comments civil and respectful, vetting news and information to avoid spreading false information, and any other tools or habits that keep your social media use safe and positive. For more about parental control tools, visit ConnectSafely.org/controls.

Talking with your teens about being online

We can’t overestimate the importance of having conversations with your teens about their use of online platforms, focusing on both the benefits and the risks. It should be a calm conversation, never a lecture or an inquisition. Just ask general questions like “what are your favorite apps, and why?” and “what do you do to protect your privacy and safety?” (TikTok’s Family Pairing feature will also suggest questions for parents and guardians to encourage these conversations. Learn more [here](#).) You might even want to ask them for their advice on how you can protect your own safety, privacy, and security. You might be surprised and impressed by how much they know. Teens are often more aware of online risks and how to manage them than many adults.

Of course, you also need to talk about the risks associated with all interactive technology, such as harm to body image, engaging in dangerous behavior, and harms associated with excessive use, false information, and more.

Yes, there are risks associated with being online, but that’s true with all technologies and almost all activities, including cooking, driving, and sports. You can never avoid

all risks, but you can manage risks, minimize the chances of something going wrong and learn to recover when bad things happen.

By speaking with your teen, you'll get a much more accurate portrayal of how your teen manages risks associated with online platforms and probably get additional insight into your teen's attitudes towards risk in general, which become very important when your teen starts to drive or ride in other teens' cars, get into romantic relationships and engage in other activities which may involve risk.

Also, be aware that all risks are not equal and don't affect everyone the same way. For some teens, for example, a cyberbullying incident can be extremely consequential, but for others, perhaps mildly annoying. How your teen—and you—handle situations can have a big impact on how well they are resolved.

Parents are rightfully concerned about who their teens interact with online, but “stranger danger” is often exaggerated. That's not to say that bad things don't happen, but severe negative experiences are uncommon, and that's partly because most teens are pretty savvy about who they interact with. Still, it's a good idea to go over some basic safety guidelines with your teen to make sure they are aware, for example, of what types of conversations to avoid and how to report anyone who is abusive and block anyone who is rude, creepy or otherwise engages in inappropriate conduct or contact.

Perhaps the most common risks of digital platforms are distress over “FOMO” (fear of missing out) and sadness when teens compare themselves to others who may appear to be better looking, more popular, and generally seem to be living a better life. Remind your teen that things are not always as they appear and that some of these beautiful people are using filters, make-up, lighting, and—in some cases—even plastic surgery to look inauthentically “perfect” and to present a highlight reel of



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their life. For more, see ConnectSafely's [Resisting the 'Pressure to be Perfect'](#) and the Jed Foundation's post on [Understanding Food and Body Image Struggles](#).

Online challenges aren't necessarily bad

You may have heard about dangerous online challenges like “devious licks,” but the majority of viral challenges aren't dangerous, and [studies show](#) most kids don't participate in dangerous online challenges on TikTok or other apps. Also, TikTok's Community Guidelines prohibit videos that promote or glorify dangerous behavior and the company says that it swiftly removes violative content when it becomes aware of it.

While there have been problematic challenges on TikTok and other platforms, most challenges are fun, light-hearted activities that people film themselves doing to share with and connect to the broader online community. A recent challenge that went viral, for example, is the 3-minute makeup challenge, which involves people attempting to do their entire makeup routine in less than 3 minutes to sometimes hilarious results. You may also remember the ice bucket challenge, another well-known challenge that involved people recording themselves pouring buckets of ice over their heads, which raised [millions of dollars for ALS research](#).

Still, it's important to talk with your kids about dangerous internet challenges and hoaxes, which are pranks or tricks created to make viewers believe something frightening, but which aren't true, and the peer pressure to participate. Some physical challenges are indeed dangerous, especially if the person isn't well trained, such as challenges that involve performing a backflip, for example, or any other activity that requires a special skill. TikTok recently developed [a guide to help parents and teens](#) learn about online challenges and the steps they can take to assess the level of risk.

Blocking and reporting

TikTok uses a combination of policies and human- and machine-based moderation practices to block and remove content that violates its [Community Guidelines](#). You can also report content or other users who you believe may violate the guidelines.

- Block a user: You can block another user for any reason. A blocked user will not be able to follow you. They also will not be able to view, like, or comment on your videos. To block another user, tap on the Profile and the three dots in the upper right corner. Select **Block**.
- Report a profile: Tap on the Profile you want to report and the three dots. Tap **Report**.

