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TikTok

Watching without posting, privacy, time limits and TikTok Shop — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for watchers, grandparents and families

Take your time — watching can't break anything

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

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For the TikTok app on iPhone & Android · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to TikTok, written for people who mostly want to watch. Parts 1 and 2 get you watching; Part 3 locks down your privacy; Part 4 keeps your time in check; Part 5 covers shopping and scams. Read in any order and at your own pace. If a screen looks a little different, the idea is still the same.

Part 1 — Getting Started

1 A Note from Bill
2 What TikTok Is, and Why So Many People Use It
3 Who Runs TikTok in the U.S. Now
4 Getting the Real App (or Watching Without One)
5 Creating an Account Just for Watching
6 A Tour of the Screen

Part 2 — Watching TikTok

7 Watching Videos: Swipe, Pause, Sound and Captions
8 Shaping Your For You Feed
9 Searching and Following
10 Saving Favorites and Sharing a Video with Family
11 Comments: Reading, Liking and When to Stay Quiet
12 Watching TikTok on Your TV

Part 3 — Privacy & Account Safety

13 Making Your Account Private
14 Who Can Message, Comment and Find You
15 What Your Profile Shows
16 Passwords, 2-Step Verification and Security Checkup
17 If You Got Hacked or Locked Out
18 Block, Report and Quietly Unfollow

Part 4 — Your Time & Your Family

19 Setting a Daily Time Limit
20 Restricted Mode
21 Family Pairing for Children and Teens
22 Limits on the Phone Itself

Part 5 — Shopping, Money & Scams

23 TikTok Shop: How It Works
24 Buying Safely and Getting a Refund
25 LIVE Videos, Coins and Gifts

26 Scams on TikTok
27 Real or Fake? AI Videos, Health Tips and News

Part 6 — Posting, Taking a Break & Help

28 If You Decide to Post a Video
29 Taking a Break, Deleting Your Account and Your Data
30 Helping a Parent or Grandparent Use TikTok
31 When to Call Bill
32 Your TikTok Cheat-Sheet

PART 1

Getting Started

What TikTok is, who runs it now, getting the real app, and setting up an account you can use just to watch.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. Maybe the grandkids keep sending you TikTok links, or a friend told you about a cooking channel there, or you simply want to know what everyone's talking about. TikTok is an app full of short videos, usually under a few minutes long, that play one after another. You swipe up to see the next one. It can be funny, useful, and yes, a real time-eater.

I'm Bill. For more than 30 years I've helped people make sense of their technology, and I serve folks right here in Portage County, Ohio. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it at your kitchen table: slowly, in plain English, one step at a time.

Who this guide is for

- Anyone who wants to **watch** TikTok without ever posting a video.
- Grandparents who want to see what the grandkids share, and keep up with family.
- Parents and grandparents who help a child use TikTok safely.
- Anyone worried about privacy, scams, or how much time the app eats up.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this guide does for you

By the end you'll know how to install the real app, set up a private account for watching, shape what TikTok shows you, set a daily time limit, spot scams and fake shops, and help a child with Family Pairing. You'll be in charge of the app, instead of the other way around.

The big promise: watching can't break anything

Swiping, pausing, and searching are completely safe. Nothing you watch is posted anywhere. The places to slow down are three: what your profile shows, who can message you, and anything that asks for money. I'll flag each one clearly.

You're never stuck alone

If anything here feels confusing, call or text me at **(330) 200-8042**. Start with Chapter 2, *What TikTok Is, and Why So Many People Use It* and go at your own pace.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What TikTok Is, and Why So Many People Use It

TikTok is a free app for watching and sharing short videos. What makes it different from YouTube or Facebook is the **For You** feed: instead of choosing what to watch, you swipe and TikTok picks the next video based on what you've lingered on before. It learns quickly.

How many people use it

According to the Pew Research Center, 37% of U.S. adults said they use TikTok in 2025, up from 21% in 2021. About one in five American adults now regularly get news there.

What people watch

- Cooking, gardening, home repair and craft how-tos.
- Funny animal videos, music and dance.
- Local news, weather and community happenings.
- Product reviews and shopping (see Chapter 23, *TikTok Shop: How It Works*).
- Family videos from children and grandchildren.

HEADS UP

Anyone can post

TikTok videos aren't checked for accuracy before they're posted. Health tips, money advice and news on TikTok can be wrong or made up, and some videos are generated by AI. See Chapter 27, *Real or Fake? AI Videos, Health Tips and News*.

GOOD TO KNOW

It's free, but it's a business

TikTok makes money from ads, from TikTok Shop sales and from LIVE gifts. That's why it works hard to keep you watching. Setting a time limit (see Chapter 19, *Setting a Daily Time Limit*) helps.

