

Hearing Before
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Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security

Protecting Kids Online: Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube

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Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Blackburn, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss how industry is working to provide a safe and secure online experience for younger users.

My name is Michael Beckerman, and I am the Vice President and Head of Public Policy for the Americas at TikTok. Prior to joining TikTok, I was the founding President and CEO of the Internet Association, which represents leading global internet companies on public policy issues. I also served for twelve years as a Congressional staffer, including as the Deputy Staff Director of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

TikTok is a global entertainment platform where people create and watch short-form videos. Our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy, and that mission is the foundation for our privacy and safety policies that aim to protect and promote the well-being of minors on the app. The TikTok community has ushered in a new era in user-generated content by fostering authenticity. One of the unique things about TikTok, is how our powerful yet easy-to-use tools democratize video creation, enabling everyday people to express themselves creatively and find their community on the platform. This approach has resulted in more authentic content and has helped launch new cultural trends from feta pasta to the resurgence of Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams." It has allowed small businesses to find their voice, and to expand their reach and customer base, and it has been a bright spot for American families during the Covid-19 pandemic. Parents are sharing their journeys through fatherhood and motherhood, building an inclusive community for families of all backgrounds. In a [study conducted by Nielson](#), TikTok was the only app where a top reason for usage was, "to lift my spirits."

Since its launch a few years ago, TikTok has experienced exponential growth, and billions of videos are being created each month. We continue to build out and strengthen our teams and technology in support of our commitment to maintain a safe and supportive environment for our community.

We empower people who use the app with a robust set of controls to customize their individual experience, and we are constantly working to build new features that support a positive and safe

environment. For example, we give people the ability to restrict who can send them direct messages (with direct messages turned off entirely for people under 16 years old), to filter out comments containing keywords they select or that otherwise may be inappropriate, to delete comments in bulk, to easily report activity that violates our policies, and to shape the type of content that they will see. We have also introduced well-being resources to support people who want to share their well-being journey in our community. Developed with input from experts, these resources - accessible in our app and on our Safety Center - provide information to support people impacted by eating disorders or struggling with thoughts of suicide or self-harm. For example, if someone searches for key terms related to suicide, self-harm, or eating disorders, we direct them to expert information and support, including the Crisis Text Line, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and the National Eating Disorders Helpline.

We recognize that childhood and adolescence are transformative phases of life. In the United States, we have two separate experiences: TikTok for Younger Users for children under 13 years old, and TikTok for those at least 13 years of age. We have proactively implemented privacy and safety protections to promote the well-being of children and teenagers, and we continue to work on changes to support age-appropriate experiences on our platform. We understand and respect adolescents' desire and need for greater autonomy, but we also appreciate that they are still learning and growing, which is why our product is designed to be sensitive to the differing developmental stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Our goal of providing an age-appropriate experience for our younger users starts with a neutral, industry-standard age screening, which requires individuals creating an account to provide their birthdate. However, our commitment to enforcing our minimum age requirement does not end with age screening. We take additional actions to identify and remove suspected underage account holders from the TikTok platform. For example, we train our safety moderation teams to be alert to explicit admissions that an account may belong to someone under the age of 13. We also use other information, such as keywords or user reports, to help identify potential underage accounts. If, after reviewing all relevant information, our safety team determines that an account may belong to an underage person, we will suspend and remove the account. As part of our commitment to transparency and accountability, since the first quarter of 2021, we have provided reports about our removal of suspected underage accounts, which totaled more than 11 million removals between April and June 2021. We are proud to be an industry leader in making these disclosures.

TikTok for Younger Users

In the United States, if an individual registers for TikTok as under the age of 13, they are directed to [TikTok for Younger Users](#), a curated viewing experience with stringent safeguards and privacy protections designed specifically for people under 13. In TikTok for Younger Users, youth can experience and make fun, creative, and even educational videos on their device. However, they cannot post videos on the platform, comment on others' videos, message with others, or maintain a profile or followers. No advertisements are shown in the under 13 experience.

Earlier this year, we announced a [partnership with Common Sense Networks](#) as part of our ongoing efforts to improve upon the TikTok for Younger Users experience. Through our partnership, Common Sense Networks is providing additional guidance on the appropriateness of content for children under 13, thus strengthening our work to create an entertaining yet safe viewing environment for our younger audience.

Our Approach to Teen Safety and Privacy

Teens who are at least 13 years old can use the main TikTok platform. Today's youth are growing up in a media world and to help them safely manage their digital spaces, we provide them with age-appropriate privacy and safety settings and controls. The privacy and safety settings TikTok has developed, reflect careful consideration of not only the differences between children and teenagers, but also within the 13-18 teenage group.

Our Minor Safety team holds a high bar of rigor for developing policy. We are staffed with experts from the fields of adolescent development, prevention science, and child protection. Our policies are informed by peer-reviewed academic literature and ongoing consultation with external scholars. TikTok works with leading youth safety and well-being experts, as well as adolescent psychologists to inform our approach, including the Family Online Safety Institute, National Parent-Teacher Association, Common Sense Networks, and the Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital. We seek out feedback, research, and best practices from such experts and organizations, and we use this information to help us design TikTok in way that considers and supports the unique needs of teens. Based on input from these experts and published research in this space, we have adopted a nuanced, age-appropriate approach that distinguishes between early teens (age 13-15) and late teens (16-17), which is reflected in our teen-related privacy and safety settings as discussed below.

Family Pairing and Parental Oversight

TikTok is committed to providing parents and guardians visibility into, and control over, how their teenagers use the app. Parents and guardians are critical partners in ensuring the safety of teens. They cannot do it alone and neither can we. We are continuously looking for ways to involve parents and guardians in their teen's experience on our platform. To that end, in 2020, TikTok unveiled our [Family Pairing](#) features, which empower parents or guardians to customize privacy and safety settings for their teenage users, which we continue to improve in consultation with youth and family safety experts. We are pleased to see some of the other platforms exploring similar features to give more meaningful choice and tools to parents.

Family Pairing allows a parent or guardian to link their account (from the parent's device) with their teenager's account and enable privacy and safety controls. Through Family Pairing, parents can choose from the following settings:

- **Screen Time Management:** Parents can decide how long their teen can spend on TikTok each day. Parents can do this directly from their own accounts on their personal device.

- **Restricted Mode:** Parents can help limit the appearance of content that may not be appropriate for all audiences.
- **Search:** Parents can decide whether their teen can search for content, accounts, hashtags, or sounds.
- **Discoverability:** Parents can decide whether their teen’s account is private (in which case the teen decides who can see their content) or public (in which case anyone can view their content). While under 16 accounts are private by default, this feature adds a layer of parental oversight.
- **Suggest Account to Others:** Parents can decide whether their teen’s account can be recommended to others.
- **Direct Messages:** Direct message is not available for teens under age 16. For teens aged 17-18, parents may restrict who can send messages to their teen’s account or turn off direct messaging completely.
- **Liked Videos:** Parents can decide whether anyone can view the videos that their teen likes.
- **Comments:** Parents can decide whether anyone can comment on their teen’s videos.

Even when Family Pairing is not enabled, teens themselves can always take advantage of these tools by selecting them individually through TikTok’s Digital Wellbeing setting. While parents and their teens should remain in control of deciding what is right for their family, our hope is that our Family Pairing features will encourage families to have important conversations about digital safety and well-being.

In addition to Family Pairing, we recently launched an updated [Guardian’s Guide](#) to provide an overview of TikTok and the variety of tools and controls we have built into the product to keep our community safe. The guide also provides general information on common internet safety concerns for families.

We also developed a guide for the [National PTA](#) to provide families and educators with a comprehensive overview of the TikTok app and the safety tools and resources available to create age-appropriate experiences on the platform. The guide was sent to dozens of schools around the country and was published in a U.S. Department of Education newsletter.

Privacy and Safety by Default

The privacy and safety of our teenage users is our priority. To that end, we have implemented numerous privacy settings and controls that reflect our commitment to provide our teenage users with a positive, safe, and age-appropriate experience, including the following:

- **Private Accounts:** The default setting for all TikTok accounts of teens under 16 is set to “private.” That means that only the accounts that the teen approves can follow them and watch their videos.

- **Suggest Your Account to Others:** The “suggest your account to others” feature is disabled by default for teens under 16. This means the teen’s account will not be suggested to other users unless the teen changes the setting to “on.”
- **Direct Messages:** Direct messaging is automatically disabled for users under 16. For older teenage accounts (16-17), their direct messaging setting is set to “No One” by default. We do not allow anyone, regardless of age, to send off-platform videos, images, or links via direct messaging. We made this decision to further protect teens from exploitation, bullying or other unwanted communications, as studies have shown that this type of content is spread via private messaging.
- **Livestreaming:** Livestream hosting is disabled for teens under 16.
- **Comments:** Teens under 16 can allow Friends (followers who the teen follows back) or “No One” to comment on their videos; the Everyone comment function is not available for under 16 teens.
- **Video Downloads:** The ability to download videos created by teens under 16 is disabled. For teens between 16-17, the default setting in this feature is set to Off. If teens aged 16-17 choose to turn the download feature on, they will receive a pop-up asking them to confirm their choice that others can download their videos.
- **Duet/Stitch:** The “Duet” function allows users to react, contribute to, or sing along with another user’s video. Users can also “Stitch,” which allows a user to clip a portion of another user’s video to include as part of their own video. Duet and Stitch are disabled for teens under 16, whereas the default setting for teens 16-17 is set to Friends.
- **Gifting:** Users must be 18 or over to buy, send, or receive virtual gifts during Livestreams.

Building on these age-appropriate protective measures, and in keeping with developments in the global privacy landscape, we recently have introduced new settings:

- We have added a pop-up that appears when teens under 16 are ready to publish their first video, asking them to choose who can watch the video. They will not be able to publish their video until they make a selection.
- We have provided additional context to help teens aged 16-17 understand how downloads work, so they can choose the option that is most comfortable for them. If they opt to turn the feature on, they will now receive a pop-up asking them to confirm that choice before others can download their videos.
- When someone aged 16-17 joins TikTok, their Direct Messaging setting will be set to “No One” by default. To message others, they will need to switch to a different sharing option. Existing accounts that have never used direct messaging before will receive a prompt asking them to review and confirm their privacy settings the next time they use this feature.

- Accounts for age 13-15 teens will not receive push notifications from 9 p.m., and accounts for age 16-17 teens will have push notifications disabled starting at 10 p.m.

Preventing Bullying and Harassment

TikTok stands against bullying and harassment in any form. We continue to look for ways to promote open and respectful discussion while prohibiting inappropriate and harmful comments on our platform. We launched [#CreateKindness](#), a global campaign and a creative video series aimed at raising awareness about online bullying and encouraging people to choose to be kind toward one another. The campaign has already received more than one billion views.

Bullying and harassment are violations of our Community Guidelines, and when we see such content and behavior, we take action. To further help foster kindness in our community, we have rolled out the following features this year:

- A prompt asking people to reconsider posting unkind or inappropriate comments.
- Two features that give users more control over the comments on their videos:
 - With our new Filter All Comments feature, users can decide which comments will appear on their videos. When enabled, comments are not displayed unless the creator approves them using the comment management tool. This feature builds on our existing collection of comment controls that allow people to automatically filter spam, offensive comments, and specific keywords.
 - We have also introduced the ability to delete multiple comments at once or report them for potentially violating our Community Guidelines. Accounts that post bullying or other negative comments can now be blocked in bulk, up to 100 at a time.

In addition, we work to educate teens and families about bullying prevention. We recently launched a [bullying prevention guide](#) on our [Safety Center](#) to help teens, parents and guardians, and educators learn about the issue and settings that can help prevent bullying on our platform.

Combating Child Exploitation

TikTok is firmly committed to protecting the safety of our community, and we take a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), including child sexual abuse material (CSAM). We continually monitor, update, and reinforce our efforts to stop the creation and sharing of CSAM. TikTok has a dedicated investigations group within our Trust & Safety team focused on detecting emerging trends and patterns regarding child exploitation and abuse as part of our efforts to keep our platform safe. TikTok adheres to the [Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), which provide a framework that can be consistently applied across sectors and services to respond to changing societal and offending behaviors and reduce risks for users.

TikTok's efforts to thwart CSAM and child exploitative content is premised on the three P's: Policies, Product, and Partners.

- **Policies:** The threat posed by CSAM and child exploitative content remains a global challenge that requires collaboration with academic experts, child safety groups, industry organizations, and governments. TikTok's global Trust & Safety teams are comprised of experienced professionals whose backgrounds span product, policy, compliance, child safety, law, and privacy. Trust & Safety leaders collaborate closely with regional regulators, policymakers, governments, and law enforcement agencies to promote the highest possible standard of user safety. Our Los Angeles-based Trust & Safety team is responsible for developing and enforcing moderation policies and strategies in the United States.

TikTok's [Community Guidelines](#) prohibit content that depicts or disseminates child abuse, child nudity, or the sexual exploitation of children. When we become aware of such content, we take immediate action to remove the violative content, terminate the pertinent accounts, and, where appropriate, report cases of CSAM to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and other law enforcement agencies. In 2020, [TikTok made 22,692 reports](#) regarding CSAM and child exploitative content to NCMEC's CyberTipline.

TikTok's multifaceted strategy to combat CSAM and child exploitative content employs both human-centered moderators as discussed below, as well as machine-based moderation tools such as photo-identification technology. Additionally, we filter red-flag language and share information with NCMEC about situations that may indicate grooming behavior, according to their policies and industry norms.

- **Product:** TikTok does not allow off-platform videos, images, or links to be sent through direct messages or comments to videos. This was a deliberate decision we made, supported by relevant studies, and helps to close off a potential vector for the propagation and dissemination of CSAM and child exploitative content. We provide [in-app reporting mechanisms](#) to ensure users can report content that violates our Community Guidelines, including content that violates our [minor safety rules](#). Finally, for our under 13 users, we have implemented additional restrictions and safeguards in TikTok for Younger Users to help guard against the risks of CSAM and child exploitative content.
- **Partners:** TikTok leverages the expertise of child safety organizations, including the [Family Online Safety Institute](#), [ConnectSafely](#), [National PTA](#), [Cyberbullying Research Center](#), [Boston Children's Hospital's Digital Wellness Lab](#), [Internet Watch Foundation](#), [NCMEC](#) to continually assess and enhance our minor safety policies and product features. We also recently joined the [Technology Coalition](#), a global alliance of leading Internet companies, to work collaboratively toward solutions that protect children from online sexual exploitation.

Content Moderation and Dangerous Challenges

Content moderation policy and implementation for the United States is led by our US Trust and Safety team in Los Angeles, with the goal of developing equitable policies that are transparent and can be consistently enforced.

We solicit a diverse range of feedback from external experts in digital safety and human rights, including members of our [Content Advisory Council](#). We also work with accredited and independent fact-checking organizations that help us assess the veracity of content, such as [Lead Stories](#) or [Science Feedback](#), so that we can take the appropriate action in line with our Community Guidelines. We greatly value our collaboration with independent researchers on industry-wide challenges, which helps strengthen how we enforce our policies to keep our platform safe and welcoming.

Our Community Guidelines are designed to foster a safe environment that nourishes creativity, and we rely on our community members to responsibly honor these parameters. We strictly prohibit dangerous acts and challenges on our platform and work to aggressively remove videos and hashtags that promote such behavior. TikTok has even stricter policies when it comes to inappropriate content featuring minors. Our policies prohibit any content that depicts or promotes activities that may jeopardize youth well-being, including physical challenges, dares, or stunts.

While we do not condone any harmful, dangerous, or criminal behavior, we understand that some individuals may nevertheless decide to post such content. We aggressively look to remove such content and related hashtags as soon as possible. To educate our community about the dangers of such behavior, TikTok has partnered with creators [to raise awareness](#) against these dangerous challenges.

Unfortunately, “dangerous challenges” are often sensationalized in the traditional media and can go “viral” in news accounts or from tweets by public officials, even when they are not actually appearing on the app. With regards to reports of scheduled challenges on TikTok, as a prominent disinformation researcher who focuses on TikTok recently pointed out: “When I looked into this, I could not find a single TikTok actually endorsing this behavior. All evidence indicates this is a hoax turned into reality by local news and school districts reacting to completely unconfirmed rumors.” A number of news reports have surfaced that many of the alleged challenges are in fact hoaxes that originated on another platform and were never on TikTok at all.

We recently saw content related to “devious licks” gain traction on TikTok and other platforms. Our moderation teams worked swiftly to remove this content and redirect hashtags and search results to our Community Guidelines to discourage such behavior. We issued specialized guidance to our teams on this violative content and proactively detected and removed content, including videos, hashtags, and audio associated with the trend. Additionally, our teams are continuously staying alert to emerging violative content as well as new variations of spellings for hashtags relating to challenges. To help reach schools and parents, we actively worked with National PTA throughout this cycle to explain our diligent actions and reach families with messages that support

ongoing, open conversations about digital safety and etiquette with their teens to ensure they are using social media productively and responsibly. As part of our [PTA Connected](#) initiative, National PTA has teamed up with TikTok to develop a guide that provides parents and guardians with information about TikTok, digital safety, and how they can help ensure their teens are using technology productively and responsibly.

Transparency into Enforcement of Minor Safety Rules

TikTok aims to be transparent and accountable when it comes to minor safety. We publish a quarterly Transparency Report that discloses the metrics related to violative content that we remove pursuant to our Community Guidelines. This includes data about content that violates our minor safety rules, as well as how quickly we detect and remove such content. [In the second quarter of 2021](#), for example, 41.3% of content removed violated our minor safety policies. Of those videos, 97.6% of videos were removed before they were reported to us, and 95.4% of videos were removed within 24 hours of being posted. This continued improvement in proactive detection is the result of our efforts to improve our policies and procedures that work to identify and flag violative content early on, before it is even viewed.

Conclusion

There is no finish line when it comes to protecting children and teens. The challenges are complex and constantly evolving, but with humility and determination, we are working hard to build upon our work to keep our platform safe for everyone, especially children and teens. It truly does take a village to keep minors safe online, and we will continue to work with teenagers, parents, child safety experts and organizations, policymakers, and other interested stakeholders to continue to improve and do better. Thank you for your time and consideration.