- Report a video: Long press on the video and tap **Report**.
- Report a comment: Long press on the comment and tap **Report**.
- Report a message: Open the conversation and tap the icon at the top right. Tap **Report**.

Cyberbullying

Parents should remind their teens to speak with a trusted adult and/or peer if they are ever on the receiving end of bullying or unwanted content, and encourage young users to report content that is negative or otherwise objectionable. And, of course, always encourage your teens to be kind and considerate in their use of TikTok.

One helpful tool is the ReThink App for Android and iOS that “looks over your shoulder” while you type and prompts you to rethink sending anything the app deems to be problematic. For more advice on talking to your kids and teens about cyberbullying, see ConnectSafely’s A Parent’s Guide to Cyberbullying.

Another helpful resource is TikTok’s bullying prevention guide, which is designed to help you identify bullying behavior and figure out how to take action if you or someone you know is being bullied.

TikTok also offers several comment controls to help keep bullying off the platform like comment filters and a prompt for people to reconsider posting unkind comments. (Learn more about the tools here.)

Privacy

You have the option to make your account private. This allows you to approve or deny followers. It also means that only your approved followers can view your videos. To minimize risk and maximize safety, consider carefully each follower request before accepting it. To make an account private, go to **Settings and Privacy > Privacy**.



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For more info about privacy, visit [ConnectSafely.org/privacy](https://connectsafely.org/privacy).



There are several other useful ways TikTok allows you to protect your privacy and customize your experience:

- Prevent other users from receiving suggestions to follow you. Go to **Settings and Privacy > Privacy > Suggest Your Account to Others**.
- Prevent others from commenting on your videos or limit comments to friends only. Go to **Settings and Privacy > Privacy > Comments**.
- Turn off or limit to friends only who can send you direct messages. Go to **Settings and Privacy > Privacy > Direct Messages**.
- Turn off Duets or limit the ability to Duet with your videos to friends only. Go to **Settings and Privacy > Privacy > Duet**.

TikTok's privacy policy outlines the information that is collected, why it is collected, and the options you have to limit the information you share. The policy states that TikTok gives "advertisers reports about the types of people (not the names of individuals) seeing their ads and how their ads are performing." Users may prevent their data from being shared by opting out of personalized ads. Go to **Settings and Privacy > Privacy > Ads Personalization**.

Resources from TikTok

TikTok has several educational resources for parents, including a [Guardian's Guide](#) in its [Safety Center](#), a [Well-Being Guide](#), and an ongoing [blog series](#) with helpful tips to customize your TikTok experience. These tools are useful resources for parents to begin discussions about TikTok's in-app [safety tools](#). ConnectSafely also has safety resources in addition to this guide, including a Quick-Guide, video interviews with TikTok executives and a short video that highlights key safety features at ConnectSafely.org/tiktok.



For more resources
about TikTok, visit
[ConnectSafely.org/
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Closing thoughts for parents

It's easy for parents to feel intimidated or "out of the loop" when it comes to TikTok or any online platform but relax, you don't have to be a technology expert to know how to help your teen safely use TikTok or any other app. The "rules" for using any site or service are pretty similar. Everyone should be respectful of themselves and others, be mindful of what they post and understand how to use any privacy settings, security tools, or blocking and reporting mechanisms.

And it's not just about TikTok because there are other apps your teens use or will use, including new ones that may pop up at any time. While each app has its own unique features and safety tools, the risks and approach to managing risks are generally similar among all apps that allow people to interact.

So, no matter what tech your kids use, it's important to keep the lines of communication as open as possible and to have ongoing conversations about what's appropriate for them in terms of privacy settings, time spent online, and the types of activities they're engaging in. It generally works better to talk with your teen about their favorite tools—with genuine interest, not fear—because they're more likely to come to you when they need help, and you're much more likely to be kept in the loop about the technology that they use. As always, everyone needs to be respectful of themselves and others, be mindful of the effects of what they post on other people, and understand that anything they post can impact their reputation and, possibly, their future.

Finally, although TikTok can bring joy and happiness to teens, it's important that they take off their headphones and put down their phones to interact with people in real life.

About ConnectSafely

ConnectSafely is a Silicon Valley, California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to educating users of connected technology about safety, privacy and security. We publish research-based safety tips, parents' guidebooks, advice, news and commentary on all aspects of tech use and policy.