

Parents' Ultimate Guide to TikTok

Is TikTok safe? How does it work? And can I do a duet with my kid? Everything you need to know about this popular musical singing and sharing app. By [Frannie Ucciferri](#) 8/27/2018

Topics: [Celebrity Influence on Kids](#), [Digital Citizenship](#), [Privacy and Internet Safety](#), [Social Media](#)

Advice | 1:00

What Is Musical.ly?

With so many social networks to keep track of, it's not surprising if your kid's obsession with the TikTok app leaves you scratching your head. So what is it exactly?

TikTok - Real Short Videos is a free social media app that lets you watch, create, and share videos -- often to a soundtrack of the top hits in music -- right from your phone. It was originally available as musical.ly in the U.S. but was rebranded when the two apps merged in August 2018. With more than 100 million users, Tik Tok is incredibly popular, owing in part to its slick mash-up of features from other kid favorites. As with the [lip-synching app Dubsplash](#), users can watch and record videos of themselves lip-synching to popular music and sound bites. As they did on the [now-defunct Vine](#), kids can create short, shareable videos ranging from funny to serious. And just like [YouTube](#), Tik Tok is an interactive world of videos that lets you connect with friends and admirers through likes, comments, and even duets.

TikTok - Real Short Videos even spawns its own celebrities. Almost overnight, musical.ly sensations like Baby Ariel and [Jacob Sartorius](#) have gained internet fame, especially with kids and teens.

But with so much information out there, it can be a challenge for parents to know if it's really safe. While TikTok videos are mostly harmless, creative fun, there are real concerns about kids using the app. As [with any social network](#), you have to use privacy settings to limit how much information you and your kids are sharing. Kids can post stuff without reviewing or editing it first. There have even been reports of [online predators](#) using the app to target younger users.

Read Common Sense Media's [full review of TikTok - Real Short Videos](#), and help your kids use it safely with answers to parents' most frequently asked questions below.

What is TikTok - Real Short Videos?

TikTok is a social network for sharing user-generated videos, mostly of people lip-synching to popular songs. It was originally called musical.ly (pronounced MU-zik-lee). Users can create and upload their own videos where they lip-synch, sing, dance, or just talk. You can also browse and interact with other users' content, which covers a wide range of topics, songs, and styles.

How safe is TikTok?

Using any social network can be risky, but it's possible for kids to safely use the app with adult supervision (and a private account). 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.

How does TikTok work?

Tik Tok users sign up with a phone number, an email address, Facebook, or Instagram. Once logged in, you can search popular creators, categories (comedy, animals, sports), and hashtags to find videos. Or you can use your phone contacts or social media followers to find friends already on the app. Many kids on Tik Tok like to create videos, but plenty of people don't post themselves -- they just use the app to find and follow content creators.

Is TikTok appropriate for kids?

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.

What age is TikTok recommended for?

Common Sense recommends 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.

How are TikTok and live.ly related?

When TikTok merged with musical.ly, the developers shut down live.ly and directed livestreamers to [LiveMe](#), a different live video app. Musical.ly and live.ly were created by the same developers and linked together. But where musical.ly was based on recorded videos, live.ly was a live-streaming service, which can be a riskier option for kids and teens. You could use one account for both services and move between the two apps depending on the features you want to use, but this is no longer available within TikTok.

How can you make your TikTok account private?

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 edit who can send you comments and direct messages, and who can do a duet with you.

How do I delete a TikTok video?

To delete a TikTok video that you have posted to your account, select the video you want to delete from your profile. From there, tap the "..." icon in the bottom-right corner and select Delete or the trash can icon. You will be asked if you are sure you want to delete the video. Then it will be removed from your profile.

How can I delete a TikTok account?

To delete a TikTok account, go to your profile, then select the "..." icon in the top-right corner. Select Manage My Account. From there, you must add a phone number if you haven't already. This must be a working number, as they will text you a code to verify the number and later to verify deleting the account. Once you've added a phone number, an option at the bottom of the Manage My Account menu will appear, asking, "Thinking about removing your account?" Tap the phrase, which will lead you to a new page prompting you to enter a verification code. Choose "Send Code" to receive a text message with the verification code. Enter the number, then select Continue. You will be given information on what is entailed in deleting the account. Choose Continue once again for a final confirmation that you want to delete your account, then tap Delete Account.

How can I use TikTok with my kids?

You can provide a buffer between kids and iffy content by watching with your kids and making videos together. Offer to hold the camera or turn it around to do a selfie duet. You can post it or save it as "private" so only you can see. The app also lets you share videos by email, text, or other social media where you can better control who sees it, so kids can perform for friends and relatives instead of a wider network of people.

How do you do a duet on TikTok?

TikTok has a feature that allows two users who aren't in the same place to perform a duet. Both users must follow each other to make it work. One user creates and posts a video, and then a mutual follower can tap the "..." icon at the bottom right of the video and select "start duet now!" The second user can then lip-synch along with the first person, either swapping back and forth or in a split screen.

How can I monitor my kid's activity on TikTok?

Other than blocked search terms, there's no way to filter out content on Tik Tok, so kids using the app on their own might come across age-inappropriate videos. Parents can and should share an account with kids under the age of 13. For older kids, ask about their favorite video creators and get to know their videos (with or without your kid). Also, take the time to regularly look at the most popular songs, videos, and challenges.

What if my kid wants to get famous on TikTok?

While the safest way to use TikTok is with a private account, the social nature of the app and the rapid success of its stars might have your kids begging to set it to public. There's huge enticement to get famous, which could encourage kids to do things they wouldn't normally do to get a larger audience. They may also become obsessed with "likes" and virtual approval. Encourage and model safe behavior, and make sure to set limits on the type of information your kid shares.

About Frannie Ucciferri

As associate managing editor, Frannie Ucciferri makes sure each of Common Sense Media's more than 30,000 reviews and 700 curated lists is as complete and comprehensive as possible. Frannie is a graduate of UC Berkeley,... [Read more](#)
