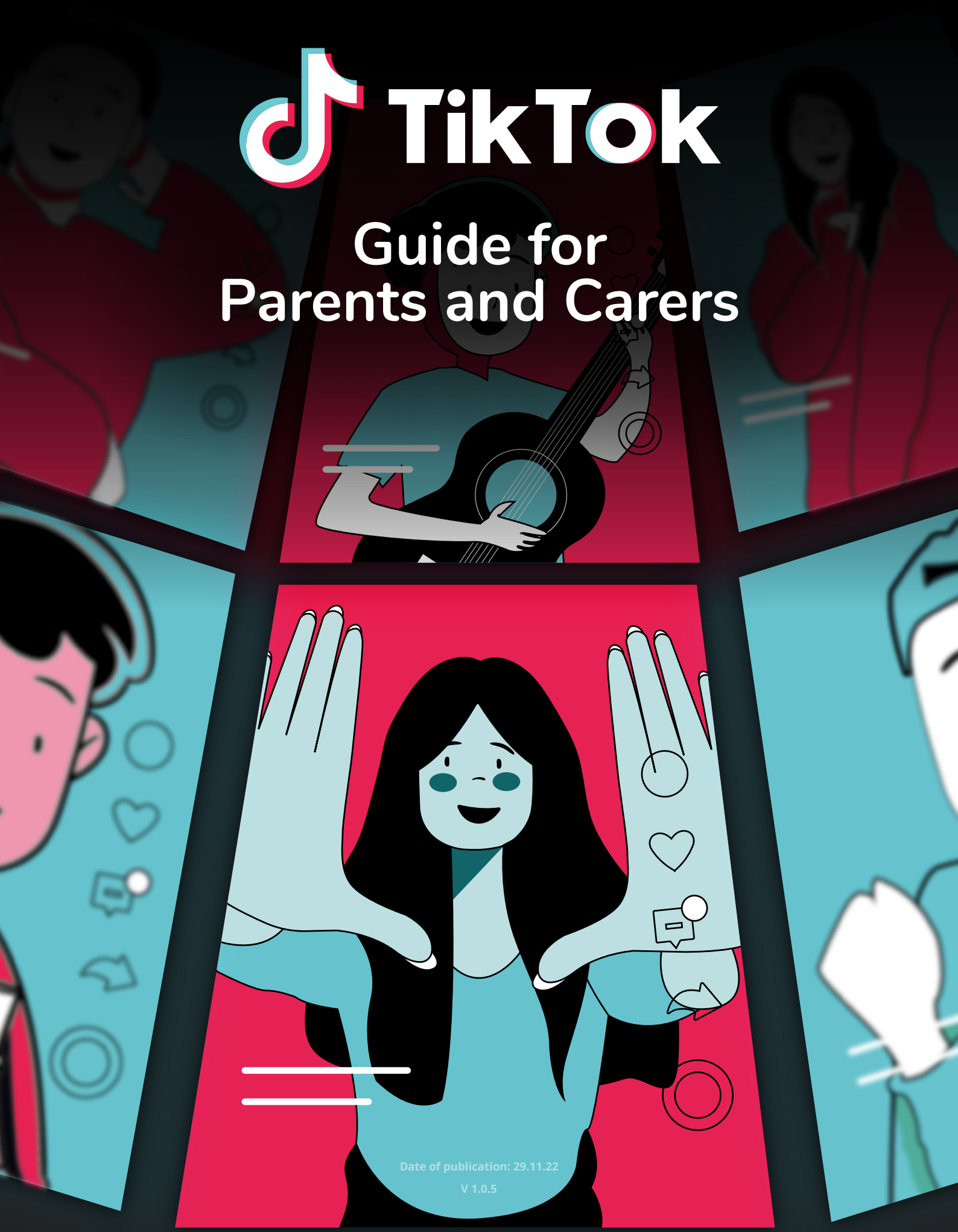
Education Authority

SAFER SCHOOLS NI

Department of Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk

TikTok

Guide for Parents and Carers



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V 1.0.5

What is TikTok?

TikTok is a social media app set to reach 1.8 billion users by the end of 2022 across 155 different countries, where users can create, share, and watch short videos. The app contains a variety of music and special effect features that allow users to express themselves in creative ways. This includes singing, viral dance trends, lip-syncing, performing comedy sketches and online challenges.

How do you get it?

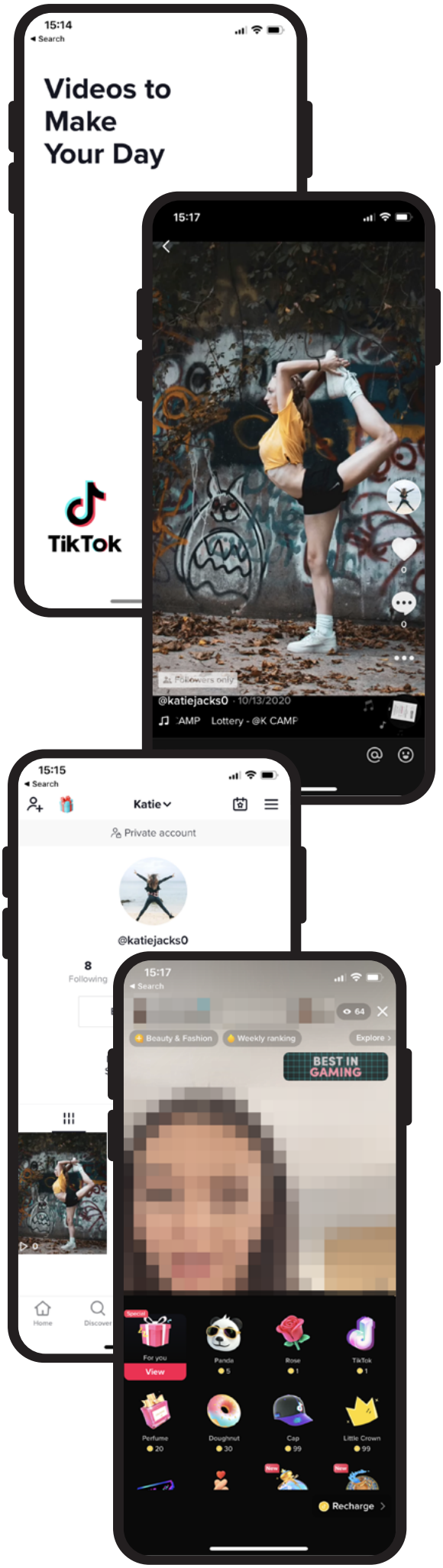
The TikTok app is free to download on Android and iOS devices. It can also be accessed on web browsers and some smart TVs. However, if a user has a direct link to a specific TikTok video, they can watch it without having the app installed on their device. It is only if they want to like, comment, or create their own video content that they will need to sign up for an account.

