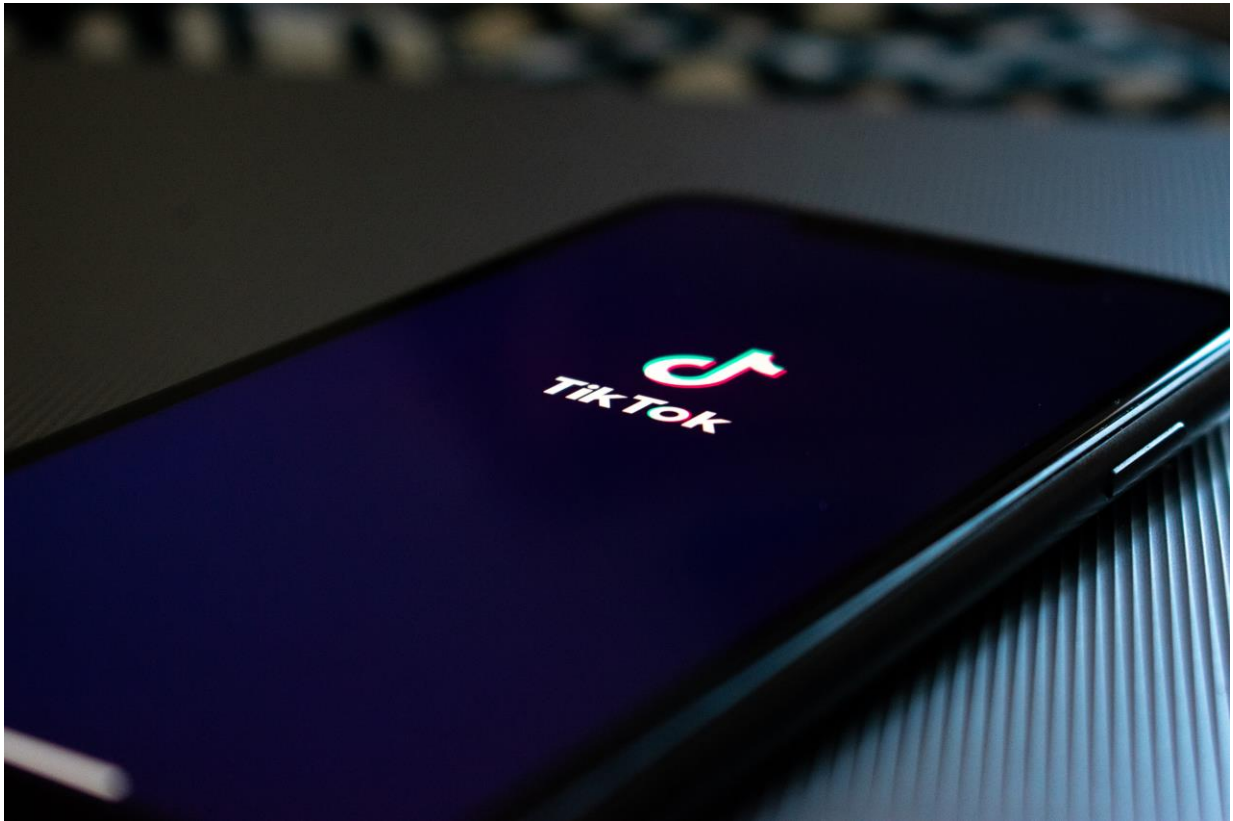


TikTok: everything you need to know about the video production app



Despite only launching in 2018, TikTok has enjoyed a dramatic rise to become one of the most popular social media apps on the planet.

Young people, in particular, love its short-form video focus, and it is now one of Generation Z's favourite tools of expression.

There's a good chance your child is either using it already or asking to be allowed on it – but what exactly is it, and are there any risks you should be aware of?

Here's everything parents and carers need to know about TikTok.

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What is TikTok?

TikTok was born out of a merger between two already popular apps, Douyin and Musical.ly. It's based around many of the same features found on those platforms and is primarily a social media app where users can both create and watch short video snippets, often accompanied by music.

Over the two years since its launch, the app has amassed more than **800 million active users** and has consistently stayed at the top of both the Google Play Store and Apple App Store charts.

What sort of content is on TikTok?

You can find videos relating to almost all interests on TikTok, from DIY tricks and make-up tutorials to gaming and sports. People are allowed to let their imagination run wild on TikTok, as there isn't really a 'right' or 'wrong' type of content. Your child might use TikTok to pick up new skills, learn how to play an instrument or even connect with people they share an interest with.

The videos are often playful and take maximum advantage of the editing tools to make the 15 seconds of video as memorable as possible. Although most of the content you will find is upbeat, funny and joyful, people also use the platform to respond to current events such as the #BlackLivesMatter campaign and the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led to controversy in the past, with TikTok having been accused of **censoring politically-charged content** which was especially critical of the Chinese government.

