



Safe on Social

tik-tok

Cheat Sheet

This guide will be formatted differently to the normal Safe on Social app guides – because for the first time this is not an app we feel we can support the use of in any way.

We'd like to tell you our reasons – and then show you how to delete it.

There will be no how to use information. We will include for those who feel they are comfortable after reading our evidence, a short directive on how to protect both the privacy and security of your child.

This is not a new app, having had a name change from Musical.ly to TikTok in 2018 when the existing Musical.ly and Live.ly company was purchased the Chinese Internet giant Bytedance. Tiktok called Duoyin in China, already had a vast presence and this exploded with this amalgamation. The reported deal was in the realm of 1 billion dollars USD.

The actual purchase took place in 2017, but Musical.ly has migrated all users over to TikTok as of August 2nd 2018 at the time of the name change.

Musical.ly had a broad reach with over a 100 million active users per month – with fans calling themselves musers. Use of TikTok records figures of 500- 800 million monthly users now if not more. It is massive, and growing in popularity.

Musical.ly had a number of problems for an app that had been marketed to pre-teens/children – despite making vague noises about a 13+ age gate.

Some examples of these including children behaving pornographically in pursuit of likes, random strangers being able to contact young users, flagrant disregard of the age ratings (13+) , inappropriate language and dancing content from the videos provided to “lip sync “ to.

The list was becoming longer as the app grew in popularity and with the sale – the perfect excuse for a rebrand arose.

And – one would have thought – a opportunity to fix some of the issues that had plagued TikTok's predecessor.

Well. NO. That didn't happen.

And so begins the lists of reasons why Safe on Social, really is not a fan.

TO START

Privacy of children

TikTok or Bytedance is currently the proud recipient of the largest EVER civil penalty in the USA for violating the online privacy of children.

Those words should be enough. India banned it (and now has a special set of guidelines for users). Indonesia banned it, and now the USA has given it a kick in the proverbial.

But what did the app do, particularly in America to earn this reward?

In the USA, there is a piece of legislation called COPPA or the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act 1998. Part of this legislation is the requirement that companies that intend to collect personal information MUST obtain parental consent for individuals under 13.

Prior to rebranding Musical.ly had been aware that a large proportion of its users were under 13 as they had received thousands of complaints from parents.

The company had done nothing to address this issue either as Musical.ly or TikTok.

What was found during the Federal investigation was that information that was being captured by the app consisted of email addresses, phone numbers, first and last names and personal photographs of children well under the age of thirteen. (and facial recognition technology is used within the filters available - as an aside)

Trying to hide behind re-iterating the fact it had always had an "age-gate" especially since the rebrand was a futile exercise in the eyes of the court – given the ease with which it is to lie in these birth date entry points.

With its open messaging structure, automatic public defaults of profile pages, and huge levels of underage content that was leading to adults trying to contact children via the app, it was too much for the court.

"The operators of Musical.ly — now known as TikTok — knew many children were using the app but they still failed to seek parental consent before collecting names, email addresses, and other personal information from users under the age of 13," FTC Chairman Joe Simons stated in a press release. The FTC said the \$5.7 million settlement is the largest civil penalty ever in a children's privacy case."

Bytedance /TikTok was ordered to delete all data stored on users under 13 at the request of their parents and they will also be paying an \$8 million fine.

This has prompted the company to begin to develop an under 13 only space – but.....really? How genuine is this intent to keep younger users safe?..... Not very genuine at all.

Safe on Social feels the following account is telling. And not in a good way.

Directly after the COPPA case ruling this February 2019 the following took place.

A whole bunch of users found themselves locked out of their TikTok accounts following the age ruling. The Federal Trade Commission ruling saw TikTok temporarily suspend all accounts belonging to individuals under 13.

(So if you don't remember your pre-teen bewailing the loss of their TikTok/Musical.ly account around February 2019 - your child may be lying about their birth date on the app).

