

Dangerous stunts just a

REBECCA WHITFIELD-BAKER

THERE'S great fun to be had on TikTok – from lip-synching battles to viral dance challenges, heartwarming feel-good trends and cooking hacks.

That appeal – along with a sophisticated algorithm that serves up particular content to certain demographics – is why the social media platform has amassed 1.1 billion users around the globe.

But while much of the content is harmless, the free social media app is also home to dangerous trends and, sadly, it's our kids who are most vulnerable.

Last week, an Adelaide mother told how her son ended up in hospital with a concussion after attempting the "thumb-blowing" challenge, reportedly popular with school kids in which they film themselves hyperventilating and passing out.

It's just one of a host of weird, wacky and strange social-media stunts that have captivated a young audience in recent years.

Many are innocuous, such as the "mannequin challenge", which involves staying as still as possible to mimic a mannequin.

But some are potentially problematic, if not downright dangerous.

Kids – and adults – have dared each other to pour salt in their hands and hold ice until it burns, cover their faces in hot wax, yank their hair

How parents can ease the risks

PARENTS need to take a proactive approach to understanding the risks of online spaces before kids jump into them, psychologist and cyberpsychology consultant Jocelyn Brewer says.

"Think of it in terms of swimming lessons – we're in the pool with kids, we pop floaties on their arms, we support them with lots of lessons before they head into the surf," she says. "We must consider

the online space like a rip and ensure kids (and parents) know how to spot the dangers and navigate safely – we don't just ban swimming or build a higher pool fence."

Ms Brewer says there are tools – even found on TikTok and other social media platforms – that allow higher levels of control and safety. For details, visit esafety.gov.au/parents/skills-advice/taming-technology

quickly to make a "popping" sound from their scalp and drink an excessive amount of the antihistamine Benadryl. Other challenges involve fire, alcohol and flammable liquids.

US child and adolescent family therapist Darby Fox says the issue for kids is they "don't have a real connection with the reality".

"They can't make a connection or preview what may be the possible risk ... we know their developing brain has more excitability to it than the ones that inhibit or say stop," she says.

She says while it is impossible to stay ahead of the latest "crazy" challenge, it is important to monitor the type of content kids are watching.

"A lot of parents think TikTok is harmless and just dancing videos, they have no idea about these challenges ...

parents need to have some awareness (and also) to educate themselves."

Co-founder of Australia's Cyber Safety Project, Trent Ray, agrees parents need to engage openly with their kids, adding social media can glorify and celebrate risk-taking.

"TikTok challenges can emerge rapidly so for parents it's important to be chatting regularly with their teenagers to gain insights into what they are exposed to online," he said.

"We also recommend bringing up popular trends such as 'the hold challenge' and asking your children to critically evaluate the risks or harms associated with participating."

Mr Ray says he has heard reports from schools that young people are "falling into harm's way".

Kids should be 13 to access TikTok but younger children are finding ways around that.

So, what is it about the video-sharing app that appeals so much to young people?

Respected psychologist and cyberpsychology consultant Jocelyn Brewer says TikTok creates a "sense of belonging and connection".

"When you are involved with and know about the latest trends and memes, you have an opportunity to create/recreate your own take and interpretation ... and build these connections and social capital, not just within your friendship group or even school but a much larger audience," she said.

"This can lead to kids making risky and risqué choices in online spaces in the hope of increasing their connection. We watch cooking shows, kids watch dancing videos (but) the issue ends up being the extreme and violent content that kids can be exposed to."

Ms Brewer says there are positive aspects to TikTok in terms of social learning and connection but time spent on it needed to be balanced with doing other things.

Mt Barker schoolteacher and mum-of-three Renee Bell says daily sports commitments keep her kids active and off their screens. "At night, phones are handed in and I'll do random checks (of their phones) ... my kids also have to be friends with me on social media," she says.

SA Health and the Education Department did not respond to requests for statistics on injuries via TikTok.



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swipe away for kids

More in hospital

THE number of people in hospital with Covid-19 has risen, despite a drop in new cases.

SA Health announced on Saturday that 147 people were in hospital, up from 136 the day before.

The number in intensive care rose from five to seven. Three were on ventilators.

The number of new cases announced on Saturday was 3724, down from 4274 on Friday.

The proportion of eligible South Australians who have had a Covid-19 vaccine booster shot is now 69.6 per cent.

Police find 4000 pills

TWO men have been arrested after a joint operation between SA Police and Australian Border Force intercepted more than 2kg of ecstasy tablets at an Australia Post outlet.

A Prospect man, 28, and a Flagstaff Hill man, 34, were arrested about noon on Friday when they allegedly tried to collect 4000 pills in a package.

Both men were charged with attempted trafficking a large commercial quantity of a controlled drug. They were refused bail and will appear in the Christies Beach Magistrates Court on Monday.



Mount Barker United Netball Club players Eleanor, Maddie, Trinity and Airlee have no issue setting their phones aside to play sport. Picture: Brenton Edwards

TikTok's riskiest challenges

DEVIOUS LICKS: Students post videos of themselves stealing or vandalising school property, from soap dispensers and exit signs to fire extinguishers - amounting to thousands of dollars worth of damage. The "slap-a-teacher challenge" reportedly evolved from this.

SKULL-BREAKER: The legs of a person in mid-jump are swiftly kicked out from beneath them, causing them to land flat on their backs and resulting in injuries from broken bones to concussions and even more serious head injuries.

BASKETBALL BEER: This requires someone to hold a basketball in their hands and place a beer bottle or can on top. The person bounces the basketball then tries to catch the flying bottle and skol it.

SALT: Teens pour salt directly into their mouths and down their throats.

TIDE POD: Involves biting into packets of liquid laundry detergent.

MILK CRATE: Participants climb a tower of empty milk crates arranged like a staircase. TikTok has banned this challenge.

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