But TikTok has a set of **community guidelines** all content must adhere to and does not permit, for example, violent, racist, extremist or sexually explicit content on the platform.

How does it work?

Users don't need an account to watch videos on TikTok but if they want to like, comment, customise their feed or create their own video content, they'll be prompted to sign up for a free account.

Like most social media platforms, TikTok requires its users to be at least 13 years old, although there's no robust age-verification in place. When logging in for the first time, the user will be asked to log in using either their email, their Google account, or by linking TikTok to one of their other social media accounts, for instance Facebook or Twitter.

After entering their date of birth and selecting which topics they're interested in – such as sports, pop culture, music or gaming – the user will be dropped straight into the feed.

In contrast to most of its competitors, TikTok doesn't require the user to add any information to their profile: they're issued with a user number, but whether they add a name, profile picture or any other personal information is their choice.

Users are given complete creative control of their content. Putting together a video is very easy and there's a range of tools available to spruce up the content, such as filters, effects, text and stickers.

Depending [on their age and how they've adjusted their settings](#), users can share their content with their follower base and/or the larger TikTok community – and even reshare their content on other platforms such as Instagram or YouTube.

Many high-profile TikTokers – such as the [dancer Addison Rae](#) and [magician Magic Singh](#) – have achieved stardom by simultaneously building their audiences across platforms.

Are there any risks?

- **Data collection:** TikTok has previously come under fire for illegally collecting the data of children under 13, which resulted in a record-breaking fine from the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) of £4.2m and harsh criticism from the UK's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Fortunately, TikTok doesn't require users to give much personal information to join the app anymore, but it's a good idea to minimise the amount of data your child stores on the app and turn off personalised ads in the settings.
- **Contact with strangers:** Although connecting with new people on social media is not harmful in and of itself, TikTok has previously been [in the news](#) for failing to remove sexual messages sent to teenagers. The platform's [guidelines](#) include a section devoted to 'Minor safety', which states "We are deeply committed to child safety and have zero tolerance for predatory or grooming behavior toward minors." To further address concerns, TikTok introduced a feature that prevents under-16s from both sending and receiving private messages – but nothing stops young users from faking their age. Be sure to adjust the app's settings (more advice below) and let your child know that they can come to you if they've had a bad experience which has involved being contacted by a stranger.
- **TikTok live:** There is a live-streaming feature of TikTok that is only available for users aged 16+. Users can start a live-stream or respond to another user with their own live-stream. While live-streaming can be a fun and immediate way to engage with others, there is a risk that younger users could be live-streaming with adults in an unsupervised environment.
- **Risky challenges:** The social media platform is famous for spawning viral challenges which are a big draw for many users. But TikTok has received a lot of flak for allowing potentially dangerous challenges – such as the [Skullbreaker Challenge](#) and the [Outlet Challenge](#) – to reach popularity on its platform. Make sure that your child knows not to try risky activities they see on TikTok. You can find further information on viral trends in this [Parent Info article](#).

Does TikTok have any parental controls?