These same users took to Twitter to complain. And this showed very, very clearly that many of the suspended under 13 years accounts belonged to ACTUAL ADULTS. (or at the least older teens).

Um...what?

Adults pretending to be children to interact with children on the Internet?

Adults pretending to be children to interact with children online complaining about accounts being suspended and therefore outing themselves as creepy stalker types publicly?

There's a special name for internet idiocy of that ilk, and we won't be putting it here. But come on! Even more special was TikTok's own response.

The app suggested that, well, if people had ...you know...accidentally put in the wrong birth date, they could tootle over to the Report a Problem section of the web browser. Right.

This is the point that you would hope, such users were completely booted and banned from the app – but nope. TikTok offered a polite way for them to continue.

And doubling down HARD on the whole issue of personal data security in the first place, the app continued to state that

“...app and provide confirmation that you're age 13 or older by submitting a copy of your government ID.” Via Twitter Stunning. Send us a copy of your FORMAL identification documents, to prove you are actually older than 13, because we have just been fined for improperly managing data already and need your information.

And even more no, because for those users who missed the obvious issue with sending an internet company, just charged with privacy breaches copies of formal ID – they started complaining that since their accounts were suspended they were locked out of the website too.

It was a mess. And this was only four months ago. And nothing has been mentioned about the MASSIVE problems that lot of adults were masquerading as pre-teens.

This can be summarised by saying that the app has...

No problems with adults pretending to be children, and no intent to sanction these users.

They just want more of your data.

Strike one.

MORE REASONS AND MORE PROBLEMS

If the deliberate collection of data from children wasn't enough for you to want to delete your child's account, here's some more fun filled facts from the UK.

The NSPCC or the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children recent released statistics that found that 25% of children they surveyed who used TikTok (and they looked at 40,000) had connected with a stranger on the app, and of these, one in 20 had been asked to strip or perform suggestively during those encounters.

Still think it's fine? Need more reasons to delete this? No problem. Here's some more.

More Problems Part two.

Branching out

Where Musical.ly was largely focused on lip syncing videos – TikTok has splintered into numerous directions from its karaoke roots.

The app is full of 15 second clips covering – well a wide variety of genres – physical comedy, dancing, gymnastics, monologues, lip-syncs - with the common theme being some kind of audio track laid down over the clip. This can be a song or a voiceover. There are popular songs, voice overs, filters, emoji's and comments, hashtags and likes and dislikes – similar to many social media applications.

But.

The content has gone a little wild west lately. The broadening from simple karaoke is leaving some toxic (and frankly astonishingly horrible) video up on the app.

Watch without an account

You do not need a personal TikTok account to view the content of the app. You can download the app without becoming part of the community. Watch anything that rolls up on the app.

This means a child may view the public accounts of strangers doing absolutely anything on TikTok , without a parent having imposed any filters or restrictions on the app. You can't censor the content your child may be exposed to.

You can't set anything. Your child can watch anything they want, without having an account.

NOTE – this is an option a number of children are taking, to avoid being restricted by parents.

Inaccurate ages used both by older and younger users

The age restrictions according a number of sources varies from 12+ to over 16+ -depending on which internet parenting forums you may seek advice from, but TikTok itself insists on a 13+ birth date for members(now).

And will create a sort of quarantine area “Kidzone” for the younger users. From the company directly...

The company is launching a separate in-app experience for kids under 13 that will place “extensive limitations on content and user interaction,” according to the statement.

“In the younger ecosystem, users cannot do things like share their videos on TikTok, comment on others’ videos, message with users, or maintain a profile or followers,” the statement reads.

A child/anyone can choose Facebook, an email address and other social media accounts to sign in to TikTok. They are required to enter their date of birth.

Should they do this honestly, they will not be allowed to make an account. That's it. That's the age-gate protecting children from signing up.

Of course, this is easily lied about and circumvented, and has been – if you merely look at the response seen on Twitter when TikTok was forced to crack down on younger users accounts. (see above).

Default Public setting for all accounts

An account, when established is automatically a public one. A child may not realise this when setting up their profile, or deliberately choose not to install the privacy options.

Anyone at all may view the content of a public account, and until the privacy function is switched on they continue to be able to do this.

While there is a feature that can limit followers to only approved ones – when the essential point of an app is to collect likes and gain popularity – what child will really stick to this?

Private accounts on a sharing app

These are difficult to insist on and it is really impossible to expect a child to use this app in a privacy bubble.

You are absolutely kidding yourself if you think your child's private account will remain that way, unless they only use it when you are around, and your supervision is very strict. The app is not designed to be used this way.

With this style of app there is huge incentive to engage in the wider TikTok community and gain popularity. There are TikTok users with huge followings, and this can and does lead to children taking risks – such as talking to and following the suggestions of strangers to accelerate their popularity. And yes – use your imagination at what some children have been asked to do online.

“Barnardo’s has reported seeing children as young as eight using their services after being encouraged to engage in sexual activity online, with TikTok being one of the apps used to target children.”

<https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle-2-15039/tiktok-privacy-settings-everything-parents-need-to-know-about-the-video-app-1-4872619>

Restricting account to private will in turn restrict a user use of the app. Accounts don't stay private for long.

No notifications if someone screenshots your stuff

Unlike Snapchat, who will send a notification to a user if a screen shot has been taken, this does not happen with TikTok. Should your account not be a private one, any one may screenshot your content, and the user will be none the wiser.

Bad language and inappropriate content

The music offered in the TikTok library is unrestricted unless specific settings are engaged. Many popular tunes offered include words you really don't want a child using, or lip syncing to, and many dance clips feature very sexually suggestive choreography.

You can't control this – even if you install the restricted mode many things slip past, and Tiktok has sort of covered itself by stating that content can include “mature or suggestive themes”.

This of course, makes it just fine and yes, your child can still access uncensored lyrics and video content, should the account be public. Or as mentioned above – if they choose to just watch TikTok rather than participate.

No comments or video screening - *to public accounts*

There's no comment moderation. Anyone may comment on your child's video, or watch it. And it is not hard in the slightest, to veer off the more popular videos and find some unsavoury things you really, really don't want your child to see. Much of this style of content is inappropriate even for the 16+ recommendations TikTok advised, and would struggle to not acquire an X rating.

Hashtags

Hashtags are used to collate videos into types/styles or to follow trends. These are selected to add to a video when it is uploaded.

There are numerous parental complaints arising about the specific hashtags trending on TikTok at various times and what actions these tags are linked to. Some have been seen encouraging self-harm – a form of cyberbullying of a serious nature, others encourage disordered eating, others inappropriate behaviour.

Contact with strangers

Due to the default public settings of the app there is a real risk that a stranger can contact, like, or follow online any new user they wish. There are volumes of reports online from parents complaining their child was contacted by adult users of the app. This is not a new danger on social media, but the structure of TikTok, the volume of activity and the struggles the app has endured with privacy concerns and child security make this more of a tangible threat on this app, as opposed to some of the other common social media platforms.

The above are the most obvious, almost expected problems you would see on a social media app – except for the whole data mining of children without parental consent part.

But there is another issue with Bytedance/TikTok that may not have crossed the minds of many.

This addresses the topic of data security and privacy issues far past the point of the massive fine TikTok received for harvesting the data of its child users.

<https://qz.com/1613020/tiktok-might-be-a-chinese-cambridge-analytica-scale-privacy-threat/>

This company has already had a big foul attached to it re data mining. You still need an email, phone number of another social media account to sign up. The app does use your contacts both via phone, email and other social media contacts to find friends who already use the app. So yes, it's still collecting data – and your friends, data and their friends.

Why is there a problem with the way TikTok collects and stores its data on account holders?

Because this app, unlike the rest of the social media we are familiar with is Chinese owned. And the Chinese laws regarding data collection and storage are a very different animal to those that we see in the west. There is a different standard and indeed different expectation to privacy in China compared to Australia and many other nations.

So, for TikTok a very pertinent question is where is all the data going?

Well, according to TikTok's privacy policy, data collected prior to February 2019 was transferred to China.

The company itself has confirmed this in a series of emails, to the above articles author, David Carroll.

“Data from TikTok users who joined the service before February 2019 may have been processed in China. ByteDance has since reorganized its structure and operations to prevent user data from flowing into China.”

This means, in essence that all the data collected from children illegally was stored in China, and as was everything else collected by the app prior to the lawsuit it lost in February 2019.

The article and the company attempt to discuss and navigate differing global privacy and data use restrictions.

One rule for all does not apply, and while it is a slightly complicated read, if you are concerned about what might happen to your information – maybe give it a look.

You should not be okay with this.

In addition,

Facial recognition technology – the app uses a form of facial recognition technology to add effects to user’s faces – sort of like a filter but not. Personal details combined with facial recognition combined is setting of numerous privacy sirens at Safe of Social.

The company recently acquired a global giant in Facial recognition technology aiming to refine this feature of the app. In February ByteDance acquired augmented reality selfie app Faceu for \$300 million USD.

While those less paranoid amongst us, may feel that this is of minor concern – the enormous reach this app has combined with increases in the levels and scope of data that are collected is less than ideal.

Deleting TikTok

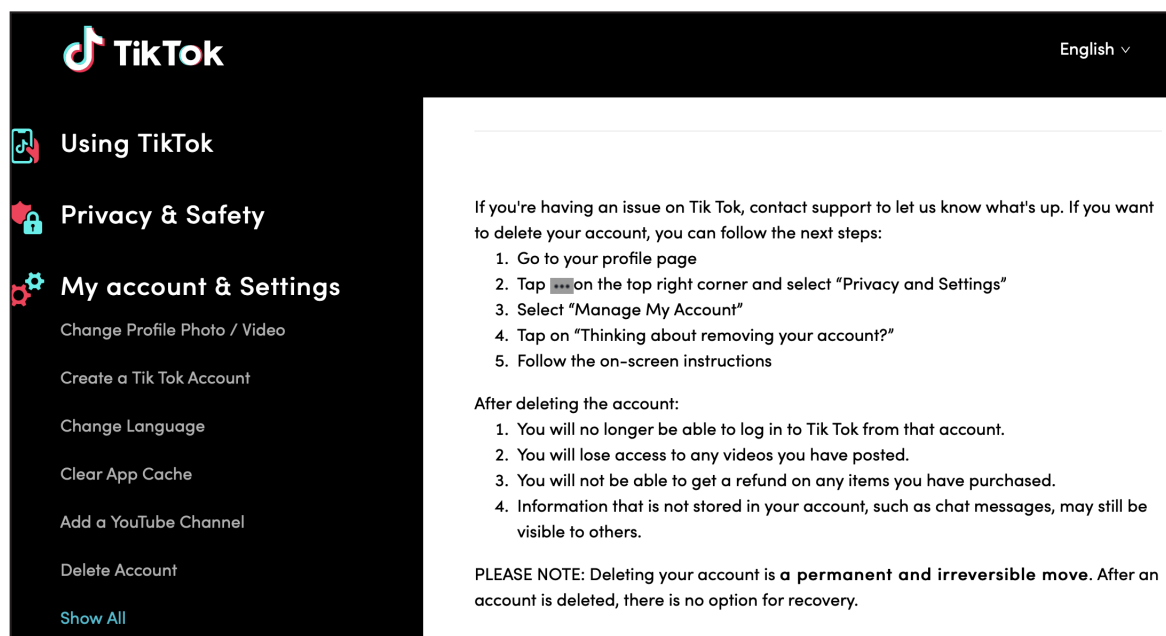
Guess what? It’s a little dodgy regarding data security.