CHAPTER 3

Who Runs TikTok in the U.S. Now

You may remember years of headlines about TikTok being banned. Here's where things stand, stated plainly.

The short version

- In January 2026, TikTok's U.S. operations were moved into a new company, the **TikTok USDS Joint Venture**, controlled by American and other investors led by Oracle, Silver Lake and MGX.
- ByteDance, the Chinese company that created TikTok, kept a 19.9% minority stake.
- Oracle hosts U.S. users' data and reviews the app's code. The recommendation system is licensed from ByteDance and retrained on U.S. data.
- You did not need a new app. The TikTok app you already had kept working.

GOOD TO KNOW

New terms of service

After the change, U.S. users were asked to accept updated terms and a privacy policy naming the new company. If the app asks you to agree to new terms, it's legitimate when it appears inside the app itself.

SCAM ALERT

No one needs your password to "move" your account

Messages claiming you must "verify" or "transfer" your TikTok account to keep it, with a link to click, are scams. Real changes happen inside the app. See Chapter 26, *Scams on TikTok*.

What it means for you

For everyday watching, nothing changed: same app, same videos, same settings. People still disagree about how independent the new company is from ByteDance. If privacy is a concern, the settings in Part 3 are the parts you control.

CHAPTER 4

Getting the Real App (or Watching Without One)

TikTok is free in the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store. Get it only from those stores.

Installing TikTok

1. On an iPhone or iPad, open the **App Store**. On Android, open the **Play Store**.
2. Search for **TikTok**. The real app is from **TikTok Ltd.** or **TikTok Pte. Ltd.** and has a huge number of reviews.
3. Tap **Get** or **Install**, then **Open**.

HEADS UP

Skip look-alikes

Apps called "TikTok Downloader," "Free Followers" or "TikTok Coins Free" aren't from TikTok. Many steal logins or push you to pay. You need only the one real app.

Watching without an account

You can watch many TikTok videos without signing up. Open a link a family member sends you, or visit **tiktok.com** in a web browser. Without an account you can't follow people, like videos or save favorites, and TikTok will often pop up asking you to sign in. That's fine; close the box and keep watching.

TIP

Just want the grandkids' videos?

If the family sends links by text, you may not need an account at all. Tap the link and it opens in the app or your browser.

CHAPTER 5

Creating an Account Just for Watching

An account lets you follow family, save favorites and set your own time limits. You never have to post a single video.

1. Open TikTok and tap **Profile** at the bottom right.
2. Tap **Sign up**. Choose to sign up with your email address or phone number.
3. Enter your real birthday. TikTok uses it to apply age-appropriate settings.
4. Create a strong password you don't use anywhere else, and write it in your password book.
5. TikTok suggests a username. You can change it later; avoid using your full name and birth year.

TIP

Use email or phone, not "Continue with Facebook"

Signing up with your own email or phone number keeps TikTok separate from your other accounts. If you ever lose access to Facebook, you won't lose TikTok too.

Right after signing up

1. Make your account private (Chapter 13, *Making Your Account Private*).
2. Turn on 2-step verification (Chapter 16, *Passwords, 2-Step Verification and Security Checkup*).
3. Set a daily screen time limit (Chapter 19, *Setting a Daily Time Limit*).
4. Skip the request to sync your contacts unless you want TikTok to suggest your contacts as friends.

HEADS UP

Contacts and "suggest your account"

TikTok may ask to sync your phone contacts or Facebook friends. If you agree, people who have your number may see your account suggested. You can say no now, and turn suggestions off later in Chapter 14, *Who Can Message, Comment and Find You*.

CHAPTER 6

A Tour of the Screen

TikTok opens straight into a video playing full-screen. Here's what everything around it does.

You'll see	What it does
Home (bottom left)	The main video feeds. Across the top you'll see **For You** (TikTok's picks) and **Following** (people you follow).
Friends or Shop	Depending on your app version, this tab shows friends' videos or TikTok Shop.
The plus (+) button	For making a video. If you only watch, you can ignore it.
Inbox	Notifications and private messages.
Profile (bottom right)	Your account, saved favorites, and the menu with all settings.
Right side of a video	The creator's picture (tap to follow), the heart (like), comments, favorites (bookmark), and share.

Finding Settings

1. Tap **Profile** at the bottom right.
2. Tap the **Menu** button (three lines) at the top right.
3. Tap **Settings and privacy**. Nearly every setting in this guide starts here.

GOOD TO KNOW

Your screen may look a little different

TikTok changes its layout often and tests new features with some people first. If a button isn't where this guide says, look under Settings and privacy, or use the search box at the top of Settings.

PART 2

Watching TikTok

Swiping, sound and captions, shaping your feed, searching and following, saving favorites, comments, and watching on the TV.

