TikTok is a global video community where users create, share and discover ‘funny and memorable moments’ via short video clips – typically about 15 seconds long. Videos can be ‘spiced up’ with special effect filters, stickers, music and sound clips. Currently one of the world’s most popular apps, TikTok was formerly known as Musical.ly before it was rebranded by the Chinese company ByteDance that acquired it in November 2017. If your child had previously had a Musical.ly account, all of their videos and personal settings will have automatically been moved to TikTok. In early 2019, TikTok was hit with a record $5.7m (£4.2m) fine in the US for child data privacy concerns for its record keeping while under the Musical.ly brand.

**ONLINE PREDATORS**

By default, users accounts are automatically set to public when they first create an account. TikTok encourages users to share creative expression through their videos, but if posted publicly, anyone in the world can see your child’s homemade content.

There have also been concerns the Chinese government could access data or sway public opinion through the app. If your child’s profile is open, strangers can use the app to comment on your child’s videos. While this isn’t always sinister, it gives potential predators the ability to contact your child through the platform.

**INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT**

TikTok lets users lip-sync to their favourite songs and produce their own music videos. Some of the music choices contain swear words or sexual themes but not only can children be led to create potentially inappropriate content but they can broadcast themselves mining or singing these lyrics. In addition to this, some of the outfits and dance moves in videos can be overtly sexual and provocative. There have also been reports of some videos that promote anorexia, porn, self-harm and violence.

**IN-APP PURCHASES**

As with many apps, there’s a paid element to TikTok. Users can buy virtual coins to be exchanged for virtual gifts – for example, if they like a specific video, your child can use coins to purchase emojis to show approval. These can be expensive and easily purchased – there is the option to buy 10,000 coins for £99.99 with a one-click buy button.

**DISCUSS THE PITFALLS OF OVERSHARING**

Encourage your child to always think before they do, say, like or post anything online. Explain that their ‘digital footprint’ shapes their online reputation and the way that other people see them. Something they may find funny and entertaining now may impact them in the future. Talk about how to deal with peer pressure and how doing something they think will impress others could affect them. Remind them that they do not have to do anything they are not comfortable with. To ensure that there’s no way of anyone tracking your child’s location or identity online, you should ensure that they should never film a video in their school uniform or near a landmark that gives away where they live.

**REPORT INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT**

If you or your child sees something inappropriate on TikTok, you can flag it up as an account, video or comment by simply tapping ‘Report’ in the app’s ‘Digital Wellbeing’ feature, there’s also an ‘Enhanced Restricted Mode’, limiting appearance of videos which may be inappropriate.

**HANDLING CRITICISM**

While it’s fantastic to see your child being creative and expressive and bonding with people with similar interests, they need to be aware that not everyone will be supportive online. Comments can be negative or even cruel. Make sure your child knows how to comment respectfully and handle negative feedback. In the app’s Privacy and Safety settings, your child can decide who can react to their videos, who can comment and who can send them private chat messages. We suggest altering these settings so only their friends can interact with their posts.

**USE THE ‘DIGITAL WELLBEING’ SETTING**

If you’re concerned about how long your child is spending on TikTok, it has a setting called ‘Digital Wellbeing’ which allows you to manage the amount of screen time your child can have. We also recommend you turn off push notifications in the settings to prevent your child from receiving ‘spam-like’ notifications from TikTok that encourage users to go on the app.

**SIGNING UP WITH THE CORRECT AGE**

When signing up, users are prompted to input a their date of birth. If the inputted date of birth means your child is under 13, the app will block them. However, this doesn’t prevent your child from lying about their age. The app is intended for users aged 13+. So, explain the app is there, for a reason, to keep them protected from online dangers.

**USE A PRIVATE ACCOUNT**

Setting up a private account means that only people who are approved to see your videos can view them. To make an account private, tap the dots at the top right of the screen to access settings. Click ‘Privacy and Safety’. Scroll down until you find ‘Private Account’ and turn this setting on.

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**TOP TIPS FOR PARENTS**

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- **DISCUSS IN-APP PURCHASES**: To lower the risk of your child making accidental in-app purchases, teach them exactly what in-app purchases are and the risks of making them without permission. Tell them that they are not essential to enjoy the app and that if they want to make a purchase, they should always ask you beforehand. In the app’s ‘Digital Wellbeing’ feature, there is the option to disable the function of purchasing coins and sending gifts.

**SOURCES**

- TikTok vs Musical.ly: per Everything you need to know about the app your child is obsessed with www멸리도로.com/watch?v=aNO6s4FCdUs, www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVGZ1ZQ4JqM, static.muscdn.com/website/pdf/creatorPlaybook.pdf.