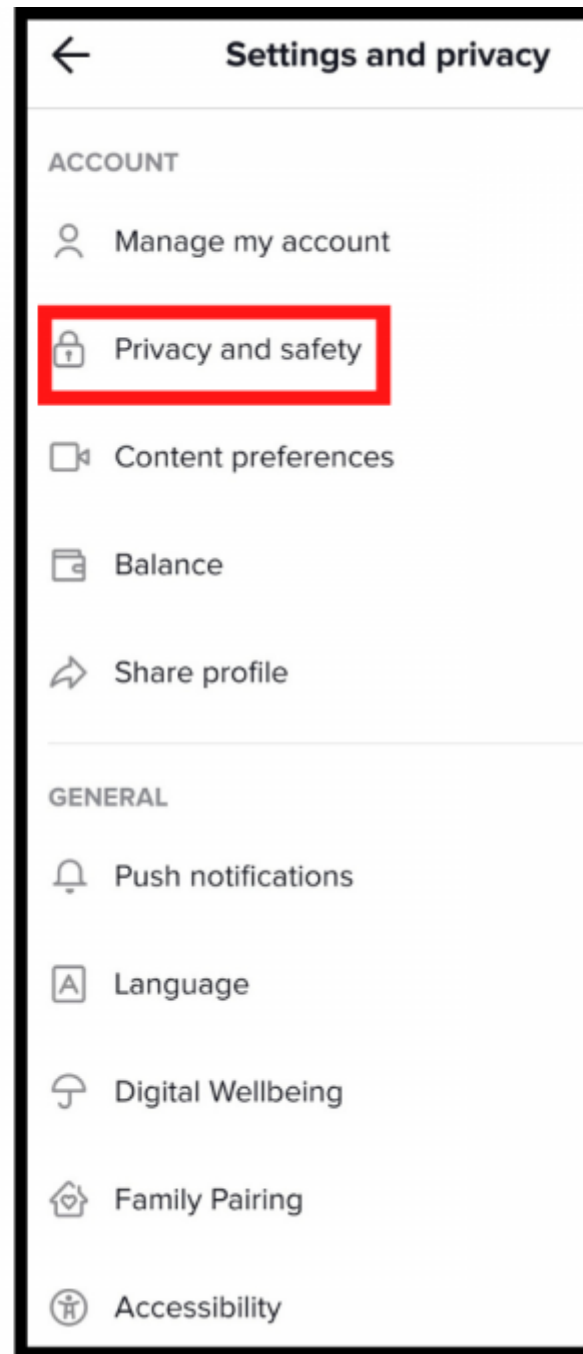
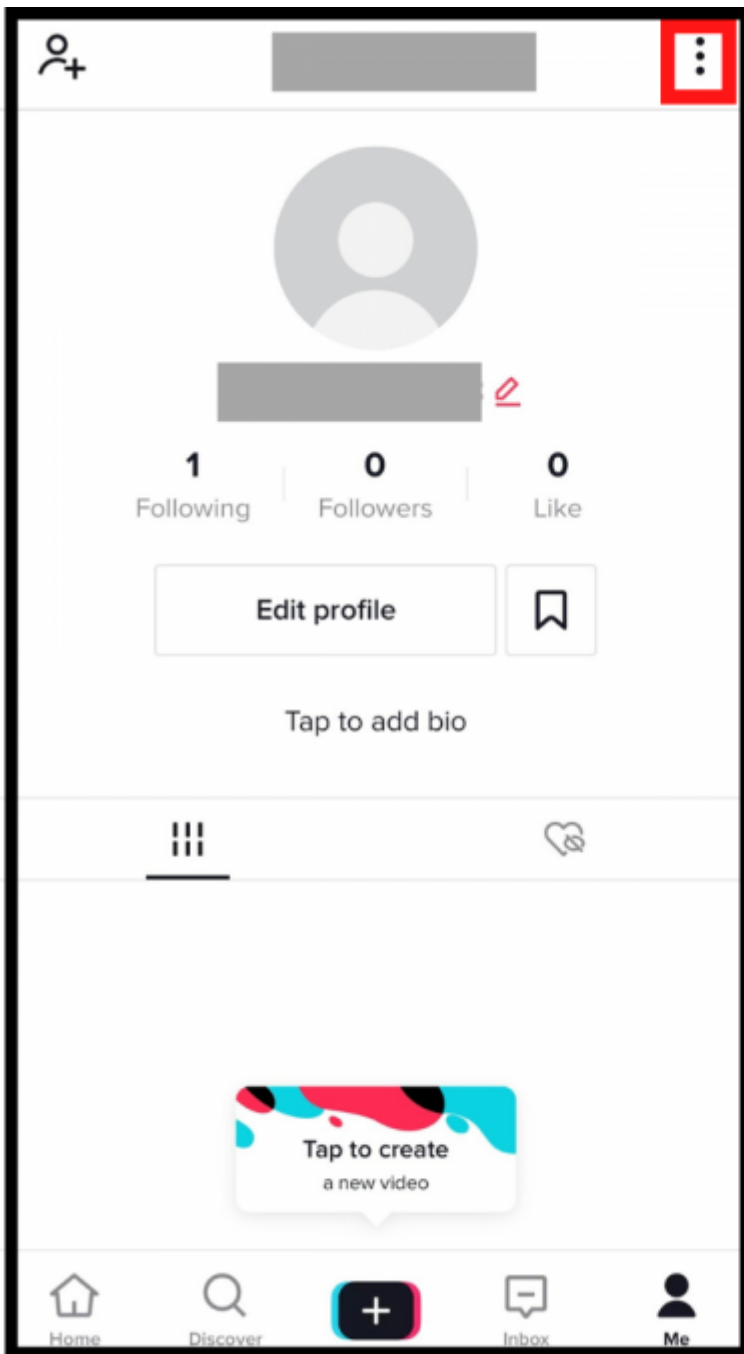
TikTok offer its users a range of settings to customise their experience and make it safer for young people. These controls have **recently been tightened up** as part of a concerted effort by the platform to make it safer for its younger users. Although it's important to bear in mind that settings and parental controls don't eliminate risk, they can be a good first step.

Private accounts

One of the main concerns parents have about social media is that their child might be contacted by strangers who might not have their best interest at heart. In January 2021, **TikTok updated its privacy settings so that accounts for under-16s are set to private by default**. This means that other users must be approved before they can see and interact with your child's content or contact them.

If your child is 16 or 17, or your 13-15-year old has changed the default, you can set it to private like this:

- Go to your child's **'Account'** section and tap the **three-dot menu** in the top-right corner of the screen.
- Select **'Privacy and safety'** from the 'Settings and privacy' menu.
- Toggle the **'Private account'** slider at the top of the page.

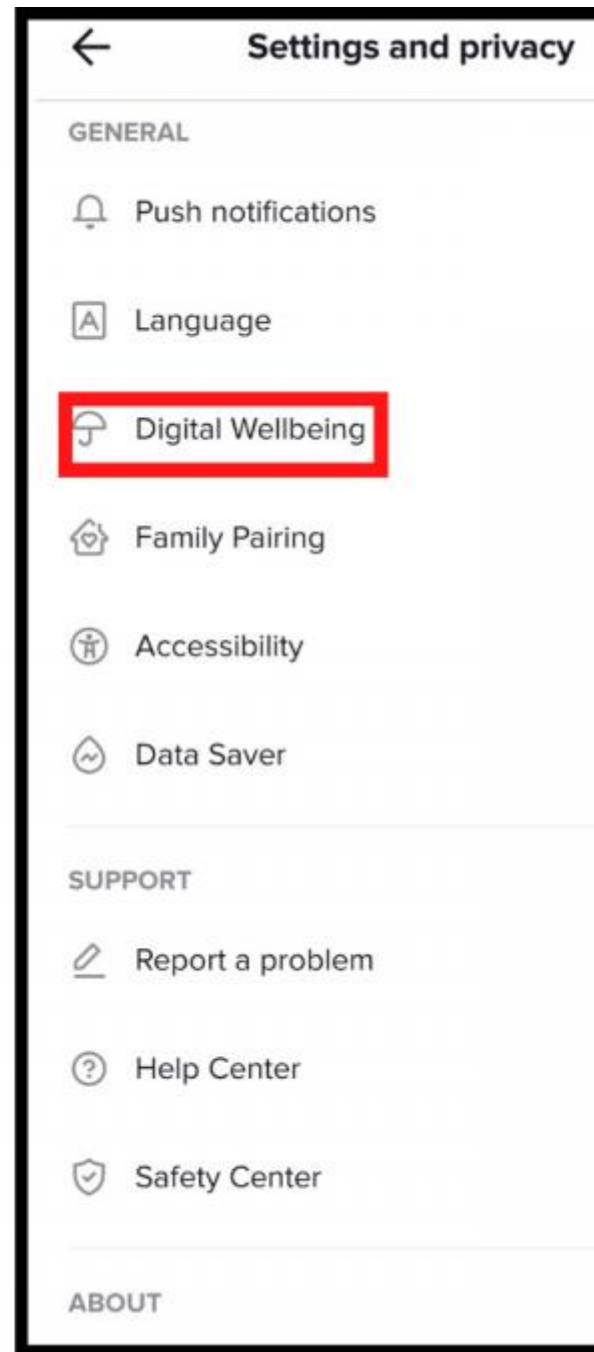
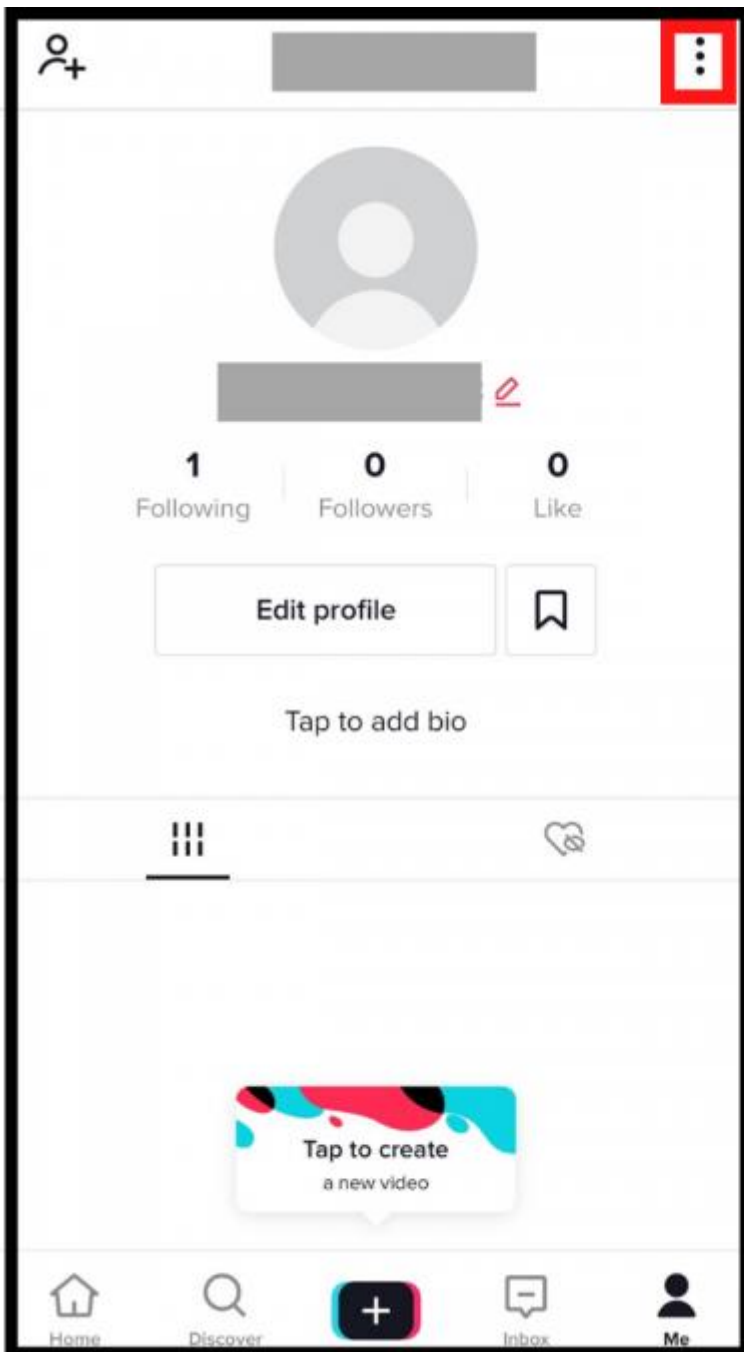


