



December: Online Safety Bulletin for Parents

Social Media

Why do children use social media?

Children and young people use many different social media apps and sites. The most popular are Facebook and Instagram, with many others such as Snapchat, TikTok and Twitter.

There are lots of benefits to social networking. They can allow users to stay connected with friends and family. They can also learn many different things, from make-up or gaming tutorials to making slime, or how to create their own videos.

Like most things, there can be negatives too. For children and young people there are risks that you should be aware of, to help keep your child safe on social media.

What are the risks of social media for children?

- Oversharing
- Sharing their location
- Talking to people they don't know
- Sending or receiving inappropriate content
- Unrealistic sense of body image or reality
- Obsessive focus on likes and comments



Tips to help children stay safe on social media

- **Review the location settings** - Remind them, and explain why, they shouldn't share location on posts, or public forums and chats, videos or with people they don't know. Review the location settings on their favourite app or game and talk to them about what they're sharing online.

Sometimes it might be appropriate for your child to share their location with a trusted adult or friend. For example, if they're travelling home alone or arranging to meet a group of friends outside school, then it can be a good way to help keep them safe.

Remember: If children share their location publicly, it could be seen by someone they don't know. This can increase the risk of cyberbullying, stalking or unwanted contact (from friends or others) or becoming a target.

- **Get to know the safety and privacy settings** - Explore the safety and privacy settings on any app, to decide which are right to use for your child. Each app has slightly different ways to set up an account, but most have the option to set an account to private, to not allow friend requests, and to hide the user's location. Explain these settings to your child and the reasons for having them in place.
- **Age ratings and features** - Get to know the age ratings of the apps that your child uses. Many have a minimum age of 13 years old to be able to sign up, but you should check the age rating of individual apps to make sure.

Don't forget that you know your child best, and you might decide that they need to be a little bit older before it's suitable for them.

Social media apps – a quick guide



Facebook | Age rating: 13+

Main features: newsfeed to share text, photos & videos, instant messaging, marketplace, friends, likes and comments.



Instagram | Age rating: 13+

Main features: photo & video sharing, livestreaming, stories, DMs, hashtags.



Snapchat | Age rating: 13+

Main features: photo & video messaging, snaps, location sharing



TikTok | Age rating: 13+

Main features: making & sharing short videos, lip-syncing.



Twitter | Age rating: 13+

Main features: tweets (text with restricted character count), photo and video sharing, hashtags.



Wink | Age rating: 13+

Main features: messaging, friends, photo sharing.

National Online Safety – A reminder that all of our parents are able to access more detailed information on the National Online Safety platform, access details below.

To create a parent account, please follow <https://nationalonlinesafety.com/enrol/wellington-school> and complete your details. You can access National Online Safety online via any device- including via a brand-new smartphone app. To download the app, please go to:
<https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/national-online-safety/id1530342372>
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=uk.co.nationaleducationgroup.nos>

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

TIKTOK

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

(certain features are restricted to over-18s only)

TikTok is a free social media platform that lets users create, share and watch short videos ranging anywhere from 15 seconds to 10 minutes in duration. The app gained notoriety for its viral dances, trends and celebrity cameos and can be a creative, fun platform for teens to enjoy. Now available in 75 languages, it has more than a billion active users worldwide (as of spring 2022) and is most popular with the under-16 age bracket. In fact, a 2022 Ofcom report found TikTok to be the most-used social media platform for posting content, particularly among young people aged 12 to 17.

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 mean they aren't manually monitored and vetted.

18

CENSORED

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 families filing lawsuits against TikTok over the tragic deaths of their children.

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

With around 1.1 billion users globally, the potential for contact from strangers on TikTok is high – especially as accounts created by over-16s (or youngsters using a false date of birth) are set to public by default. This not only means that someone's profile is visible to everyone else on the app; it also lets their videos be suggested to others and enables anyone to comment on them or download them.

IN-APP SPENDING

TikTok is free, but users have the option to buy TikTok coins, which can be used to purchase emojis in the app. These emojis are then sent as rewards (retaining their monetary value) to other users for videos they've created. Coin bundles range from £9.99 to an eye-watering £99; TikTok's policy is that they can't be bought by under-18s, but it's possible to bypass this with a fake birthdate.

ADDICTIVE NATURE

Like all social networking platforms, TikTok can be addictive: figures show that young people are investing increasing amounts of time in it. In the UK, children with TikTok spend an average of 102 minutes per day on the app, versus 53 minutes on YouTube. This compulsive repeated use can interfere with their sleep patterns – leading to irritability – and distract them from other activities.

TIKTOK NOW

Introduced in late 2022, the 'TikTok Now' feature lets users post a daily video or photo at the exact same time as their friends. Users receive a synchronised notification at a random time of day, giving them three minutes to take a video or real-time photo. This addition can not only be a distraction to young people but could lead to them inadvertently sharing private content such as their location.

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. Parents can then, for example, turn on Restricted Mode (reducing the chances of a child seeing inappropriate content); 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.

LIMIT IN-APP SPENDING

If your child is using an iPhone or Android device to access TikTok, you can alter the settings to prevent them from making in-app purchases. We'd recommend that you enable this feature, as it's quite easy for a young person – without realising what they're doing – to spend a significant amount of real money buying TikTok coins so they can unlock more features of the app.

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 not eating meals.

Meet Our Expert

Carly Page is an experienced technology journalist with a track record of more than 10 years in the industry. Previously the editor of tech tabloid The Inquirer, Carly is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant.



National
Online
Safety®

#WakeUpWednesday



www.nationalonlinesafety.com



@natonlinesafety



/NationalOnlineSafety



@nationalonlinesafety