SOURCES:
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 a 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.

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 TikTok may look to imitate the explicit language they hear or the suggestive actions they see when viewing others' videos on the app.

**TIKTOK FAME**
TikTok is very image focused and there is a notable preoccupation with appearing cool and attractive. Many teenagers now attempt to go viral and become what’s known in-app as 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 safe and wholesome content, but have since ventured into more extreme territories in an effort to make people laugh. However there has been a knock-on effect of making them go to more and more drastic lengths to get noticed.

**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.

**ADDICTIVE NATURE**
TikTok is no different. It can be fun and hugely entertaining. However, it is also because of this addictive nature 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 45-minute visits.

**IN-APP PURCHASES**
Aside from the content, there’s also the option to purchase in-app extra coins 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.

**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, comment and message their content. Setting the account to private may clash with your child’s goal of social media stardom, but it will keep their account secure from strangers. The setting can be enabled under the privacy and safety menu by tapping the ellipse icon in the ‘my’ tab of the app. To be extra safe, there are additional controls available to logged in users, such as who can send messages and comments, among other options.

**MODERATE SCREEN TIME**
As entertaining as TikTok is, you can help your child moderate their time on the app by making use of the digital wellbeing section. Under the screen time management option, you can limit the daily allotted time allowed on the app in increments ranging from 40 to 120 minutes. You can also lock the app, disabling restricted mode, ensuring they can’t access the app. TikTok is very image focused and there is a notable preoccupation with appearing cool and attractive. Many teenagers now attempt to go viral and become what’s known in-app as 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 safe and wholesome content, but have since ventured into more extreme territories in an effort to make people laugh. However there has been a knock-on effect of making them go to more and more drastic lengths to get noticed.

**EXPLORE AND LEARN YOURSELF**
Understanding and learning the app yourself is a great way to get to grips with TikTok. You could then block individual users by going on their profile, change the privacy settings and turn on restricted mode by going into the menu bar and tapping the 'setting' icon. 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 TikTok may look to imitate the explicit language they hear or the suggestive actions they see when viewing others' videos on the app.

**LEARN HOW TO REPORT AND BLOCK INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT**
With the proper privacy settings in place, TikTok can be a safe and enjoyable place for children to express themselves. However, in case something does manage to slip through, TikTok has an in-app reporting system that is easy to use. TikTok users can report offenders and comments within the app. You can also block individual users by going on their profile.

**TALK ABOUT ONLINE DANGERS**
Assuming your child is above the age limit to use the app, make sure you also take the time to talk to them about what they are seeing on the app. Have a dialogue, get them to give you about what they have seen. TikTok allows users to report offenders and comments within the app. You can also block individual users by going on their profile.

**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 appropriate although it should be noted that this isn’t always 100% foolproof. 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.

**Safety Tips for Parents**

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.

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