Thinkuknow Parents and Carers guide to Musical.ly

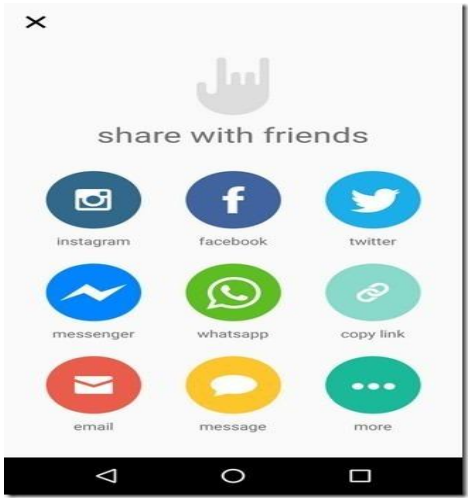
CEOP has seen an increase in the popularity of the app Musical.ly amongst young people. As a result, we have created this guide for parents and carers to help you to understand more about the Musical.ly and it's features.

We endeavour to keep our parents guides as up-to-date as possible, however due to the changing nature of social media, the information and advice in this guide may well date over time. Information is correct as of June 2017.

What is Musical.ly?

Musical.ly is a free social network app popular for viewing and creating short music videos, known as 'Musical.ly's'. Children can select a song from thousands available on the app and record themselves singing, lip-syncing (miming) or dancing along to their chosen song. One of the aims of Musical.ly is to create your own following or fan base. Musical.ly includes 'coins' and virtual gifts that users can give to other users in order to increase their popularity. Videos can be up to one minute long and users are able to edit them using a range of filters. Once recorded, videos can be shared via other social networking apps, such as WhatsApp or Facebook.

Musical.ly's age restrictions within their terms of service are unclear. They state that the service is "not for anyone under the age of 13 but that by using the service, the user affirms that they are 18 years of age or have been authorised to use the service by a parent or guardian".



Why is Musical.ly so popular?

Since its launch in 2014, the popularity of Musical.ly has soared with over 90 million users worldwide.

Musical.ly allows users to be creative and interact with their friends. Young people enjoy sharing their talents, gaining followers and fans and getting their content 'featured' so it can be seen by millions of users. Young people who use Musical.ly like to follow celebrities who also use the app and watch their content. Some celebrities have been known to 'like' or comment on young people's videos and offer to duet with them.

Directl.ly and Live.ly

Direct.ly is a direct messaging function within Musical.ly that allows users to send direct messages to each other. In 2016 Musical.ly launched a linked live streaming function known as Live.ly, which allows users to broadcast their Musical.ly videos in real-time (Live.ly has the same unclear age restrictions as Musical.ly, users need to be at least 13 years old but by using the service they are affirming that they are 18). To access Live.ly, users will sign in to their Musical.ly account.

The default settings on Musical.ly (and therefore Livel.ly) are set to public. This means that anyone can view a user's videos, write comments or send them direct messages. Location settings are enabled by default which mean a child's location could be publicised on the app. There is more information on Privacy settings on Page 4 of this guide.

Should I be concerned about Musical.ly as a parent / carer?

Musical.ly state that they moderate content and will remove content that is inappropriate. Their terms of service prohibit the posting of 'obscene, harassing, vulgar and other offensive content'. However it is not clear how effective their moderation is as content that breaks their community guidelines has remained on the site.

You can read Musical.ly's terms of service here - https://www.musical.ly/en-US/term

The introduction of live streaming to Musical.ly has increased the interaction amongst its users, with the ability to comment, like, interact with anyone on the app in real time.

When using Live.ly, users have the option to leave live comments or ask the 'broadcaster' a question. These interactions may be inappropriate or involve users publicly sharing personal information. There have been media reports of users encouraging 'dares' on Live.ly where a user is asked to complete a dare in order receive the in-app gifts and emojis on the site. These dares may involve young people being asked to change their clothing, take their clothing off, answer sexually explicit questions or perform sexual acts. Young people may also be asked to chat on more private platforms such as Whatsapp or Kik.

As with all live streaming, exchanges take place in real time and there could be a tendency for users to be easily influenced and share something without thinking of the consequences. As always, it is important to talk to your child about the risks of sharing too much information online and that they should never feel pressured to do something online that they don't want to do. Your child should know that they can always come to you for help and support, and that even if something has gone wrong online, they will not be blamed.