Creating an account

Accounts can be created by connecting the TikTok account to a Facebook, Twitter, or Google account, or by using a phone number or email. If someone uses their phone number or email, they will be asked to enter their date of birth, create a password, and be given the option to verify their contact details.

How does it work?

Once signed up and logged in, users can search for topics they are interested in, follow celebrities, influencers, and creators, or find people they know via their phone's contact list. Users can also upload, comment, and like different videos using a variety of the inbuilt editing tools and features.



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Potential Risks

Underage users

If a child in your care has permission to use TikTok despite being underage, *which is a breach of the platform terms and which we would strongly advise against,* it is important that they correct their age once they turn 13. This is to ensure the platform knows their true age and processes their data appropriately.

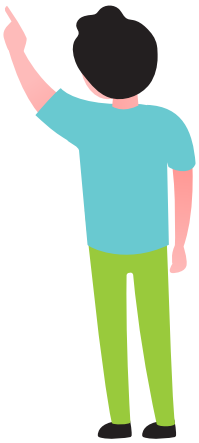
For more details visit **support.tiktok.com**.

Age Verification

TikTok requires users to be at least 13 years old. However, there is no strict age-verification in place, meaning there is nothing to stop users from claiming to be older to meet requirements.

Stranger Danger

Users are able to manipulate their profile information without any sort of verification, so you can never be certain someone is who they say they are. Strangers may also be able to contact other users directly, depending on privacy settings.



Explicit Content

Explicit and/or sexual language maybe heard in the music/audio features on the app. Users may also use suggestive emojis or hashtags to discuss explicit content that is unsuitable for younger audiences.

External Links

There are external links found on profiles, meaning users could be signposted to inappropriate or explicit content found on other platforms like Twitter, Instagram, or OnlyFans.

In-app purchases

Users can buy digital goods on the platform and gift these to others. Many influencers also try to encourage their followers to send them gifts in order to receive a 'shout out' or special message.

Payment Links

There is an option to share links to PayPal accounts, meaning other users can send money for actions, mentions, or support. However, there is a concern that this could be used to coerce young people into performing inappropriate actions.

Persuasive Design

The platform is based on 'vertical/ portrait videos' that encourages users to continually scroll through a curated feed of infinite videos, with easy-to-use features and labels that keep attention focused on content.

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Potential Risks

Powerful Algorithm

TikTok uses a powerful algorithm that learns from every individual user by only showing them content they are most likely to engage with. This can become risky if someone watches potentially harmful content.

Video Downloads

Videos can be downloaded and saved without permission if users are over 16. Users are also not notified if their video is downloaded. These can then be shared on other external apps and platforms, or screen recorded and reshared.

Social Pressure

Young people may feel pressure to take risks while filming videos in the hope they will gain more followers, likes, and shares. They may also be pressured into 'trading' or 'swapping' intimate videos or pictures.

TikTok Challenges

This platform is well known for featuring popular challenge videos that are widely shared and copied. These typically involve dances and filters, but can also involve risk-taking behaviour like stunts and pranks or inappropriate content.

Data Collection

By default, TikTok asks for more information than necessary, including the user's location and contact lists. A user may not realise that they are agreeing to sharing these details and will need to manually change them.

TikTok Now

Users can post temporary 10 second videos or photos once a day at a random time called 'Now'. This could mean a user feels they could post something inappropriate as the posts are not permanent and might not be seen by everyone.

TikTok Live

In order to access the livestreaming feature, TikTok Live, users must be 18. Young people might input a false date of birth to be eligible. There is also option to use 'Multi-Guest' which allows up to 5 other creators to join the livestream.

Addictive Nature

Due to the constant scrolling and unique personalisation of TikTok's 'For You Page', younger users may find they develop addictive tendencies to using TikTok. This could result in neglecting offline responsibilities, such as homework or chores.

Fake News

TikTok has been criticised for publicising instances of fake news and misinformation, specifically to younger users who may not have developed the critical thinking skills necessary for debunking false news stories.

Teacher-Targeted Bullying

There has been a recent uptake in videos being made by pupils to bully their teachers. These have been widely shared and have a variety of consequences, including legal action, depending on the content.

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Advice for Parents and Carers

Safety Options

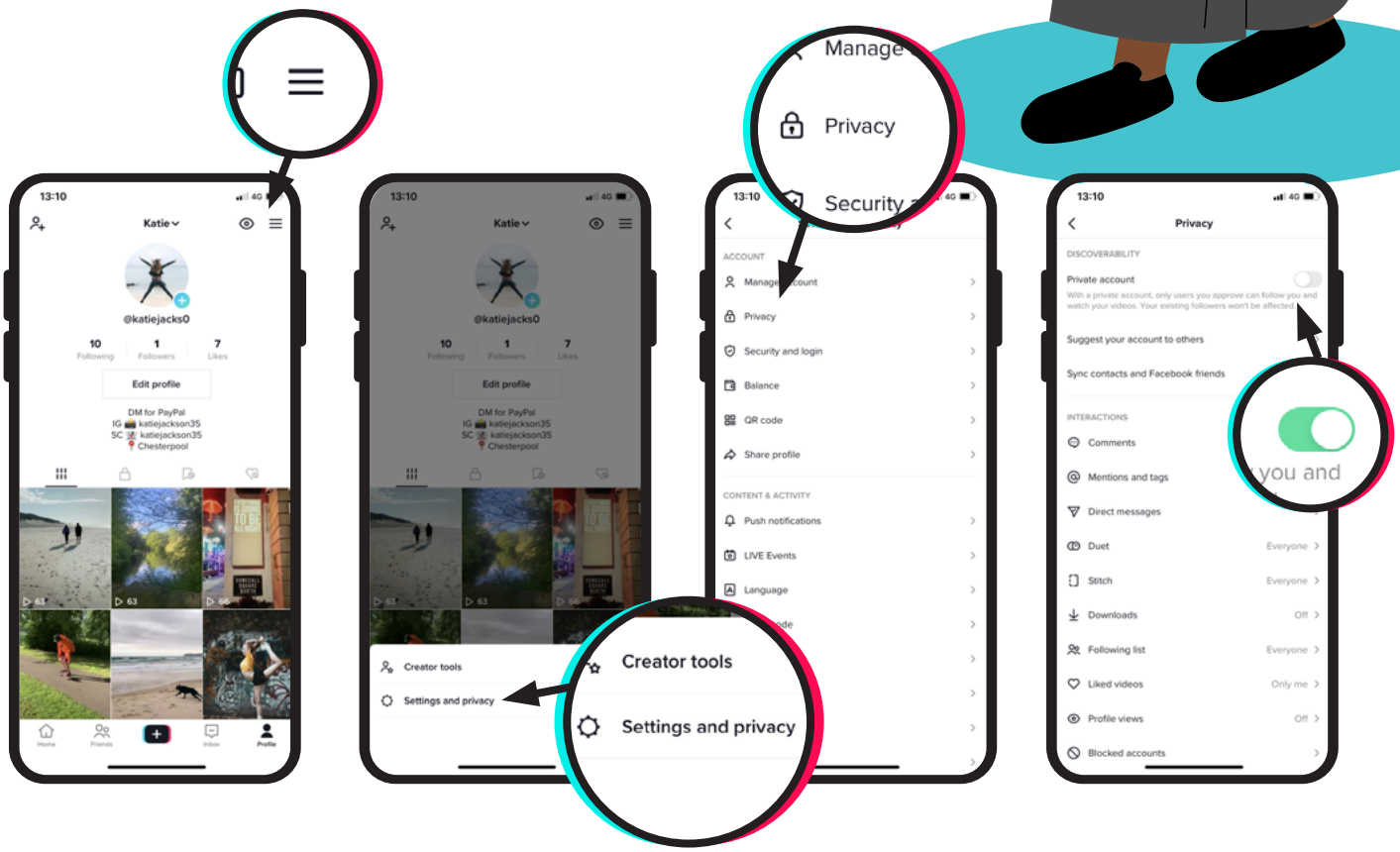
There are lots of safety features available on TikTok that can make the experience a safer one for the young people in your care.

Some of these are automatically in place for users under 16. Direct Messaging on the platform is not available for users registered as under 16 years old, and all TikTok accounts for 13 to 15-year-olds are 'private' by default. However, we do recommend that all accounts are kept private, even after a user reaches age 16, as this means only accepted 'friends' will be able to interact with any posted content. This will help strengthen the user's account privacy.

To make an account 'private':

- Tap the three lines in the top right of the profile.
- Select 'Settings and privacy'.
- Tap 'Privacy'.
- Ensure the 'Private account' toggle is moved to 'on'

Follow along with these steps below:



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Restricted Mode

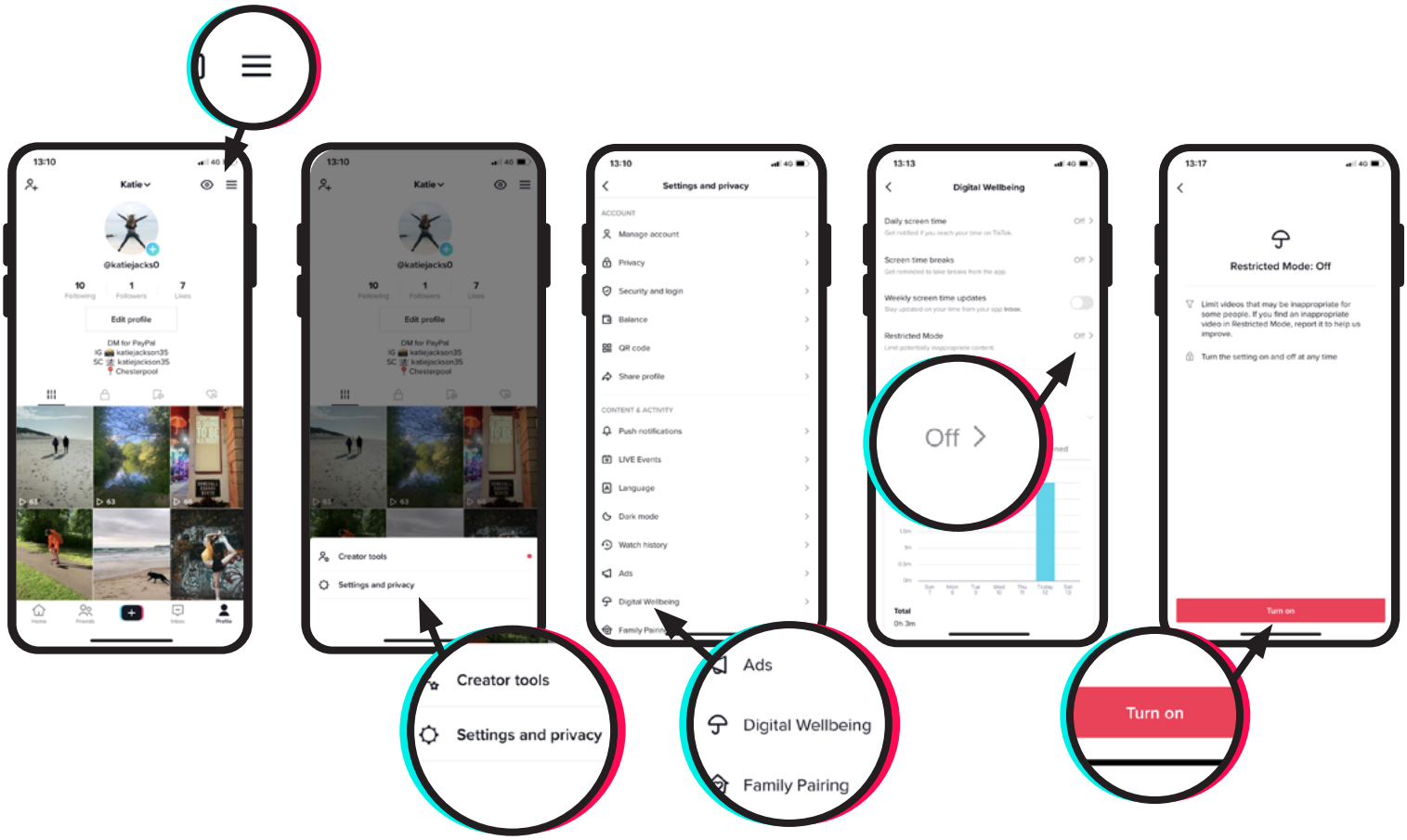
While TikTok is moderated and inappropriate content is regularly removed, this does not mean it is 100% fool proof. We recommend that 'Restricted Mode' is enabled for young people, as this will help limit any content that may not be appropriate for them.

TikTok also encourages its users to report any content they find inappropriate (while in Restricted Mode or not) to help ensure other users see less inappropriate content.

You can enable restricted mode by the following steps:

- Tap the three lines in the top right of the profile.
- Under 'Settings and privacy', select 'Digital Wellbeing'.
- Go to 'Restricted Mode' and then tap 'Turn on'.
- Enter a passcode which you will need to enter to disable it again.

Follow along with these steps below:



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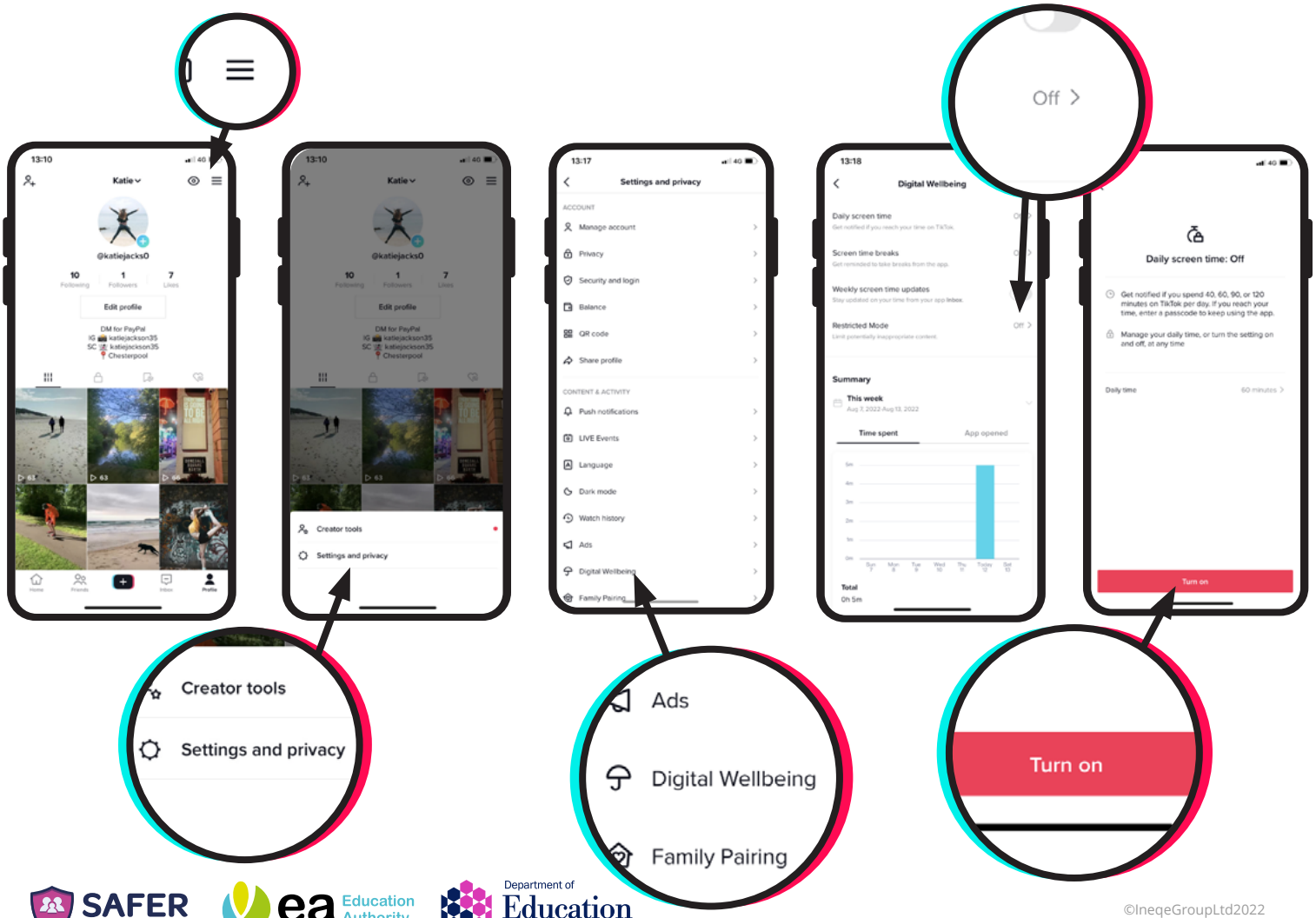
Screen Time Management