How to filter out inappropriate content

TikTok is moderated and content that does not uphold its [community guidelines](#) is continuously weeded out. But if you want to further minimise the risk of your child stumbling across mature content, it's a good idea to enable 'Restricted Mode'. TikTok doesn't explicitly say how this works, merely that it "[limits the appearance of content](#) that may not be appropriate for all audiences". To enable it:

- Go to your child's '**Account**' section and tap the **three-dot menu** in the top-right corner of the screen.
- Select '**Digital Wellbeing**' further down on the 'Settings and privacy' menu.
- Go onto the page for '**Restricted Mode**' and tap '**Turn on Restricted Mode**'.

- You'll then be asked to set a **password** you need to enter to disable it again.

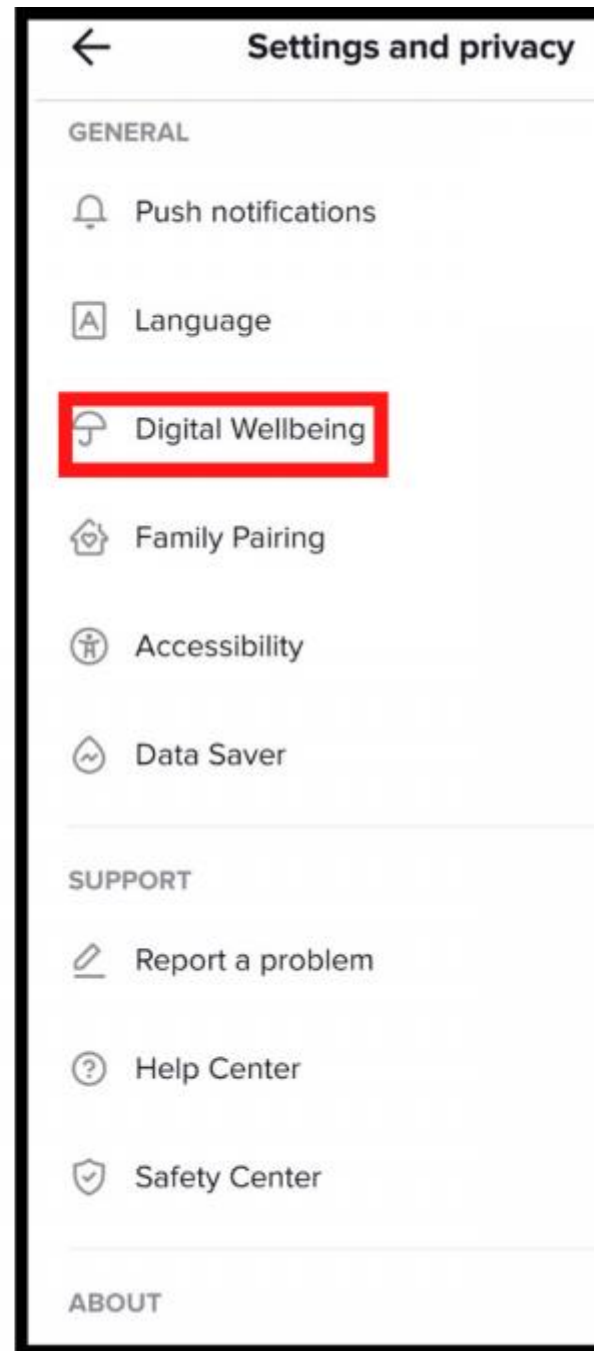