CHAPTER 7

Watching Videos: Swipe, Pause, Sound and Captions

Watching TikTok takes just a few moves. Once you know them, the app feels much less frantic.

I want to…	Do this
Next video	Swipe up.
Go back	Swipe down.
Pause or play	Tap the middle of the screen once.
See who made it	Tap their name or picture.
Louder or quieter	Use your phone's volume buttons.
Skip ahead in a long video	Drag the thin bar at the bottom of the video.

Turn on captions

Many videos have automatic captions you can turn on, which is handy if you're hard of hearing or watching in a quiet room.

1. Open **Profile**, tap the **Menu** button, then **Settings and privacy**.
2. Tap **Accessibility**.
3. Turn on **Captions** (some versions say Always show captions).

TIP

Make text bigger

TikTok follows your phone's text size for much of its writing. Making text larger in your phone's settings helps comments and captions too.

HEADS UP

Videos play with sound

TikTok videos start playing with sound right away. If you open it in a waiting room, turn your volume down first.

GOOD TO KNOW

Ads look like regular videos

Some videos in your feed are ads. They're marked **Sponsored** or **Ad** near the bottom. Swipe past them like any other video.

CHAPTER 8

Shaping Your For You Feed

The For You feed learns from what you watch. The longer you linger on a kind of video, the more of it you'll see. The good news: you can steer it.

"Not interested"

1. When a video you don't like plays, press and hold on it.
2. Tap **Not interested**. TikTok shows you fewer videos like it.

Manage topics

Manage topics lets you turn categories like Cooking, Sports or Travel up or down. It changes how often you see them rather than blocking them completely. TikTok has also tested a setting here for how much AI-generated content you see.

1. Go to **Settings and privacy**, then **Content preferences**.
2. Tap **Manage topics** and slide each topic up or down.

Start fresh

If your feed has gone somewhere you don't like, **Refresh your For You feed** (also under Content preferences) resets it close to how a brand-new account starts, so it can relearn your interests.

> TIP
> **Filter out words**
> Under Content preferences you can also filter out videos that use certain words or hashtags, such as a topic you find upsetting.

CHAPTER 9

Searching and Following

Instead of letting TikTok choose everything, you can look for what you want and follow people you like.

Search

1. On the Home screen, tap the **magnifying glass** at the top right.
2. Type what you're looking for, such as "sourdough bread" or "Kent State football," or a person's username.
3. Tap **Search**. Results are sorted into tabs such as Top, Videos and Users.

Follow someone

1. Tap the creator's picture on the right side of their video, or their name.
2. Tap **Follow**.
3. Their new videos appear in your **Following** feed at the top of Home.

TIP

Find your family

Ask your grandchild for their username, search for it, and follow. If their account is private, they'll need to approve you.

HEADS UP

Look-alike accounts

Scammers copy famous people, brands and even ordinary folks, using the same picture and a name that's one letter off. Before following someone you know, check with them. Official accounts of famous people and brands often have a blue check mark.

Unfollow

Go to their profile and tap **Following** (or the person icon), then **Unfollow**. They aren't notified.

CHAPTER 10

Saving Favorites and Sharing a Video with Family

Found a recipe you'll want next week, or a video your sister would love? Here's how to keep it and pass it on.

Save to Favorites

1. Tap the **bookmark** (ribbon) icon on the right side of the video.
2. To find it later, tap **Profile**, then the **Favorites** tab (bookmark icon).

Send a video by text or email

1. Tap the **Share** arrow on the right side of the video.
2. Tap **Copy link**, or choose Messages, WhatsApp or email from the row of apps.
3. Paste or send it to your family. They can watch it even without TikTok.

> TIP
> **Liking versus saving**
> The heart tells the creator (and TikTok) that you enjoyed it. The bookmark saves it privately for you. Use the bookmark for recipes and how-tos you want to find again.

> GOOD TO KNOW
> **Your likes may be visible**
> Depending on your settings, others may see the videos you've liked. In **Settings and privacy**, **Privacy**, you can choose who sees your liked videos.

CHAPTER 11

Comments: Reading, Liking and When to Stay Quiet

Tap the speech bubble on a video to read what others wrote. Comments can be funny and helpful, and they can also be rude or full of scams.

Reading and writing

1. Tap the **speech bubble** on the right side of a video.
2. Scroll the comments. Tap the heart next to one to like it.
3. To write your own, tap the box at the bottom, type, and tap send. Anyone who can see the video can read it.

SCAM ALERT

"Message me on WhatsApp" comments

Comments offering investment tips, prizes, cheap products or "DM me for help" are a favorite scam. Never contact strangers from comments, and never move a conversation to WhatsApp or text.

TIP

Delete your own comment

Press and hold your comment, then tap **Delete**.