A big problem with TikTok is the amount of time most young people unknowingly spend scrolling. It can interrupt homework and sleep cycles unless there is appropriate moderation used. TikTok have released a feature which allows users to create screen time limits and promote their digital wellbeing.

To enable this feature:

- Tap the three lines in the top right corner of the screen.
- Tap 'Settings and privacy', then 'Screen time'.
- Tap 'Turn on'.
- Set a passcode which will be needed to disable it again.
- If 'Restricted Mode' is enabled, it will be the same passcode.

Follow along with these steps below:



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Family Pairing

By enabling Family Pairing on TikTok, parents/carers and teens can customise safety and privacy settings together based on their needs. It is an extra safety feature for parents and carers to manage their young person's use of TikTok.

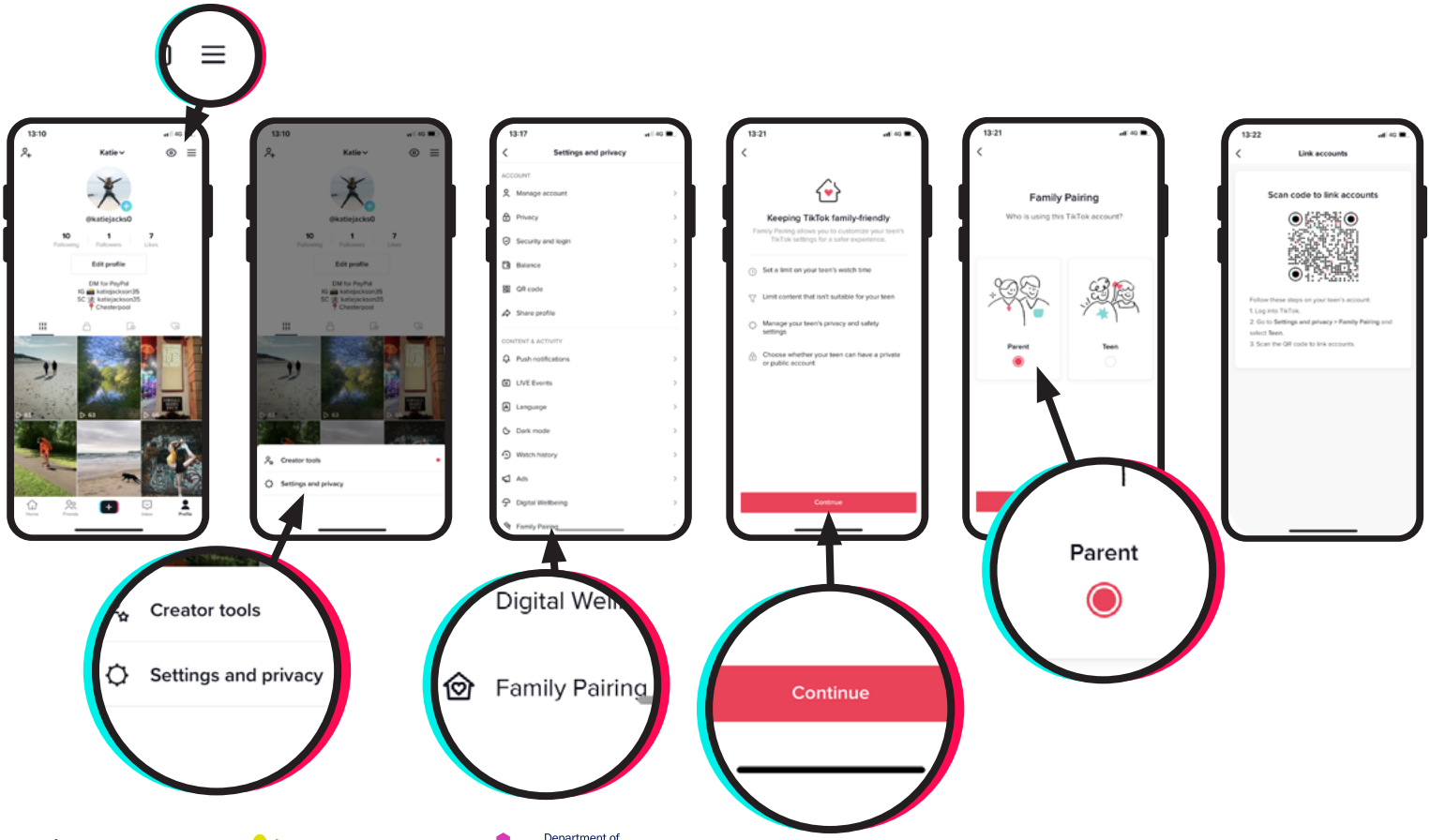
In this feature, you can set:

- Restricted mode
- Screen time limits
- Messaging restrictions
- Profile and video visibility

You will need to create a TikTok account. The pairing facility will also need to be approved on your young person's phone in order to be connected. It can only be removed from the parent's account.

