What Parents & Carers Need to Know about TikTok

What are the risks?

Age-inappropriate content
While TikTok’s “Following” feed only displays videos from users someone follows, “For You” is a stream of clips based on their previously watched content. Most videos on a child’s “For You” feed will therefore be light-hearted and amusing, but it could potentially surface something unsuitable. TikTok’s guidelines prohibit the sharing of illegal or inappropriate content, but the sheer volume of uploads means they aren’t manually monitored and vetted.

Dangerous challenges
Due to TikTok’s immense popularity, some young people have unfortunately been influenced by videos challenging them to perform harmful, criminal or even deadly acts. One extreme example was the ‘Blackout’ trend, which encouraged users to hold their breath until they passed out from a lack of oxygen. It led to two smalls facing charges over TikTok’s tragic deaths of their children.

Contact with strangers
With around 1 billion users globally, the potential for contact from strangers on TikTok is high—especially as accounts created by over-16s (or younger users using a fake age of birth) can set their videos to public. This not only means that someone’s profile will be visible to all users on the app, but also that their videos are suggested to others and enables anyone to comment on them or download them.

Advice for Parents & Carers

Enable Family Pairing
Family Pairing allows parents to link their TikTok account with their child’s and control their settings remotely. For example, turn on Restricted Mode (reducing the number of videos that can be viewed), set screen time limits, and manage their child’s ability to send messages (and to whom). Children can’t alter these settings without parental approval.

Make Accounts Private
Although under-16s will have their TikTok account set to private by default, bypassing this setting is relatively easy. However, parents have the ability to manually set their child’s account to private—meaning that their videos won’t be visible to strangers and they won’t be able to exchange messages with people who aren’t on their friends list.

Discuss the Dangers
If your child wants to use TikTok and you’re happy for them to do so, it’s crucial to talk about the potential risks in this type of app. For example, ensure they understand not to share any identifying personal information—and that they realise they could be exposed to inappropriate content. Thinking critically about what they see on TikTok can help children become generally more social media savvy.

Read the Signs
If you’re concerned that your child might be spending too much time on TikTok, or that they’ve been emotionally affected by something inappropriate or upsetting that they’ve seen, it’s important to know how to spot the possible signs. Increased irritability and a lack of concentration are potential red flags, as are failing to complete homework or regularly eating meals.

Meet Our Expert
Carly Page is an experienced technology journalist with a track record of over 10 years in the industry. Previously the editor of TechTocado, Carly is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant.