DIGITAL TIME BOMBS CAN ALSO GO "TIKTOK, TIKTOK"....

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As we rocket ahead further and further into the 21st century, it goes without saying that all of the many dire warnings of children having access to the internet are still in play, but new challenges have arisen due to the necessity of *keeping* our kids digitally involved. ZOOM bombing, family passwords, unauthorized adults ghosting classrooms…. The list goes on. Surprisingly, common internet safety practice, which has been discussed ad nauseum the last 20 years or more, effectively inhibits most of these dangers. But as we are online so much recently, precaution fatigue settles in. Children and adults alike start to get a little sloppy with safety and the next thing you know, someone's watching your kids through their own web cam!

Protect yourselves with proper password management. Keep all devices in common areas. Review your children's online activity. Everyone knows the basics, but we particularly want to address some of the concerns about one of the most popular apps on the internet in 2020.

TikTok is a Chinese video-sharing, social networking service launched in 2012. It has become exceedingly popular, especially among minors who put considerable effort into posting videos fishing for "likes". As with all social network platforms, the potential for abuse is ever-present, but unlike the better-known apps, TikTok is notorious for its lack of safety and privacy protocols. Although a privacy function has been recently added, an extra, very large dose of precaution is necessary for safety for one very chilling reason. Since the application's target groups are teens and youngsters, not to mention that the application makes it simple to "like" and SAVE other users' videos (The person saving the video does not even need to be "following" the poster!), TikTok has become an absolute magnet for child predators, whether the programmers meant for it to be or not. [3]

As is mentioned in both *Protecting God's Children* and *Safer Spaces*, predators actively seek environments where they can gain access to potential marks, and the more anonymous the location, the better. TikTok is, sadly, a near-perfect hunting ground.

However, that doesn't mean we are helpless. We had to erect barriers in other applications, and the same practices work on TikTok. The added level of difficulty comes from the very user-friendly interface that allows kids far more freedom than other networks. As such, it really comes down to applying sincere and regular diligence when monitoring our kids' activity.

So here are some general guidelines to raise the safety margins when using TikTok:

1) OF COURSE, THE EASY SOLUTION IS TO UNINSTALL THE APP, BUT AS LOTS OF ADULTS LOVE IT, THAT MAY NOT BE PRACTICAL. SO WHAT TO DO?
2) TIKTOK ADVISES PARENTS TO SET THEIR CHILDREN'S ACCOUNT TO "PRIVATE."
   ◊ WHAT IS NOT CLEARLY STATED IS THAT EVEN PRIVATE ACCOUNTS ALLOW ACCESS TO THE BIO OF ANY USER.
3) SO BASICALLY, TIKTOK PASSED THE BUCK TO THE PARENTS. IT'S UP TO US TO MAKE SURE NO INFORMATION IS SHOWN IN A BIO THAT CAN BE USED TO START THE GROOMING PROCESS.
4) IT'S ALSO UP TO US TO REVIEW OUR KIDS MESSAGES REGULARLY.
   ◊ THERE IS NO SIMPLE WAY TO DO THIS, YOU HAVE TO OPEN YOUR CHILD'S ACCOUNT AND DO IT YOURSELF.
5) THIS ONE CAN SNEAK UP ON ANYBODY, BUT YOU HAVE TO MAKE SURE SOME RANDOM UPDATE OR KEYSTROKE DOESN'T CHANGE THE SETTINGS BACK TO THE DEFAULT.

One last thing, children (not to mention their friends) can be crafty when they really want something. And TikTok is popular enough for kids to want it BAD! Although TikTok requires a minimum age of thirteen to install, the average age of TikTok users is … wait for it … thirteen! That means there must be a substantial number of children below that age with access.

6) HENCE, THE FIRST BASIC PRACTICE TAUGHT IN EVERY SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM IN THE COUNTRY IS "BE AWARE!"
THAT GOES DOUBLE, IF NOT TRIPLE, FOR TIKTOK!