To enable this feature:

- Tap the three-lines in the top-right corner of the profile.
- Tap 'Settings and privacy'.
- Select 'Family pairing' then 'Add account'.
- Follow the steps as advised.



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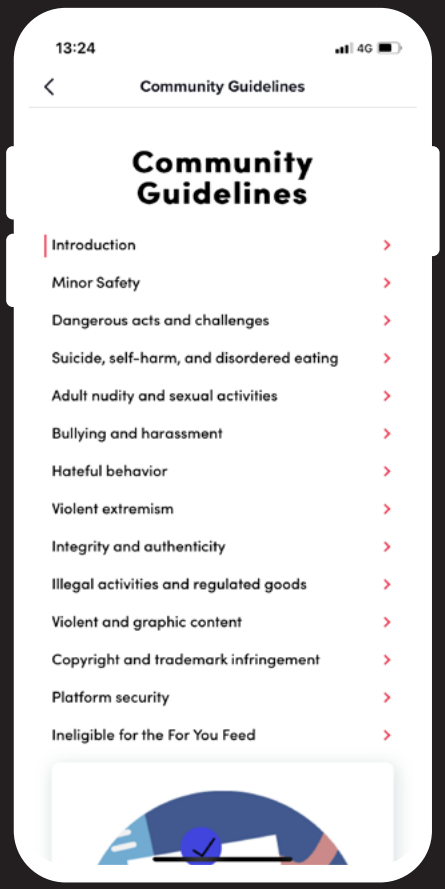
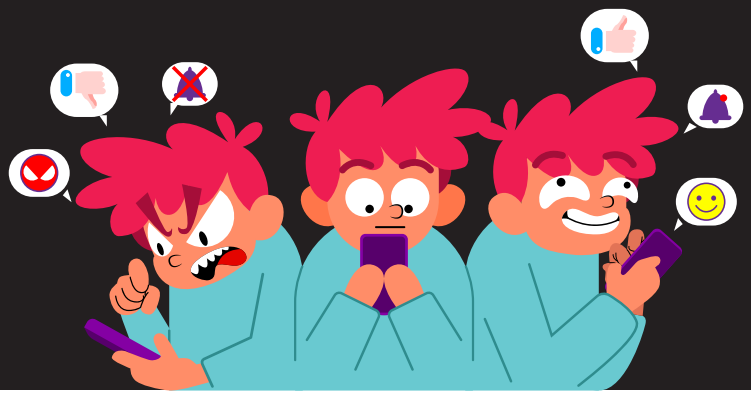


TikTok's Community Guidelines

TikTok provides 'Community Guidelines' for what is allowed and what is not allowed on the platform. The guidelines state that TikTok will remove any content that violates their policies, which covers areas such as violent extremism, hateful behaviour, and illegal activities.

More information can be found by reading through TikTok's Community Guidelines at **tiktok.com/community-guidelines.**



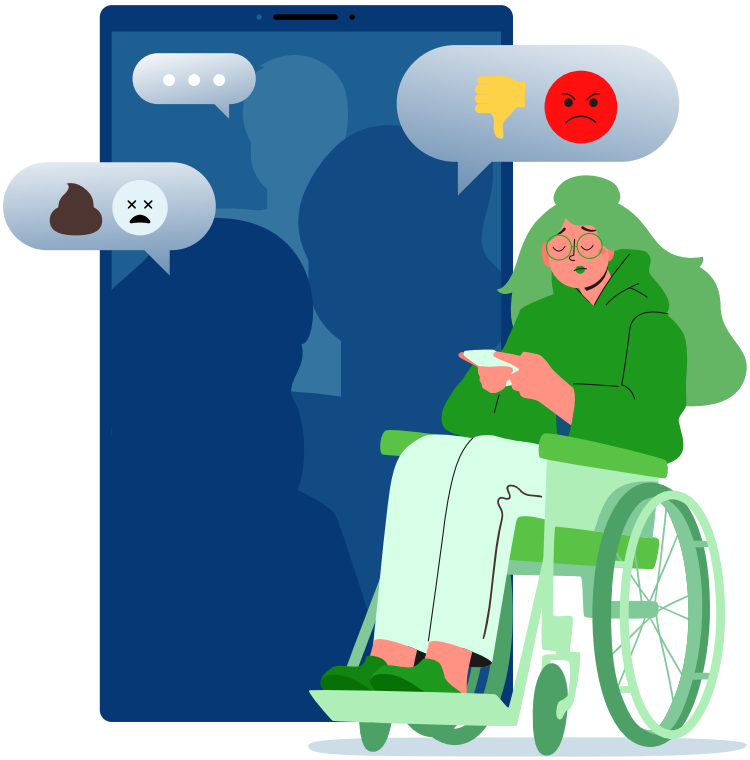
Reporting and blocking

If you become aware of inappropriate content, you should always report the video or report/block the user.

Reporting a video will refer the individual video to TikTok moderators for evaluation. They may take action if it goes against the Community Guidelines.

Reporting a user refers the account and all of its video content to TikTok. The platform may take action if the account goes against the Community Guidelines.

Blocking a user prevents them from viewing your videos or engaging with you through direct messages, comments, follows, or likes.