Good rules for comments

- Never share your phone number, address, or travel plans in a comment.
- Don't argue with strangers. Swipe on; it's not worth your afternoon.
- If a comment is threatening or hateful, press and hold it and tap **Report**.

CHAPTER 12

Watching TikTok on Your TV

Cooking and exercise videos can be easier to follow on a big screen. There are two ways to do it.

Option 1: the TikTok TV app

TikTok has offered a TV app on Amazon Fire TV, Google TV and Android TV, and some Samsung and LG smart TVs. Look for **TikTok** in your TV's app store. Some versions let you watch without signing in; others show a code to link your account.

1. Open your TV's app store and search for **TikTok**.
2. Install and open it.
3. Choose to watch without signing in, or follow the on-screen steps to link your account with your phone.

GOOD TO KNOW

Not on every TV

TikTok isn't available on every streaming device. If you can't find it, use Option 2. Our guides on Roku, Fire TV and smart TVs cover screen mirroring.

Option 2: send your phone screen to the TV

- iPhone to Apple TV or an AirPlay TV: open Control Center and tap Screen Mirroring.
- Android to a Chromecast or Google TV: use the Cast or Smart View button in your quick settings.

TIP

Watching without an account on the TV

If you don't have an account, the TV app's watch-now option shows general popular videos. It's a pleasant way to sample TikTok before you decide to sign up.

PART 3

Privacy & Account Safety

A private account, who can reach you, what your profile shows, passwords and 2-step verification, and what to do if you get hacked.

CHAPTER 13

Making Your Account Private

If you're on TikTok mostly to watch, a **private account** is the simplest privacy step there is. Only people you approve can follow you and see any videos you post or repost.

1. Tap **Profile**, then the **Menu** button (three lines).
2. Tap **Settings and privacy**, then **Privacy**.
3. Turn on **Private account**.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why it's worth it

With a private account, strangers can't browse your profile, and you review every follow request. It costs you nothing as a watcher, since you can still see public videos from everyone.

GOOD TO KNOW

People who already follow you stay

Switching to private doesn't remove existing followers. Look at your Followers list and remove anyone you don't know: tap their name, then the three dots, then **Remove this follower**.

GOOD TO KNOW

Accounts for teens start private

TikTok sets accounts for younger teens to private by default. See Chapter 21, *Family Pairing for Children and Teens* for more on teen settings.

Approving follow requests

When someone asks to follow your private account, you'll see a request in your **Inbox**. Approve people you know; decline everyone else. They aren't told you declined.

CHAPTER 14

Who Can Message, Comment and Find You

Even with a private account, a few settings decide who can reach you. Strangers who message older adults are, sadly, often scammers, so these are worth a minute.

Where to look

Go to **Profile**, **Menu**, **Settings and privacy**, **Privacy**. Then check:

Setting	A sensible choice
Direct messages	Choose **Friends** (people you follow who follow you back) or **No one**.
Comments	Choose **Friends** or **No one** if you don't post.
Suggest your account to others	Turn off contacts, Facebook friends and people with mutual connections if you'd rather not be found.
Liked videos	Choose **Only me**.
Duet, Stitch and downloads	Turn off if you post, so others can't reuse your videos.
Mentions	Choose who can tag you in their videos.

TIP

Not sure? Choose "Friends"

Friends on TikTok means you follow each other. That covers family and real friends, and keeps strangers out.

SCAM ALERT

Strangers who message first

A friendly stranger who messages you, flatters you, and soon talks about investments, crypto, a sick relative or a package fee is following a script. Block and report them. See Chapter 26, *Scams on TikTok*.

Location

TikTok can use your location for local content. On your phone, you can set TikTok's location permission to "Never" or "While using" in your phone's Settings, under TikTok or Apps. Don't include your town or street in your profile or videos.

CHAPTER 15

What Your Profile Shows

Your profile is your TikTok calling card. If you only watch, keep it simple and give away as little as possible.

Editing your profile

1. Tap **Profile**, then **Edit profile**.
2. Change your **name** (what people see) and **username** (your @ handle) if you like.
3. Add a photo if you want family to recognize you; a pet or flower works just as well.
4. Leave the bio short or blank.

HEADS UP

What to leave out

Skip your birthday, town, phone number, email, employer, and grandchildren's names. Scammers collect these details for password guesses and "grandparent" scams.

GOOD TO KNOW

Usernames can only change so often

TikTok limits how often you can change your username. Pick one you like, such as "GrandmaJoCooks," rather than something with your full name and birth year.

Check what strangers see

Ask a family member to look you up on their phone. With a private account, they should see only your name, photo and a lock, until you approve them.

CHAPTER 16

Passwords, 2-Step Verification and Security Checkup

A stolen TikTok account can be used to scam your family and friends. Two settings make that much harder.

Run Security Checkup

1. Go to **Profile**, **Menu**, **Settings and privacy**.
2. Tap **Security and permissions** (some versions say Security).
3. Tap **Security Checkup** and follow the suggestions.

Turn on 2-step verification

1. In **Security and permissions**, tap **2-step verification**.
2. Choose at least two methods: text message to your phone, email, or an authenticator app.
3. Tap **Turn on** and follow the prompts.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why it's worth five minutes

With 2-step verification, someone who learns your password still can't sign in from a new phone without a code that goes only to you.

SCAM ALERT

Never share a code

TikTok will never ask you for your password or a verification code by message or phone. Anyone who asks, even a "friend," is trying to take over your account.

See where you're signed in

Under **Security and permissions**, **Manage devices** lists the phones and computers signed in to your account. Remove any you don't recognize.

CHAPTER 17

If You Got Hacked or Locked Out

If you forgot your password, can't sign in, or see videos and messages you didn't send, act quickly. Here's the order to work in.

If you can still sign in

1. Change your password right away (Settings and privacy, Account, Password).
2. Check **Manage devices** and remove anything you don't recognize.
3. Turn on 2-step verification (Chapter 16, *Passwords, 2-Step Verification and Security Checkup*).
4. Check that your email and phone number in the account are still yours.
5. Tell family and friends to ignore any odd messages "from you."

If you can't sign in

1. On the sign-in screen, tap **Forgot password?**
2. Choose phone or email, and enter the code TikTok sends you.
3. If the hacker changed your phone and email, look for the option to **recover your account** or report a problem, and follow TikTok's steps to prove the account is yours.

TIP

Use a phone you've signed in on before

With 2-step verification on, recovering from a phone you've used before is easier. Keep an old phone around until you're back in.

SCAM ALERT

"Account recovery" services are scams

People who promise to recover your TikTok account for a fee, often found in comments or search results, take your money and sometimes your other accounts. Only use TikTok's own recovery steps.

If you're stuck, call me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll go through it together.

CHAPTER 18

Block, Report and Quietly Unfollow

You never have to put up with someone bothering you on TikTok. Blocking is instant and private.

Block someone

1. Go to their profile.
2. Tap the **Share** arrow or the three dots at the top right.
3. Tap **Block** and confirm. They can't see your videos or message you, and they aren't told.

Report a video, comment or account

1. Press and hold the video or comment (or use the three dots on a profile).
2. Tap **Report**.
3. Choose the reason, such as scam or fraud, harassment, or false information, and submit.

GOOD TO KNOW

Reports are anonymous

The person you report isn't told who reported them.

TIP

Unblocking

Changed your mind? Go to **Settings and privacy**, **Privacy**, **Blocked accounts**, and tap **Unblock**.

Mute instead of block

If a relative posts more than you'd like to see, you don't have to block them. Press and hold one of their videos and choose **Not interested**, or unfollow quietly. They aren't notified.

PART 4

Your Time & Your Family

Daily limits, sleep reminders, Restricted Mode, Family Pairing for children and teens, and phone-level limits.

CHAPTER 19

Setting a Daily Time Limit

TikTok is designed to be hard to put down. "Just one more" can turn into an hour. A daily limit is a gentle nudge that tells you when you've reached the time you chose.

Daily screen time

1. Tap **Profile**, then the **Menu** button.
2. Tap **Settings and privacy**, then **Screen time**.
3. Tap **Daily screen time** and choose a limit, such as 30 or 60 minutes.
4. When you reach it, TikTok reminds you. You can close the app, or enter a passcode to keep going.

Sleep reminders and breaks

- **Sleep reminders** (in Screen time): choose a bedtime. TikTok mutes push notifications after that time.
- **Screen time breaks**: get a reminder to take a break after a set amount of continuous scrolling.
- **Weekly screen time updates**: a summary of how much you used the app.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why it's worth five minutes

Choosing your limit while you're calm makes it much easier to stop later. Many people find that a 30-minute limit leaves plenty of time for the family videos and recipes.

TIP

Turn off notifications

Every buzz pulls you back in. In **Settings and privacy**, **Notifications**, turn off everything except direct messages from friends, or turn them all off.

CHAPTER 20

Restricted Mode

Restricted Mode limits videos that may not be suitable for everyone. It's useful if a grandchild borrows your phone, or if you'd simply like a calmer feed.

1. Go to **Settings and privacy**.
2. Tap **Content preferences** (or Digital Wellbeing in some versions).
3. Tap **Restricted Mode** and turn it on.
4. Create a passcode. Write it down; you'll need it to turn Restricted Mode off.

HEADS UP

It isn't perfect

Restricted Mode relies on automatic filters and can miss things. For children, use Family Pairing (Chapter 21, *Family Pairing for Children and Teens*) and stay nearby.

TIP

Filter words too

Combine Restricted Mode with keyword filters in Content preferences for topics you'd rather not see.

When to use it

- When handing the phone to a grandchild for a few minutes.
- If you watch TikTok in public or at work.
- If your feed keeps showing content you find upsetting.

CHAPTER 21

Family Pairing for Children and Teens

TikTok's minimum age is 13 in the U.S. If a child or grandchild aged 13 to 17 uses TikTok, **Family Pairing** links a parent's account to the teen's, so the parent can manage settings from their own phone.

What a parent can control

Setting	What it does
Daily screen time	Set the teen's limit, and even a different limit for each day of the week.
Screen time dashboard	See how much time the teen spent and how often they opened the app.
Mute notifications	Choose times when the teen gets no notifications, such as school or bedtime.
Content	Turn on Restricted Mode and keyword filters.
Privacy	Decide whether the account is private and who can message or comment.

Setting it up

1. On the parent's phone, open TikTok and go to **Settings and privacy**, then **Family Pairing**.
2. Choose **Parent**. TikTok shows a QR code.
3. On the teen's phone, go to **Settings and privacy**, **Family Pairing**, choose **Teen**, and scan the code.
4. Approve the link on both phones, then choose the settings together.

GOOD TO KNOW

Teen accounts have built-in limits

TikTok sets accounts for users under 18 to a 60-minute daily screen time limit by default, and mutes notifications at night for younger teens. Parents can tighten these with Family Pairing.

HEADS UP

Grandparents: check with the parents first

Family Pairing is meant for a parent or guardian. If you help a grandchild, set things up together with their parents, and respect the family's rules about apps and photos.

CHAPTER 22

Limits on the Phone Itself

TikTok's own limits can be snoozed with a passcode. Your phone's built-in limits are a second, sturdier layer, for yourself or for a child.

On an iPhone: Screen Time

1. Open **Settings**, then **Screen Time**.
2. Tap **App Limits**, then **Add Limit**.
3. Choose **TikTok** (under Social), set a time, and tap **Add**.

On Android: Digital Wellbeing

1. Open **Settings**, then **Digital Wellbeing and parental controls**.
2. Tap your dashboard, find **TikTok**, and set an **app timer**.

TIP

Move the app off the first screen

Putting TikTok in a folder on your second home screen means you open it on purpose, not by habit.

GOOD TO KNOW

For children's phones

Apple's Family Sharing and Google Family Link let parents set app limits on a child's phone from their own. Our guides on Screen Time and on a kid's first phone go step by step.

PART 5

Shopping, Money & Scams

TikTok Shop, getting a refund, LIVE gifts that cost real money, the scams to watch for, and telling real from fake.

CHAPTER 23

TikTok Shop: How It Works

TikTok Shop lets you buy products shown in videos and live streams without leaving the app. You'll see a small shopping bag or orange product tag on some videos, and there may be a **Shop** tab at the bottom of the screen.

Who's selling

Most products are sold by independent sellers, not by TikTok. Creators often earn a commission when you buy something they recommend. That's why some videos gush about a product: they're advertisements.

HEADS UP

Pressure tactics

Countdown timers, "only three left," and live sellers shouting about a deal are designed to make you buy fast. A real bargain will still be a bargain after you've slept on it.

Before you buy

1. Tap the product and read the seller's name, rating and number of reviews.
2. Read the reviews with photos, not just the star rating.
3. Check the return policy and the estimated delivery date.
4. Search the same product at a store you know. TikTok "deals" are sometimes more expensive.
5. Pay only inside TikTok's checkout, never by other means.

GOOD TO KNOW

Health products

Supplements, creams and gadgets that promise to cure pain, reverse aging or replace medicine are common on TikTok Shop. Ask your doctor or pharmacist before buying anything you'd swallow or put on your skin.

CHAPTER 24

Buying Safely and Getting a Refund

Paying through TikTok's own checkout gives you a way to ask for a refund if something goes wrong. Paying any other way gives you nothing.

If an order never came or arrived broken

1. Open **Profile**, then the Shop or **Orders** section (some versions put it under the Menu).
2. Tap the order.
3. Tap **Return/refund** (or Request a refund) and pick the reason, such as **did not receive the package** or item damaged.
4. Add photos if the item is damaged or not as described, and submit.
5. Watch your Inbox for the seller's reply. If the seller doesn't resolve it, you can ask TikTok to step in.

TIP

Act quickly

Refund requests have time windows. Don't wait weeks. Take photos of the package and item as soon as it arrives, especially if it looks wrong.

SCAM ALERT

"Pay me directly and save 20%"

A seller who asks you to pay by Venmo, Zelle, Cash App, gift card or crypto, or to message them on WhatsApp, is very likely a scammer. Paying outside TikTok leaves you with no refund rights at all.

If TikTok won't help

If you paid with a credit card and can't get a refund through TikTok, call the number on the back of your card and ask about disputing the charge.

CHAPTER 25

LIVE Videos, Coins and Gifts

TikTok LIVE is a live broadcast: someone talking, singing, cooking or selling in real time. Viewers can send the creator virtual **gifts**, which are bought with TikTok **coins**, and coins cost real money.

HEADS UP

Gifts add up fast

Tapping a gift is easy and feels small, but a few taps can cost real dollars, and gifts aren't refundable once sent. If you don't want to spend, don't buy coins at all.

Keep a lid on spending

- Don't save a credit card in your phone's app store if others use your phone.
- On an iPhone, Screen Time can require a password for purchases; on Android, Google Play can require authentication for purchases.
- Check your app store purchase history every month.

SCAM ALERT

LIVE hosts asking for help

LIVE broadcasts asking for gifts or donations for medical bills, disasters or a stranded traveler can be staged. Give to charities you know, directly on their own website.

If a child bought coins

Contact Apple or Google, depending on the phone, about the purchase, and turn on purchase approvals so it doesn't happen again.

CHAPTER 26

Scams on TikTok

Scammers go where the people are, and TikTok has a lot of people. These are the patterns to know.

SCAM ALERT

Fake giveaways

"You've won an iPhone! Click the link and pay shipping." Accounts pretending to be big brands run fake contests to collect your card number and personal details. Real prizes never cost you money.

SCAM ALERT

Investment and crypto "coaches"

Videos showing luxury lifestyles, then "DM me to learn how," lead to fake trading sites. Anyone promising guaranteed returns is lying.

SCAM ALERT

Romance and friendship scams

A stranger messages, becomes a close friend over weeks, then has an emergency and needs money. Never send money to someone you've only met online.

SCAM ALERT

Fake shops and off-app payments

Off-TikTok websites selling famous brands at huge discounts, and sellers who want payment by gift card, Zelle or crypto. See Chapter 24, *Buying Safely and Getting a Refund*.

SCAM ALERT

Fake TikTok support

Messages saying your account will be deleted unless you verify it, or "support agents" who ask for a code. TikTok never asks for your password or codes.

If you already sent money or information

1. Stop contacting the scammer. Block and report the account in TikTok.

2. Call your bank or card company right away using the number on your card.
3. Change your TikTok password and any account that uses the same password.
4. Report it to the FTC at **reportfraud.ftc.gov**.
5. Call me at (330) 200-8042 if you'd like help securing your accounts. Our "I Think I've Been Scammed" guide has more.

CHAPTER 27

Real or Fake? AI Videos, Health Tips and News

Some of what you see on TikTok is true, some is opinion, and some is made up, including videos made entirely by artificial intelligence.

AI-generated videos

TikTok requires creators to label AI-generated content that looks real, and adds an "AI-generated" label to some videos automatically. Labels can be missing, though, especially when a video was made elsewhere and reposted. A celebrity or doctor saying something surprising may be a fake made with AI.

Questions to ask

1. Who made this, and do they sell something related?
2. Can I find the same claim from a trusted source, such as a major news outlet, the CDC or my doctor?
3. Is it trying to make me angry or scared? Strong emotions are a warning sign.
4. Does it look slightly off: odd hands, mouths out of sync with words, robotic voice?

STAY SAFE

Health advice belongs with your doctor

Never stop, start or change a medicine because of a video. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about anything you see on TikTok.

TIP

Use "Not interested" generously

If your feed fills up with alarming or questionable videos, press and hold and tap Not interested, or refresh your feed (Chapter 8, *Shaping Your For You Feed*).

PART 6

Posting, Taking a Break & Help

If you decide to post, how to take a break or delete your account, and how to reach me.

CHAPTER 28

If You Decide to Post a Video

You never have to post. But if you'd like to share your garden or a recipe with family, here's the safe way to do it.

1. Tap the **plus (+)** button at the bottom of the screen.
2. Record with the red button, or tap **Upload** to choose a video from your phone.
3. Tap **Next**. Add a short description.
4. Before posting, tap **Who can watch this video** (or Privacy settings) and choose **Friends** or **Only you**.
5. Tap **Post**.

HEADS UP

Look at the background

Before posting, check what's visible: house number, mail on the counter, car license plate, a child's school uniform. Scammers and thieves notice these details.

TIP

Post later, not live

Post vacation videos after you're home, so you aren't announcing that the house is empty.

Deleting a video you posted

1. Go to **Profile** and tap the video.
2. Tap the three dots (or the Share arrow).
3. Tap **Delete** and confirm. You can also change who can see it instead.

GOOD TO KNOW

Deleted by mistake?

A deleted video can't be brought back from TikTok, but the original is usually still in your phone's Photos or Gallery app if you uploaded it from there.

CHAPTER 29

Taking a Break, Deleting Your Account and Your Data

Sometimes the best TikTok setting is "off." You can step away for a while or leave for good.

Just take a break

- Delete the app from your phone. Your account stays, and you can reinstall and sign in later.
- Or set a short daily limit (Chapter 19, *Setting a Daily Time Limit*) and turn off notifications.

Download your data first

1. Go to **Settings and privacy**, then **Account**.
2. Tap **Download your data** and request a file.
3. Wait until it's ready (it can take a few days), then download it.

Delete your account

1. Go to **Settings and privacy**, **Account**, then **Deactivate or delete account**.
2. Choose **Delete account permanently** and follow the steps.
3. For 30 days, signing back in cancels the deletion. After that, the account and its videos are gone.

HEADS UP

Subscriptions and coins

Deleting TikTok doesn't cancel any subscriptions billed through Apple or Google. Cancel those in your phone's app store settings. Unused coins are lost when the account is deleted.

CHAPTER 30

Helping a Parent or Grandparent Use TikTok

If you're the family member setting up TikTok for a parent, a few minutes of setup saves a lot of worry later.

1. Create the account with their own email or phone, and write the password in their password book.
2. Make the account private (Chapter 13, *Making Your Account Private*).
3. Set messages and comments to Friends (Chapter 14, *Who Can Message, Comment and Find You*).
4. Turn on 2-step verification (Chapter 16, *Passwords, 2-Step Verification and Security Checkup*).
5. Set a daily screen time limit they agree with (Chapter 19, *Setting a Daily Time Limit*).
6. Follow family members so the Following feed has something they care about.
7. Talk through the scams in Chapter 26, *Scams on TikTok*, especially "pay outside the app."

TIP

Show them Not interested

Teaching "press and hold, then Not interested" gives them a way to tidy their own feed without calling you.

HEADS UP

Respect their choices

It's their account. Set things up together, explain each choice, and let them decide.

Stay connected

Send them links to videos you think they'd enjoy. It's a lovely way to share a laugh during the week.

CHAPTER 31

When to Call Bill

TikTok is easy to watch and surprisingly fiddly to set up safely. Here's when it's worth giving me a call.

Good reasons to call

- Setting up a private, watch-only account with sensible privacy settings.
- You got hacked, locked out, or forgot your password and recovery isn't working.
- You bought something on TikTok Shop that never came and need help with the refund.
- You think you sent money or information to a scammer.
- Setting up Family Pairing or phone-level limits for a child or grandchild.
- Getting TikTok onto the TV.

This is exactly what my **Device Training** sessions are for: we sit down with your phone and set it up together, at your pace.

SCAM ALERT

Nobody from TikTok will call you

If someone calls or messages claiming to be TikTok and asks for a code, a payment or remote access, hang up or block them. See Chapter 26, *Scams on TikTok*.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call or text **(330) 200-8042**, or book at **billshometech.com/book**. Bill's Home Tech serves **Portage County, Ohio**, with 30+ years of professional experience. If you reach my assistant **Sophie** on the main line, she can answer simple questions and get you on my schedule. My help is $49 remote · $99 in your home. The guides themselves are free.

— Bill

CHAPTER 32

Your TikTok Cheat-Sheet

Everyday moves

I want to…	Do this
Next video / go back	Swipe up / swipe down.
Pause	Tap the middle of the screen.
Fewer videos like this	Press and hold, then Not interested.
Save a recipe	Tap the bookmark; find it in Profile, Favorites.
Send to family	Share arrow, then Copy link or Messages.
Block someone	Their profile, three dots or Share, then Block.

Where the settings are

To find…	Go to
Private account	Profile, Menu, Settings and privacy, Privacy.
Time limit	Settings and privacy, Screen time.
2-step verification	Settings and privacy, Security and permissions.
Restricted Mode	Settings and privacy, Content preferences.
Family Pairing	Settings and privacy, Family Pairing.
Delete account	Settings and privacy, Account, Deactivate or delete account.

Five safety rules

1. Never pay a seller outside TikTok's checkout.
2. Never share a password or verification code.
3. Ignore strangers who message first.
4. Check health and money claims with someone you trust.
5. Keep your profile, comments and videos free of personal details.

Keep this handy

Item	Your details
TikTok username (@)	_____

Item	Your details
Email or phone used to sign up	_____
Daily time limit I chose	_____
Restricted Mode passcode	_____
Family members I follow	_____

FROM BILL

One last word

Enjoy the recipes, the laughs and the grandkids' videos, and keep your guard up about money. If something seems off, call or text me at (330) 200-8042.