For a start, if you want to delete your child’s account completely, you have to request a code that the app will send you through your smartphone, that if you hadn’t already supplied while assisting your child to sign up – you must supply now.

A four-digit code will come through that must be entered before deletion can take place.

All content created will be lost at the point of deletion.

Follow the steps outlined via TikToks website to delete the account in its entirety.

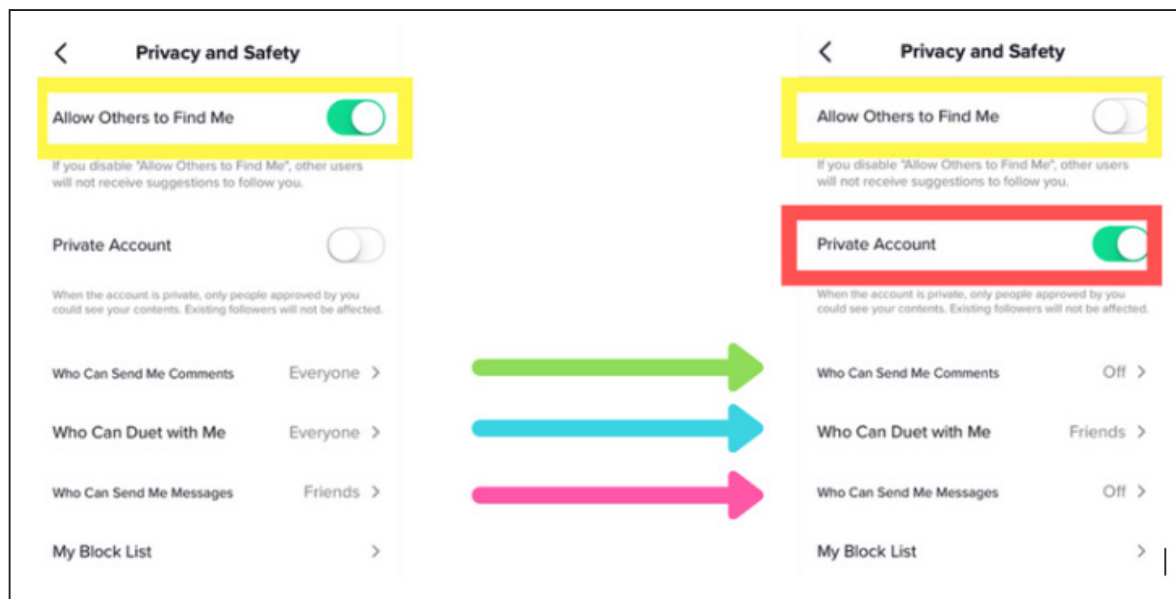


The image shows a screenshot of the TikTok app's settings menu on the left and a help page on the right. The settings menu includes options like 'Using TikTok', 'Privacy & Safety', 'My account & Settings', 'Change Profile Photo / Video', 'Create a Tik Tok Account', 'Change Language', 'Clear App Cache', 'Add a YouTube Channel', and 'Delete Account'. The help page on the right provides instructions for deleting an account, including steps to go to the profile page, tap the menu icon, select 'Privacy and Settings', 'Manage My Account', and 'Thinking about removing your account?'. It also lists consequences of deleting the account, such as losing access to posted videos and chat messages, and notes that the deletion is permanent and irreversible.