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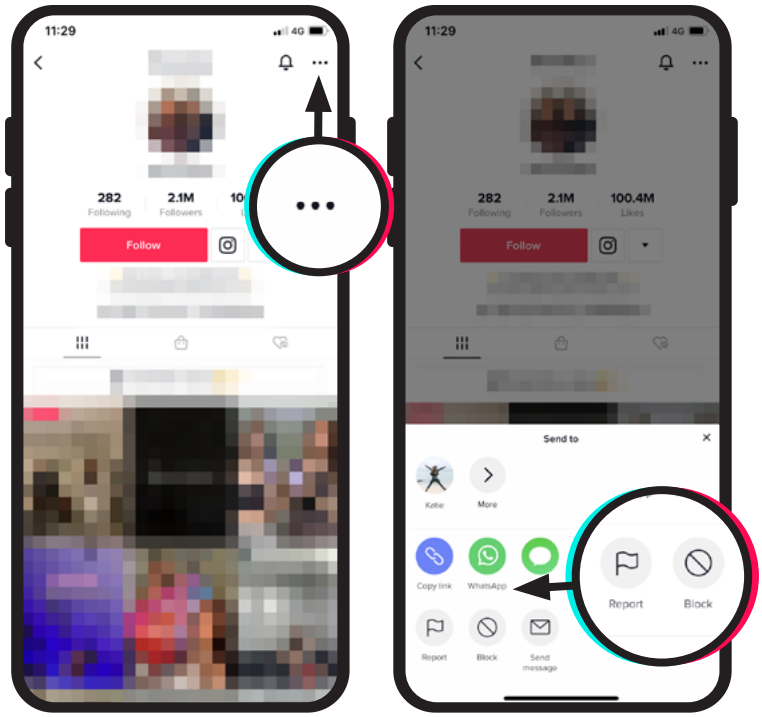
The reporting process is entirely anonymous, and the user will not be made aware of who has reported them. However, posts may need to be reported multiple times in order to get them removed.

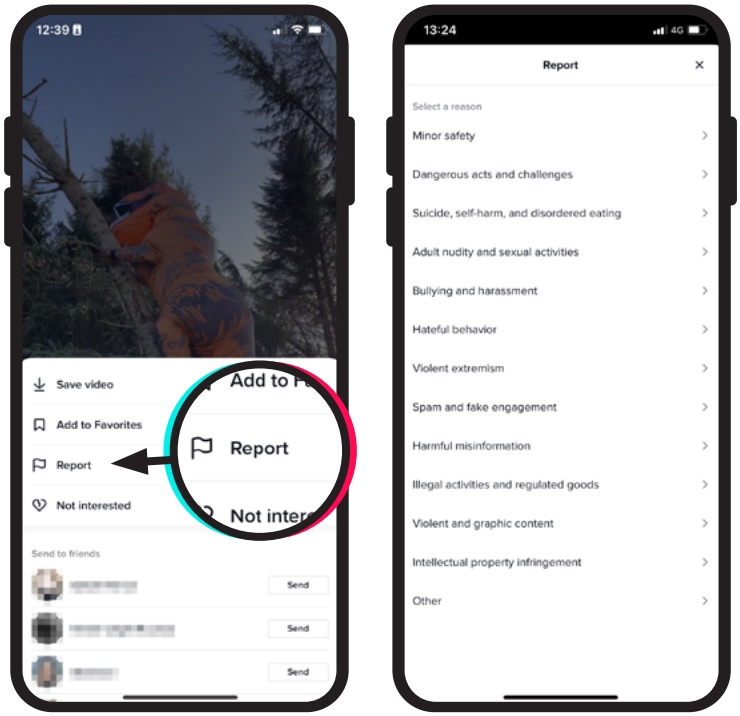
How to report and block an account

- Go to the profile of the user you wish to report or block, and tap the three-dots in the top-right corner.
- Click either 'Report' or 'Block' from the menu that will appear at the bottom of the screen.
- When reporting an account, you will be asked to submit a reason from a list of options.
- Blocking can be done without submitting a reason.



How to report a video

- Hold your finger on the video until the menu pops up along the bottom of the screen, or tap on the arrow on the right-hand side of the video.
- Tap 'Report' and select a reason for the report from the list of options.
- Select more specific reason details as requested by the app.
- On the final screen tap the 'Submit' button.



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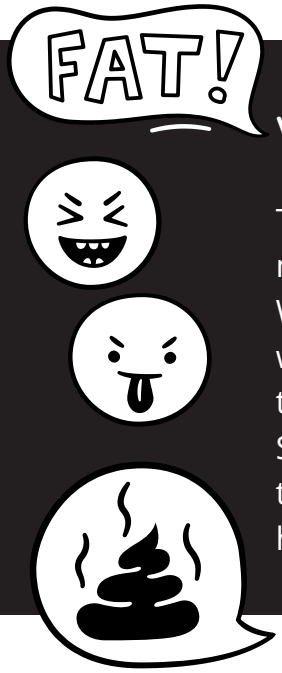
Inappropriate Content

If you find inappropriate content about your school community...

Make sure you report it to the school as soon as possible. Depending on the nature of the material, it may be appropriate to also report it to the platform or the police.

