



Dear Parents/Carers

This week, Westdale Junior School will be joining the fight for making the internet a safer place for all. Today, it is Safer Internet Day. This is a day to join together to make the internet a safer and better place for all, and especially for children and young people. Within school and through Home Learning activities, the children will be thinking about a range of internet based issues such as what their digital footprint is, what is appropriate to put online and how to keep themselves safe when accessing the internet.

Today, young people are exposed to the internet from an early age. There are thousands of apps that children can download to a smartphone or tablet – most are harmless but some are inappropriate for young people or pose risks.

Below, there is information regarding keeping your child safe on the internet and what dangers are prevalent today. This information is targeted to you however please feel free to share with your child/ren what you feel would be beneficial and appropriate.

NSPCC - Worried about a child?

If you're worried about a child, even if you're unsure, contact our helpline to speak to one of our counsellors. Call us on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000), email help@nspcc.org.uk

UK Safer Internet Centre - It is really important to chat with your children on an ongoing basis about staying safe online. Not sure where to begin? These conversation starter suggestions can help.

- 1. Ask your children to tell you about the sites they like to visit and what they enjoy doing online.*
- 2. Ask them about how they stay safe online. What tips do they have for you, and where did they learn them? What is OK and not OK to share?*
- 3. Ask them if they know where to go for help, where to find the safety advice, privacy settings and how to report or block on the services they use.*
- 4. Encourage them to help someone! Perhaps they can show you how to do something better online or they might have a friend who would benefit from their help and support.*
- 5. Think about how you each use the internet. What more could you do to use the internet together? Are there activities that you could enjoy as a family?*

Did you know, all of the apps your children are accessing have an age restriction? For a full list, please visit <https://www.net-aware.org.uk/>

Here are some of the common apps and the age restrictions:

Zoom 16+

TikTok 13+

Whatsapp 16+

AmongUs 7+

Instagram 13+

Fortnite 12+

Twitter 13+

Minecraft 7 +

Snapchat 13+

Pokemon Go 13+

Facebook 13+

GrandTheftAuto 18+ **This game is for over 18s and contains adults themes, including violence, sex and drug use.**

These apps can be great for children. They get to speak with friends and have fun. However, the age restrictions are there for a variety of reasons. These can be because the content might include themes of drug use and sexual violence, or they might be because they allow access to connect with people they do not know.

Using these apps may increase the likeliness of suffering from online abuse. Types of online abuse include

- Cyberbullying
- Emotional abuse
- Grooming
- Sexting
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual exploitation

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National Online Safety, have created many documents for Parents, that share information about children on the internet and how we can help keep them safe.

<https://nationalonlinesafety.com/guides>

Below, is information regarding one of the biggest apps at the moment, TikTok. We know many students at school access this app and although it was originally aimed at children, it has quickly changed into an open forum for inappropriate content and has widened opportunities for people around the world to connect and contact your children.

If you need any more information regarding Internet safety or you're worried about a child, please feel free to contact the above contacts and/or the school.



What parents need to know about

TIKTOK



18+

AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT



On the iOS store, TikTok is listed as 12+. On the Google Play Store it is rated as 'Parental guidance recommended'. When signing up to the app, it's possible to lie about your age without any form of verification. As children scroll through their feed, most of the videos they're likely to come across are light-hearted or designed to make people laugh. However there have been a number of videos reported for featuring drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm and young teens engaging in sexually suggestive content. More recently, suicide-themed related videos have been widely circulated. Given the deluge of material uploaded to TikTok every day, it's impossible to moderate everything and it can be common to come across explicit and age-inappropriate content on the 'for you' feed when logging into the platform.

INAPPROPRIATE MUSIC

TikTok revolves around creating music videos through lip-syncing and dancing. Inevitably, some of the music featured by users will contain explicit or suggestive lyrics. Given the undeniably young user base, there is a risk that children may look to imitate the explicit language they hear or the suggestive actions they see when viewing others user's videos on the app.



TIKTOK FAME

TikTok is very image focused and there is a notable preoccupation with appearing cool and attractive. Many teenagers now attempt to go viral and become what's known in-app as 'TikTok famous'. TikTok (and its predecessor musical.ly) has spawned its own celebrities – social media stars Loren Gray and Jacob Sartorius have been catapulted to fame through their initial exposure on the app. Obviously, most budding influencers looking to become the next big thing will be disappointed, but this may have the knock-on effect of making them go to more and more drastic lengths to get noticed.



ONLINE PREDATORS

As a social network, TikTok makes it easy to connect with other users. This includes the ability to comment on and react to other user's videos, follow their profile and download their content. Be aware that by default, any user can comment on your child's video if their account is set to public. Most interactions are harmless enough but as an app, TikTok is prone to predators because of the abundance of younger users.



ADDICTIVE NATURE

Social media is designed to be addictive and TikTok is no different. It can be fun and hugely entertaining. However, it is also because of this that it can be hard to put down. In addition to the short, punchy nature of the looping video format, the app's ability to keep you guessing what will come on screen next makes it easy to turn a five-minute visit into 45-minute visit.



IN-APP PURCHASES

Aside from the content, there's also the option to purchase in-app extras called 'TikTok coins'. Prices range from £0.99 for 100 coins to an eye-watering £93.99 for 10,000 coins. TikTok coins are used to purchase different emojis to reward content creators that a user finds funny or entertaining. In the iOS version of the app you can disable the option to buy TikTok coins but this sadly doesn't seem to be a feature in the Android version.

