

The Scoop on TikTok

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Move aside Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook. TikTok (formerly known as [musical.ly](#)) is the new social media darling with 689 million monthly active users worldwide (DataReportal, 2021). Note: These numbers do not include China whose version of TikTok goes by the name Douyin and has 600 million daily active users.

Why do we love it so much?

It is a platform for expressing creativity, creating content, sharing knowledge and highlighting passions. With clever short videos that range from entertaining to informational, it is easy to understand why 62% of US consumers ages 10-29 is the sweet spot for TikTok (Statista, 2020). The typical fan participates in an average of 52 minutes a day on the app, with preteens and teens averaging as much as 80 minutes a day.

How does it work?

TikTok has a powerful algorithm that is superior in its ability to discover the viewers interest and push specific materials through the “For You” feed. Within a timeframe of several hours, the TikTok algorithm can quickly determine a footprint of information by collecting micro-observations of data through the users shares, likes, follows and most notably the length of time spent on a particular feed. In addition, TikTok tracks users behavior regarding swipes, re-watches, number of repeat viewing of specific subject matter and when and where videos are watched. Information is continuously gathered; allowing TikTok to gain more specific data than any other platform.

What do parents need to be aware of?

It takes less than 30 seconds to find harmful content and only a few hours for the algorithm to dominate a feed and create a rabbit hole of inappropriate material to push to users. This includes content showcasing sex, drugs, alcohol, suggestive clothing, suggestive dancing, explicit music lyrics, profanity, unhealthy dietary lifestyles, high risk challenges, and material that is intended for adults only.

In some cases, teenagers are redirected to other recommended feeds and links offering paid pornography, sex shops, drug promotion, products and paraphernalia on-line stores. (WSJ 2021)

Simply *watching* a video that appears in the feed will provide the TikTok algorithm with vital information for future content. The user does not need to *search* to reveal their vulnerabilities or private interests.

TikTok allows direct messages (DMs). This permits your child to message others and others to message them. "Others" include strangers who may be interested in exploiting your child or harming them in any number of ways.

There are in-app purchases allowing users to purchase coins (up to \$99.99) and share with other users. On iPhones you can toggle off for "in-app purchases" in Screen Time.

TikTok collects a massive amount of information about its users. This includes personal, behavioral, and technical information. In addition, it has the ability to collect location data, phone and facebook contacts, messages and metadata (a summary of information about data) uploaded with each video. (TikTok privacy page)

A spokeswoman for TikTok acknowledges that the app does not differentiate between videos it serves to adults and minors but they are actively working on a tool that filters content for young users. She also said, that the majority of content of individual videos does not violate guidelines.

With over tens of thousands of videos uploaded per minute, Tiktok relies on a combination of algorithms and workforce of 10,000+ employees to police the content; often focusing on the most popular.

How to Protect your Child

Parents should model appropriate behavior on devices and social media platforms

Use the Parental Controls

Insure your child's proper birthdate is entered; once a birthdate is set, it is very difficult to change. As of January 2021, users ages 13-15 automatically have the following features disabled:

No direct messaging
Automatic private account setting
Comments are limited to "Friends" or "No one"

Parent Pairing allows parents to pair their device with their child's device in order to control privacy, searching, and content remotely from the parents device.

Set the **Restricted Mode** to filter content. Please note, mature content has still been able to infiltrate this setting.

Check "following" and "followers" from time to time on your child's device.

Download the Privacy Page and review with your kid.

Always remember, parental controls help protect your child, but is not a substitute for parental involvement and oversight.

Never forget, where you find children, you will also find predators looking to make a connection.

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