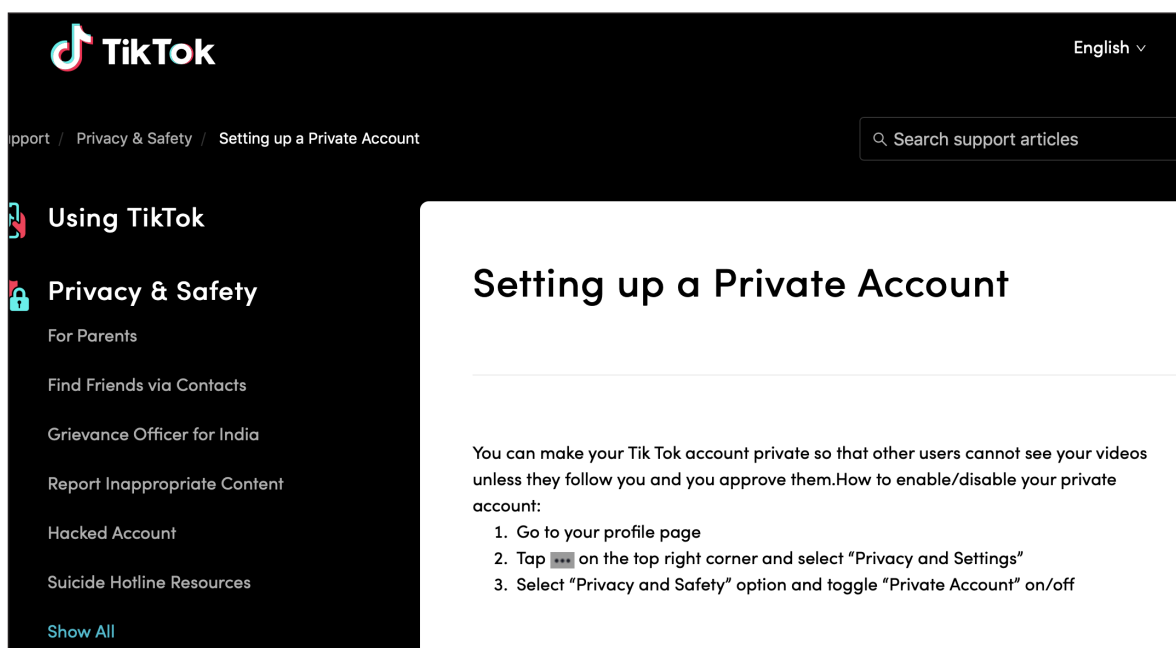
Here's how to turn on the privacy settings, and the wellness function.

Privacy Settings

Within the app itself. This is the screen you need to navigate.



From the website



Wellness

One reputable aspect of the Tik Tok app is the "Digital Wellbeing" setting.

This means a child cannot turn the app on by themselves without receiving a 4 digit passcode, sent to a previously nominated mobile phone number – usually a parents (again, more data is being provided here from another individual). Further on this choice is the Screen time management mode, which will limit a user to two hours per day. A passcode is again required to extend the time a person may use the app. This is, admittedly a good way for a parent to control the screen time of their child.

The Restricted modality is also available in this section – thought the enormous volume of content uploaded to this app is proving troublesome for moderators and this selection is by no means fool-proof.

How to locate –

On the profile page of the relevant account, there are 3 dots in the top right hand corner.

Clicking on these will open a menu with a list of options.

Included in this list is “Digital Wellbeing”

Choose the turn on option, and create a password.

While in this menu there is also the option to turn on screen time management within the app, and the “restricted mode” that should act as a censor for any dubious content that may appear within the app.

Digital Wellbeing

TikTok now introduces the Digital Wellbeing feature. By enabling the feature, you can control your spent time on TikTok and limit the appearance of content that may not be appropriate for all audiences. To enable Digital Wellbeing, please follow the steps below:

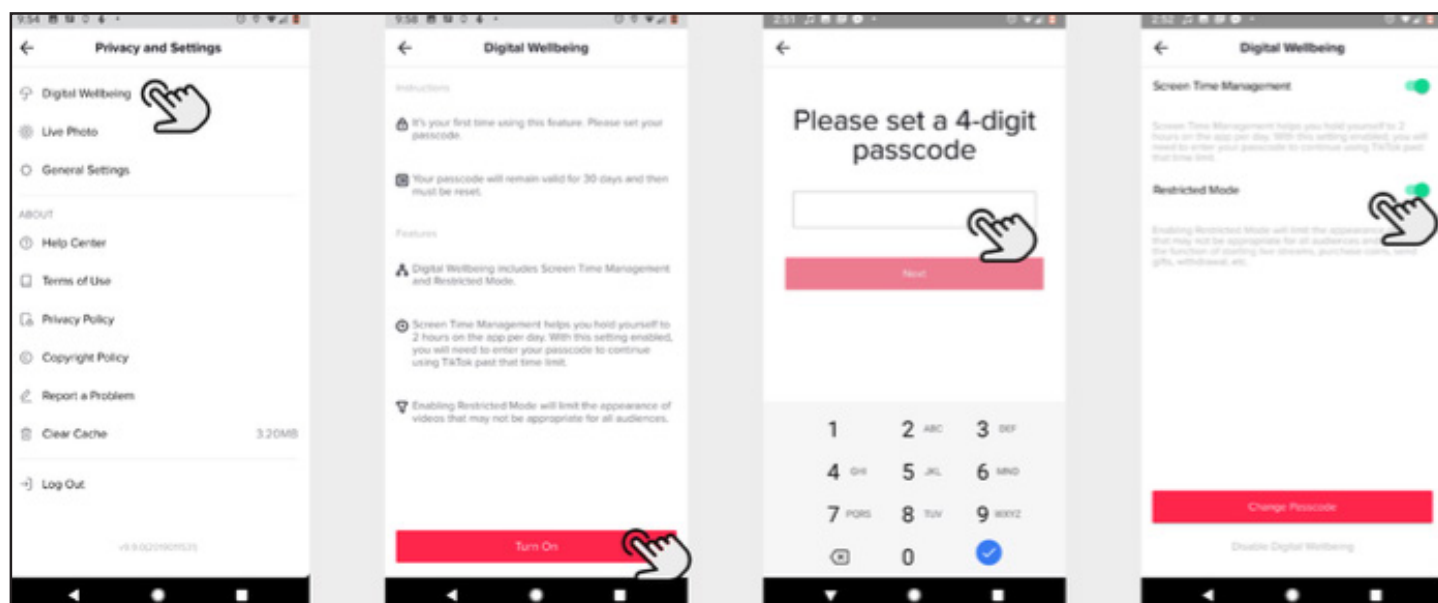
Screen Time Management

1. Select 'Digital Wellbeing' under the app settings
2. Tap 'Turn On'
3. Set a passcode
4. Toggle 'Screen Time Management'

Restricted Mode

1. Select 'Digital Wellbeing' under the app settings
2. Tap 'Turn On'
3. Set a passcode
4. Toggle 'Restricted Mode'

What this looks like in app



In Summary

This is NOT A GOOD APP. We know it is vastly popular. We know this is a differing stance.

We still don't like it.

It has issues with privacy, security, pornography, self-harm promotion, all your child's data went to China, it's using advanced facial recognition technology, accounts won't remain private, it doesn't really care if adults are pretending to be children, it's reach is immense...we could go on.

But , we hear you say.... There's a corner for younger users coming, it's controlled - sure..... NO . Seriously. Not with this app.

IT IS REALLY EASY TO LIE ABOUT YOUR DATE OF BIRTH TO ACCESS THIS. YOUR CHILD IS NOT SAFE.

Unless you sit on your child all day and only allow mobile phone or device use directly in front of you, you categorically cannot keep your child safe on this app. Or their data.

Essentially there are two big issues with this app.

Privacy/data security, and the welfare of its users.

The Community guidelines of Tik Tok are saying all the right things, and parents can be safely deluded into thinking this app can be controlled with settings and controls but this is not the case.

Your child does not need an account to watch unregulated content, private accounts will not stay private by the very nature of the app, the foreign ownership and corresponding data laws and storage are an issue, moderation is dicey due to the vast amounts of content uploaded daily, and it has a deserved reputation that rolls on from Musical.ly regarding real risks from child predators.

This one gets our first big NO.



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