Keep your child safe on Instagram

What's the problem?

- There have been a number of media stories about bullying on Instagram, and children seeing harmful images and advice about weight loss, self-harm and suicide

- Children can feel pressurised to look a certain way – for example, feeling like they should look like other users who share weight-loss content

- Leaked research from owner Facebook (now Meta) suggests Instagram can increase the rate of anxiety and depression in teenagers, and make body image issues worse for teenage girls especially

- If your child has a public account, they can share their 'reels' (a feature where users share short videos with effects and music) on Instagram's 'Explore' page, meaning strangers could watch and comment

- It can be used for online 'grooming' – gangs use it to recruit children, and strangers can use it to contact your child and ask them for naked pictures, or to send photos to your child

The **minimum age** to have an account is **13**, but it's easy to pretend to be older to sign up.

7 ways to help your child use Instagram safely

1. Set their profile to 'private' to limit what strangers can see

New Instagram accounts created by children under 16 will automatically be set to 'private' (from July 2021), but existing accounts will have been set to 'public' by default. Encourage your child to keep their profile 'private' so that only people who they approve will be able to 'follow' them and see content they share, including 'stories' and 'reels'. Anyone can send them a photo or video directly, though.

To set an account to 'private', go to 'Settings' (tap the person icon in the bottom-right of the app home screen, then tap the 3 lines in the top-right and choose 'Settings'), then go to 'Privacy' and turn on 'Private account'.

Even with a private account, any user can still request to send them a photo or video directly.

Tell your child to only approve 'Follow requests' or view 'Message requests' from people they know and trust in real life.

2. Restrict harmful comments and interactions on your child's posts

Open 'Settings', go to 'Privacy', and then 'Comments'. Here, your child can:

- Block specific people from interacting with their posts (under 'Block comments from')

Also in 'Privacy', under 'Hidden words', you/your child can:

- Automatically hide comments that might be offensive (under 'Hide Comments')
- Hide other comments and messages they don't want to see by creating a custom list of words, phrases and emojis (under 'Manage list')

3. Make sure your child knows about restricting, blocking and reporting

Restricting is a feature designed to protect children against bullying. If they restrict someone, that user won't be able to see when your child is online or if they've read their messages, other people won't see their comments on your child's posts, and your child won't be notified about comments or messages from them. Your child can choose to view the user's comments, and approve or delete them.

To **restrict** someone:

- Swipe to the left (iPhone) or tap and hold (Android) on a comment they've left on your child's post, tap the exclamation mark, and then 'Restrict'; or
- Go to the user's profile, tap the 3 dots in the top-right, then choose 'Restrict'

Young people are often reluctant to block others, so reassure your child that **blocking and reporting is anonymous**.

- To **block** an account, tap the 3 dots at the top-right of the user's profile, then choose 'Block'
- To **report a photo in a feed**, tap the 3 dots icon at the top of the post, then tap 'Report'
- To **report a comment**, swipe left over the comment (iPhone), or tap and hold on the comment (Android). Tap the exclamation mark, tap 'Report this comment', choose whether it's spam or inappropriate, and then select a reason why
- To **report an abusive photo, video or message that your child has received directly**, open the conversation, tap and hold the abusive message, then tap 'Report'. Choose a reason for reporting the message, then tap 'Submit report'

- To **report a profile**, tap the 3 dots in the top-right of the user's profile, then tap 'Report'. Follow the on-screen instructions and choose a reason for reporting the profile

4. Remind your child to be careful about what they share and with who

It's easy for others to screenshot messages or images and share them outside of the original poster's control. So remind your child to think carefully about what they share. Before they share anything, tell your child to ask themselves: "would I be happy for other people to see this?"

In particular, make sure your child knows that taking, sharing or viewing naked or sexually-explicit pictures of themselves or another child (anyone under 18) is illegal. They should ignore any pressure from others to share nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves.

5. Consider setting up supervision

Instagram now allows parents to supervise their children from their own account. You can set this up by going to 'Settings' on your or your child's account, then selecting 'Supervision' > 'Create invitation'.

> You and your child must both consent to using supervision before you can access any of the features.

Once you've enabled supervision, you can:

- See who your child follows, and who follows them
- Monitor how much time your child is spending on Instagram
- Set time limits for your child's Instagram use (see section 6 below)
- Receive notifications if your child reports a post or an account

Supervision features require the latest version of the Instagram app for iPhone and Android.

6. Think about setting a daily limit on use

Agree a time limit together. Then tap the person icon in the bottom-right of the app home screen, before choosing the 3 lines in the top-right of the screen. Tap 'Your activity', then select 'Time spent', then 'Set daily time limit'.

Alternatively, if you have supervision set up (see section 5 above), you can select your child's account from the 'Supervision' area and select 'Manage time limits' to:

- Set a daily time limit (choose 'Daily time limit'). Once this time limit has been reached, your child will not be able to use Instagram until the following day

- Schedule breaks (choose 'Scheduled breaks'). You can select specific days and times for a scheduled break, where your child will not be able to access Instagram on any device

7. Tell the school about any bullying or grooming concerns you have

It isn't always easy to spot signs of cyberbullying- it can happen all the time which makes it different from other forms of bullying.

Be alert to the following signs:

- Changes in your child's behaviour

- Your child is upset especially after using the internet

- They are unwilling to talk about their online activities

- You notice many new phone numbers, texts or e-mail addresses show up on their device

- Your child doesn't want to go to school/avoids meeting friends

- They avoid formerly enjoyable social situations

- Your child has difficulty sleeping and low self-esteem

Signs children may be being targeted by a gang, or groomed for other reasons, can include: having new and unexplained possessions, changes in friendship groups, behaviour and mood, and unexplained injuries

Sources

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