

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

TIKTOK



Connecting Parents, Teens & Jesus
in a Disconnected World

AXIS PARENT'S GUIDES SERIES

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A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

TIKTOK

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A Parent's Guide to TikTok

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There's huge enticement to get famous, which could encourage kids to do things they wouldn't normally do to get a larger audience.

**FRANNIE UCCIFERRI,
COMMON SENSE MEDIA**

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A LETTER FROM AXIS

Dear Reader,

We're Axis, and since 2007, we've been creating resources to help connect parents, teens, and Jesus in a disconnected world. We're a group of gospel-minded researchers, speakers, and content creators, and we're excited to bring you the best of what we've learned about making meaningful connections with the teens in your life.

This parent's guide is designed to help start a conversation. Our goal is to give you enough knowledge that you're able to ask your teen informed questions about their world. For each guide, we spend weeks reading, researching, and interviewing parents and teens in order to distill everything you need to know about the topic at hand. We encourage you to read the whole thing and then to use the questions we include to get the conversation going with your teen—and then to follow the conversation wherever it leads.

As Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen point out in their book *Difficult Conversations*, “Changes in attitudes and behavior rarely come about because of arguments, facts, and attempts to persuade. How often do *you* change your values and beliefs—or whom you love or what you want in life—based on something someone tells you? And how likely are you to do so when the person who is trying to change you doesn’t seem fully aware of the reasons you see things differently in the first place?”¹ For whatever reason, when we believe that others are trying to understand *our* point of view, our defenses usually go down, and we’re more willing to listen to *their* point of view. The rising generation is no exception.

So we encourage you to ask questions, to listen, and then to share your heart with your teen. As we often say at Axis, discipleship happens where conversation happens.

Sincerely,
Your friends at Axis

¹ Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 137.

**FOR GEN Z,
TIKTOK IS THE
APP TO BEAT**

TIKTOK (FORMERLY MUSICAL.LY) has rapidly gained popularity among teens and tweens since its launch in 2016. As a “destination for short-form mobile video,”¹ users upload videos of themselves lip-syncing, telling jokes, dancing, etc.

For parents of teens and tweens who use the app (or keep asking to), it’s helpful to know what it is, its pitfalls and dangers, and how to talk to them about it in order to help them pursue health in every area of their lives.

**WHAT IS
TIKTOK, AND
HOW POPULAR
IS IT?**

TO FULLY UNDERSTAND TIKTOK and its appeal, we need to go back to its origins as Musical.ly. Musical.ly was a mobile app for making fifteen-second lip-syncing videos that launched in the US in 2014 and quickly grew in popularity to 200 million registered users.² It even partnered with NBC for the 2018 Winter Olympics to give its users special behind-the-scenes footage. Within the first weekend of the Olympics, Musical.ly had produced over 10 million engagements.³

It was reminiscent of the now-defunct Vine (which made somewhat of a comeback with Byte⁴), a social media platform where users could share six-second-long videos (which could be amusing and clever and led to fame for a number of Viners, one notable example being pop star Shawn Mendes⁵). Because of this,

Musical.ly filled a hole for many Viners, as well as offering some new features.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, “Musical.ly’s great innovation was making the video *selfie* a thing.”⁶ Musical.ly videos could be up to fifteen seconds long, and users were able to add music to them, choosing from numerous songs in the app’s database or from their own libraries. It was easy for users to creatively edit the videos by adding various effects. They could then share their creations either publicly or privately.

Musical.ly gave rise to quite a few teen stars in its own right. Famous users include Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius, and twins Lena and Lisa Mantler. But all of that ended when ByteDance, the Chinese parent company of TikTok (aka “Douyin”

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in China) that purchased Musical.ly in November 2017,⁷ decided to absorb Musical.ly into TikTok in August 2018. The Musical.ly app was no more, and users' accounts were migrated over to the highly similar TikTok app.

Now that TikTok has been combined with Musical.ly's existing user base, ByteDance claims it has over 1 billion active users in 155 countries (as of 2021).⁸ Many wondered if the merge would turn off Musical.ly lovers, but the data seems to show the opposite. In the iOS app store, TikTok maintains a 4.8 out of 5 stars rating,⁹ with over 3.3 billion downloads. It was one of the most-downloaded apps of 2021 across both Android and Apple devices.¹⁰

TikTok's requirements limit use of the app to anyone thirteen and older, though

there's plenty of evidence that many Musical.ly users were quite young (nine years old or even younger),¹¹ so it's probably true that TikTok has similar demographics. And while there's plenty of anecdotal evidence to support claims that its main user base is thirteen to eighteen years old, specific statistics are hard to find.¹²