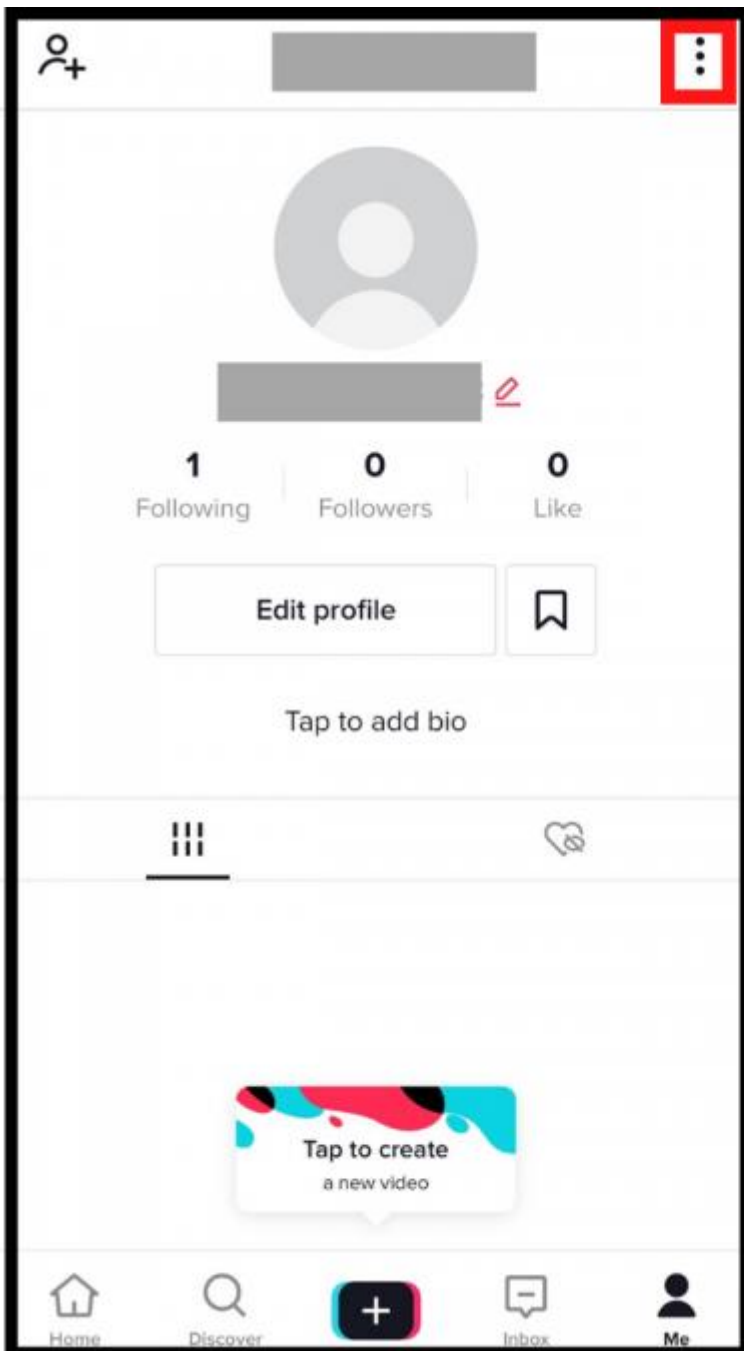


How to manage time spent on the app

Research has found that a moderate amount of screen time per day can be very beneficial for your child, but that doesn't mean you can't choose to set limits. TikTok offers a Screen Time Management feature which gives the user a custom daily quota, after which they'll need to input a password to continue.

- Go to your child's '**Account**' section and tap the **three-dot menu** in the top-right corner of the screen.
- Select '**Digital Wellbeing**' further down on the 'Settings and privacy' menu.

- Go onto the page for ‘**Screen Time Management**’ and tap ‘**Turn on Screen Time Management**’.
- You’ll then be asked to set a **password** you need to enter to disable it again. If you’ve already enabled ‘Restricted Mode’, it’ll be the same password.



How can I help my child be safer on TikTok?

Using social media can be an enriching activity for young people and a good way to stay in touch with their social circle during these strange times. Although TikTok has significantly stepped up its efforts to keep young people safe, it’s important that your child is aware of the risks they could encounter and know how to respond.

First of all, remind your child to be mindful of what they share and who they share it with. If they choose to have an open profile, they need to understand what that means – everyone can see what they post. TikTok also has a feature that allows other users to save their videos, although this is no longer available for content posted by under 16s. Older users can disable this option by going to the Privacy and Safety options and turning off ‘Allow your videos to be downloaded’. Try going through the settings together, so you can both share your views on what should be adjusted.

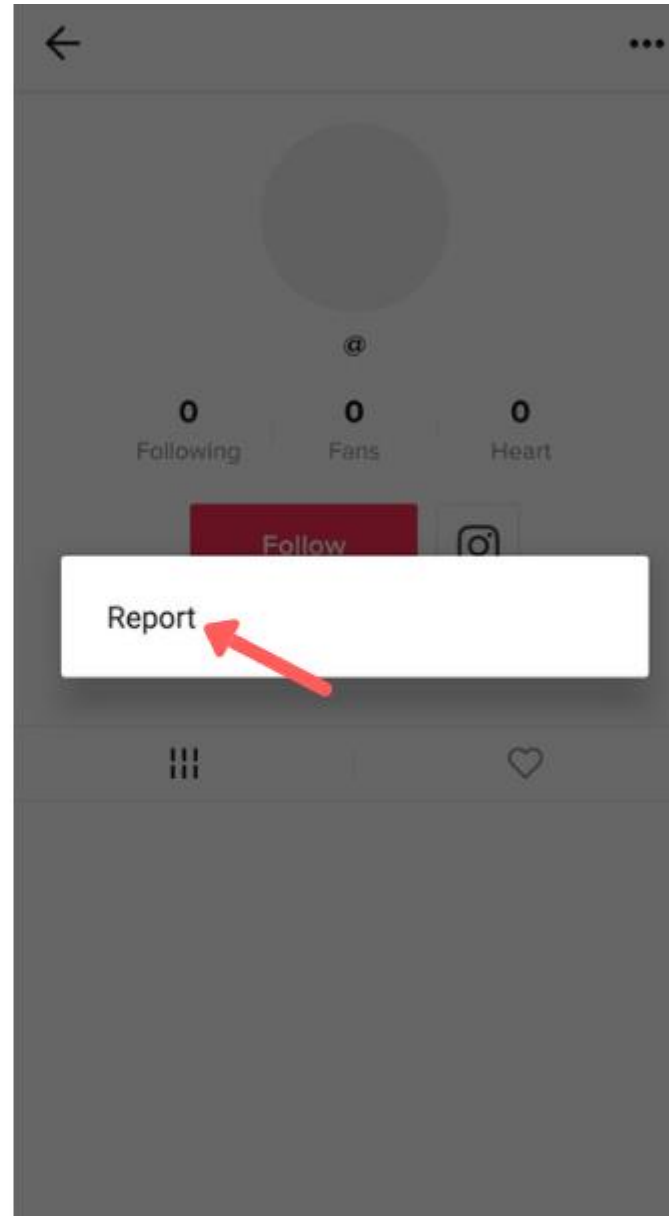
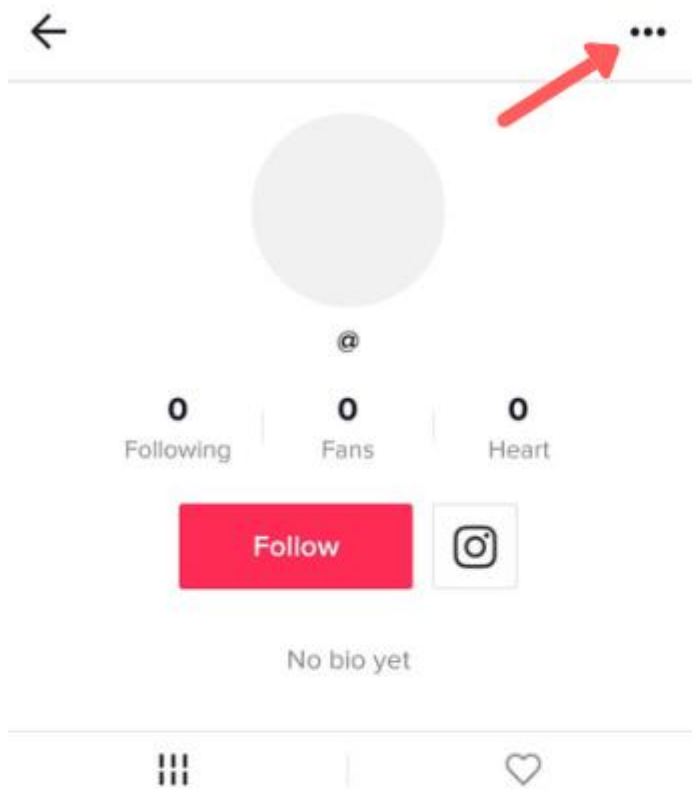
Social media can be hotbeds for misinformation and scams, so encourage your child to **think critically** about the things they see in their feed. If something seems too good to be true, chances are it probably is.

