

# What parents should know about musical.ly and live.ly apps

## What is musical.ly?

Musical.ly, the Shanghai-based social-media network, is super popular with teens and preteens. Reports on app's number of users vary from 60 million to 120 million. Regardless, millions of kids are using it to create 15-second videos of themselves singing, lip-syncing and dancing. Users, or "Musers" as fans of the app call themselves, can follow accounts to keep tabs on their favorite performers. Mega-popular celebrities, including Ariana Grande and Selena Gomez, use the app.

Musers can like posts, comment, ask questions and invite people to start duets. They can also share their musical.ly content on other social media platforms, and like most of those platforms, musical.ly is hashtag centric.

Essentially, musical.ly allows its users to express themselves in a really creative way. But a lot of the app's users are young. In fact, one of its biggest stars, Jacob Sartorius, is only 13. He has more than 10 million fans on the app.

To download and sign up for the app, users have to be at least 13. But let's be real, it's not hard to lie about your age on the Internet.

This is a very popular video karaoke app where we found minors sharing adult content with strangers. It is also a platform where children are often exposed to sexting and bullying. Users can make videos of themselves lip-syncing to songs and post them publicly.

When their video is posted, anyone can "like", comment, and direct message your child when their privacy settings are set to "public". There are numerous safety issues with this app. First of all, the app allows users to search for users (often pre-teen and early teen girls) nearby. You can watch them dance around in their bedrooms and then "follow them" and get notifications when they come online. We've seen an enormous amount of direct posts from young teens interested in and willing to exchange naked photos/videos as well as adults explicitly saying that they want to do the same and that "age doesn't matter." We've seen such adults following the accounts of young girls on Musical.ly. There have also been a lot of bullying incidents on this app. It's very easy to find adult content on the app, starting with profile photos of genitals. For these reasons, no child should use this app.

## **TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN**

Because Musical.ly is so popular, it may be difficult for your child to understand why they are not allowed to have it. Try talking to your child about why they want this app. If your child enjoys making karaoke videos, try to find an alternative method of making videos and share them with friends/family only. If your child wants to use this app to meet strangers, talk to him/her about why this is a safety risk. If your child has been using this app frequently, ask to see his/her activity. Based on their followers and the nature of the conversations they are having, you may want to involve law enforcement to protect your child.

### **What is live.ly?**

Live.ly, the live-streaming video app, is relatively new. It was released in May and racked up more than 2 million downloads in a month. As we've all seen, there's a soaring popularity for live-streaming social media with Twitter's Periscope and Facebook Live.

While musical.ly focuses on music, live.ly gives musers free reign on what they want to share with fans and allows musers to communicate with fans in real time. Musers can pick from a variety of categories, including makeup, life, sing, dance, etc., to tag in their live videos.

### **BOTTOM LINE**

Live.ly is a live video streaming product that allows children to broadcast their "channel" to other users. There is no option to make your profile private, so any broadcast can be seen by any user. This app is made by the developers of Musical.ly and users can sign in with their Musical.ly username, linking the profiles on both apps. If your child has both apps and has shared any of their private info or location on Musical.ly, any Live.ly user can see it and send them a private message without having to be a friend or a follower.

As with any live streaming product, there are concerns over what your child is sharing and what they are seeing from other users. We have seen cases of children willing to share adult content with other users. Anyone can comment on their broadcast, inviting them into a private conversation on another app that creates less evidence. Bullying is also an issue, as we often see children making mean comments about other children on live streams. This product has high risks for bullying, sharing adult content, meeting strangers, and sexting. No minor should use this app.

## **TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN**

This app, especially when linked with a Musical.ly profile, can be very dangerous for your child to use. Your child may have difficulty understanding why they are not allowed to use this app. Try asking your child what they enjoy about it. If they enjoy the live video chat element, there are many safer apps they can use to video chat with known friends and family only that are easier to monitor.

### **How to keep safe if your child uses these apps ?**

Probably. But the hard part is up to you.

You'll want to make sure your child disables location services for the app in his or her phone settings. Then in the app, you'll want to turn on three tabs in the app settings:

1. Only friends can direct.ly me
2. Hide location info
3. Private account

To get started on live.ly, users sign in with their music.ly account, so the setting preferences will stay the same for the live-streaming app.

For live.ly, stress the importance of being smart while using the app. Live streaming is exactly what it sounds like; your kid will be live on the Internet, without the ability to edit the video before others see it. Location of the live-stream is also crucial as it can give away information about where your kid lives and spends time.

Here's one more thing to keep in mind.

Musical.ly is obviously a music-based app, but not all the songs are kid friendly. There are dozens of song categories to pick from and what seems like millions of songs, so your kid probably isn't going to be singing Disney songs.