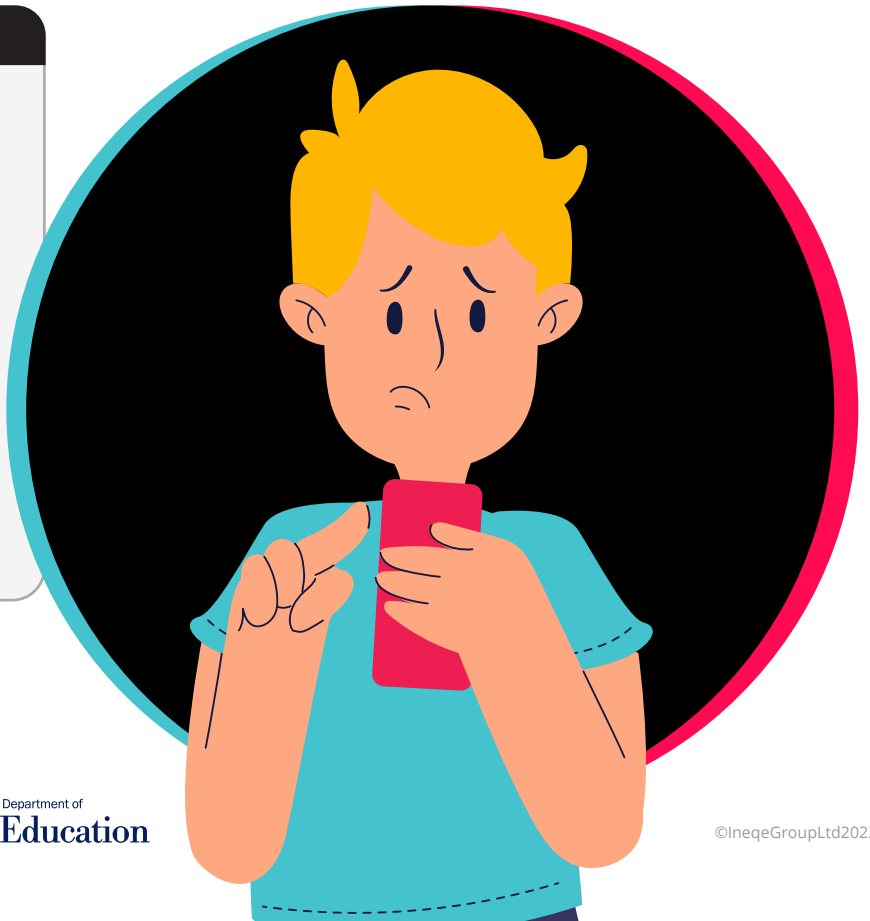
More information on reporting users and content can be found in TikTok's safety section on their website at **support.tiktok.com**.



Warning for pupils regarding inappropriate content

The Education Authority and Department of Education are treating the misuse of TikTok and other digital media applications as a serious issue. While we understand that young people can make mistakes online, pupils who are found to be posting inappropriate content (such as teacher targeted bullying) may be subject to their school's disciplinary procedures. Schools have also been informed to report extreme cases of misuse to the PSNI. This can amount to a serious communications or criminal harassment offence for pupils.

If you have immediate concerns about the safety of a child call 999 (emergency number)



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Useful Resources

We've put together some helpful guidance for you to use. These will assist you in knowing how to promote the overall health and wellbeing of the children and young people in your care as they engage in the online world.

Safer Schools NI App

An award-winning app that uses innovative technology and expert advice to help parents and carers navigate the digital world that children and young people live in every day.

saferschoolsni.co.uk/parent-carer/

Home Learning Hub

An award-winning free online library of downloadable resources, PDFs, lesson plans, and videos made for parents and carers to help children and young people be safer online.

bit.ly/homelearninghubni

Online Safety Centre

An interactive database of safety cards that cover online safety basics for children, young people, parents and carers, including topics like Blocking, Reporting, First Phone, and more.

oursafetycentre.co.uk

UK Gov Education Hub

A blog curated by the Department for Education that highlights issues school communities are facing in both the online and offline world, including challenges found on platforms like TikTok.

bit.ly/EDUCATIONHUB

EA: Digital Safeguarding

A collection of the Education Authority's best digital safeguarding resources which offers timely advice, guidance, and support to parents and carers.

bit.ly/educationauthority

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Useful Resources

TikTok Guardian's Guide

A helpful walkthrough from TikTok about their platform, tailored for parents and carers of teenagers who engage with the platform. It includes information about common safety concerns and wellbeing advice.

bit.ly/3GKIb41

TikTok Safety Audit

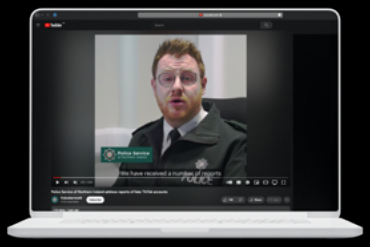
A thorough look at the Safety Settings available on TikTok, including detailed walkthroughs, visual examples, and interactive questions that question the overall safety and effectiveness of individual features.

bit.ly/tiktokauditssni

Responding to Online Challenges

A resource specific to young people, parents, and schools on how to identify and respond to online challenges, trends, and hoaxes with a more appropriate response for each group to use.

bit.ly/3OLF8KP



PSNI

A video from the Police Service of Northern Ireland addressing reports of fake TikTok accounts. These accounts are typically being used to perpetuate Teacher Targeted Bullying.

bit.ly/PSNIvideo

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SAFER SCHOOLS NI

Educating, empowering and protecting the NI school community

As a parent and carer, your Safer Schools NI App will help you to navigate the digital world that your children and young people live in every day. It will help by giving you the tools to protect the children and young people in your care online.

Your App will benefit you because...

- You will find out about fake news, influencers, harmful content and more.
- It gives you prompts, updates and warnings about online trends and threats, helping you to stay in the loop with the digital world.
- Get to grips with social media and all the various gaming platforms.
- Age-appropriate resources
- Advice and signposting
- and so much more

Download today for FREE!

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

To learn more about Safer Schools NI, click below!

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