It might seem obvious, but reassure your child that if they have any questions about the app or have had an uncomfortable experience, they can come to you for support.

And last but not least, make sure that your child knows how to report videos or users if they stumble across inappropriate content and how to block users who are bothering them.

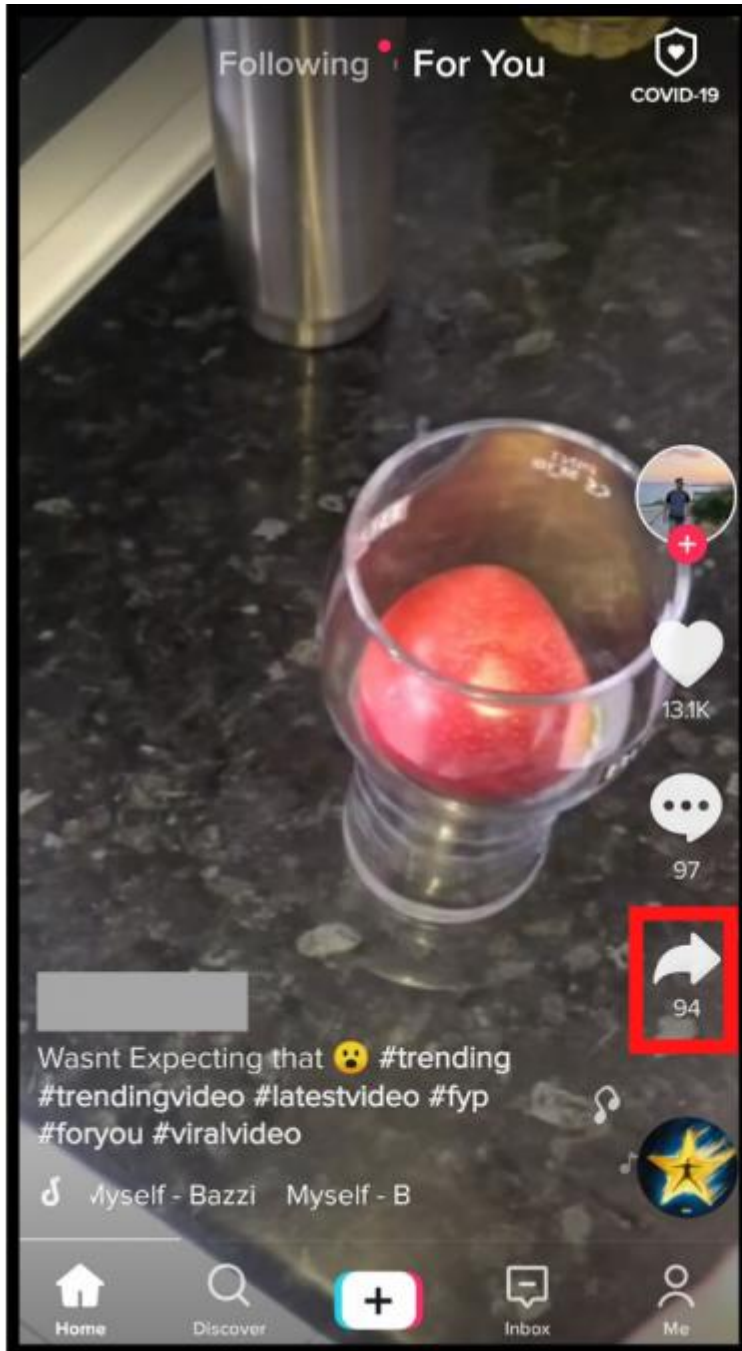
How to report and block a user

- Go to the **user’s profile** and hit the **three-dot menu** in the top-right corner of the screen.
- Click either **‘Report’** or **‘Block’** from the menu that will appear at the bottom of the screen.
- In both cases you’ll be asked to give a **brief description** of the issue and complete a few more steps.



How to report a video

- Find the **video you want to report** in the feed or on the user's profile.
- Click the arrow-shaped '**Share**' button on the right-hand side and select the flag-shaped '**Report**' icon from the menu.
- Give a **brief description** of how the video was inappropriate and follow the steps.



Main image: Kon Karampelas/Unsplash

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[The 6 apps and services that every parent should know about](#)

[TikTok tightens privacy controls for under 16s](#)