Young people may choose to perform to a song on Musical.ly that is rated as 18+. This means they could be exposed to song lyrics of a sexual nature, swearing and offensive or threatening language. Although Musical.ly's community guidelines state that posting explicit videos is prohibited, there is a chance that your child could be exposed to videos containing inappropriate content. Talk to your child about the videos they make and share on Musical.ly. Check that you are happy with the songs they choose. Part of the appeal of Musical.ly is that users imitate their favourite pop stars, but this may mean that they copy behaviours that are unsuitable for their age.

It has also been reported in the press that many fake celebrity accounts exist on Musical.ly, often looking very real and often set up to get large amounts of followers and increased interaction. Speak

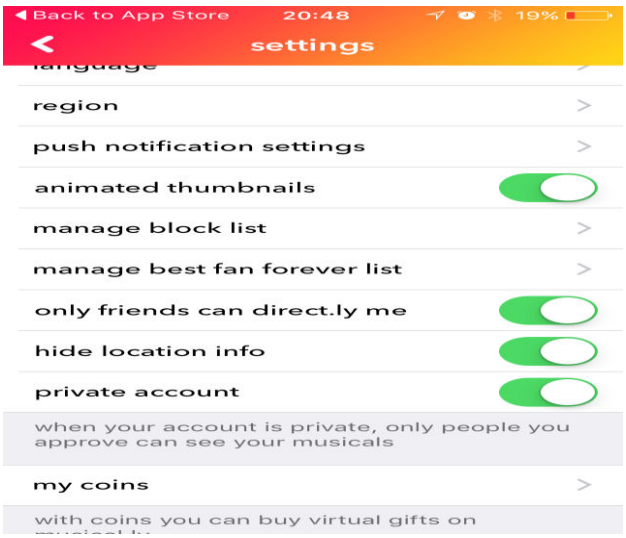
to your child about who they talk to online, and remind them that people online may not be who they say they are.

Although Musical.ly is free, it includes many in app purchases, such as buying coins and virtual gifts to give to other users. These are often linked to a credit or debit card, or alternatively the app store which may be linked to a Google Play or Amazon Prime account. Musical.ly also includes advertising which may be inappropriate for young people, such as apps where users can pay for more followers.

Privacy settings

Ensure that your child's Musical.ly account is set to 'private' so that only confirmed followers, such as their friends or family, can view their videos and add comments. Location settings can also be hidden so that a user's location is not shown when they post on Musical.ly.

You can change these settings by clicking on the three dots icon on the right hand side of the home screen and turning privacy settings to 'on', as well as the option to 'hide location info' (as shown in the image below). You can also select 'Only friends can direct.ly me'. This can prevent people your child doesn't know from having direct contact with them.

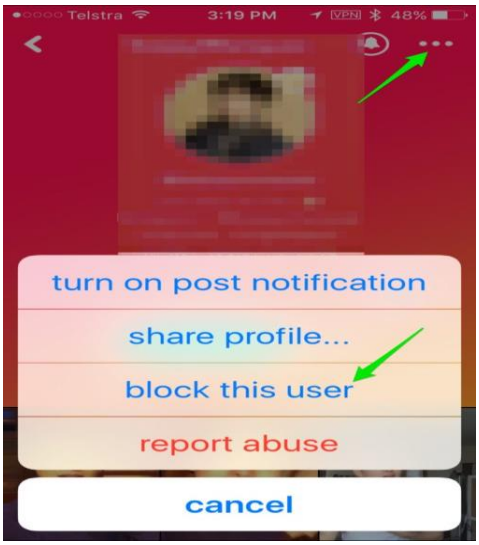


In addition, users can create privacy setting for 'live comments' within Live.ly, and select to only receive comments from people who they follow rather than anyone in the app. Users can also select 'close friends' will only be notified when they are live streaming.

Reporting and blocking a user on Musical.ly

Musical.ly has a 'report abuse' function, however they state in their terms of service that this is only offered "as a courtesy, and the Company has no obligations to remove or take any other action with respect to objectionable content on the service."

To use this, click on the three dots icon in the top right corner of the profile of the person they want to report and click on 'report abuse'. Within this section, you can also block another user's profile which will prevent them from making contact with your child (as shown in the picture below).



There is currently no option to delete your Musical.ly account, however Musical.ly have recently stated that they are in the process of adding this feature.

If you have any concerns about grooming, sexual abuse or exploitation on Musical.ly or on any other app or site, you can report to CEOP at www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre.

Further advice and support for parents and carers is available at www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents.