PARENT FACTSHEET

Child safety on Instagram

Instagram is an app for sharing pictures and videos. The **minimum age** to have an account is **13**, but it's easy to pretend to be older to sign up.

What's the problem?

- There's a 'high' risk of seeing content of a sexual nature, and of bullying
- Children can be exposed to harmful images and advice about weight loss, self-harm and suicide
- Children may feel pressure to look a certain way – for example, from feeling like they should look like other users who share weight-loss content, and from getting praise for losing weight
- There's a risk of 'grooming' – where an adult builds a relationship with a child to manipulate, exploit and abuse them. Gangs also use apps as a way to recruit children

5 steps to help your child use Instagram safely

1. Set profile to 'private'

Instagram accounts are viewable by anyone, by default. Change this to 'private' so that only people who your child approves will be able to 'follow' them and see content they share.

To do this:

- Go to 'Settings' (tap the person icon in the top-right of the app home screen, then tap the 3 lines in the top-right and choose 'Settings')
- Then go to Privacy > Account Privacy, and turn on 'Private Account'

Encourage your child to only 'approve' people they know and trust in real life, as anyone could pretend to be a child online.

2. Restrict comments and interactions on posts

By doing this, your child can reduce the likelihood of seeing something upsetting on the app.

Open 'Settings', go to 'Privacy', and then (iPhone) 'Comment controls' or (Android) 'Comments'. Here, your child can:

- Choose who to allow comments from (under 'Allow comments from')
- Block specific people from interacting with their posts (under 'Block comments from')
- Automatically hide comments that might be offensive (under 'Hide offensive comments') – also known as the 'anti-bullying filter'
- Choose words and emojis they never want to see on their posts (under 'Manual filter')

3. Make sure your child knows about reporting and blocking

Encourage your child to block users who make them uncomfortable, and to report content they find distressing. Instagram's community guidelines don't allow bullying behaviour or content related to self-harm, suicide, eating disorders or nudity.

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Safeguarding Training Centre from The Key

Reassure your child that **blocking and reporting is anonymous.**

- To **block** an account, tap the 3 dots at the top-right of the person's profile (to get there, tap their username at the top of a post), 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**, tap the speech bubble below the comment, then (iPhone) swipe to the left, or (Android) tap and hold on the comment. Tap the exclamation mark, choose whether it's spam or a scam, or abusive content, and then select a reason why
- To **report an abusive photo, video or message that they've received directly**, open the conversation, tap and hold the abusive message, then tap 'Report'. Choose a reason for reporting the message, then tap 'Report' again
- To **report a profile** for abuse, spam or breaking the rules, 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 them to be careful about what they share

It's easy to screenshot messages or images and share them with others. So, encourage your child to think carefully about what they share and who with. Before they share anything, tell them to ask: "would I be happy for other people to see this?"

In particular, make sure your child knows **not to take, share or view naked or sexually explicit pictures of themselves or another child, either voluntarily or if asked to by someone else**.

This is known as 'sexting' and is illegal, even when the person doing it is a child. It can also be distressing for a child to be a victim of sexting, or to see an inappropriate image that someone else has shared.

5. Consider setting a daily limit on use

You may have seen news stories about children becoming obsessed with Instagram. Setting a limit for how much time your child spends on the app may help to reduce the risk of this.

Agree a suitable amount of time together. Then:

- Go to 'Settings' > 'Your activity' and choose 'Set daily reminder'. Choose a time limit

Your child will then get a reminder once they've reached the limit they've set for themselves.

What can I do if I'm worried my child may be being bullied or groomed?

- Encourage your child to talk to you if someone says something upsetting or hurtful to them
- Signs they may be being bullied include:
  - Being afraid or reluctant to go to school
  - Feeling nervous
  - Losing confidence or becoming distressed and withdrawn
  - Losing sleep

  Be alert to these signs, and **tell our school about any bullying that your child experiences**.

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- Signs they may be being targeted by a gang or groomed for other reasons include:
  - Having new, unexplained possessions
  - Changes in friendship groups
  - Changes in behaviour and mood
  - Unexplained injuries

  Tell our school immediately if you have any concerns that your child is being targeted.

Where else can I go for support?

- Contact the NSPCC for advice – call 0808 800 5000 or email help@nspcc.org.uk
- If you're concerned about **eating disorders**, read more at https://bit.ly/2XKudpp (Beat eating disorders) and https://bit.ly/33Bv2Ev (Young Minds)
- If you're worried about **self-harm**, read more at https://bit.ly/211tWtK (NSPCC)
- You can read more about **depression** at https://bit.ly/2KQwJoS (Young Minds)
- Read 'A Parent's Guide to Instagram': https://help.instagram.com/154475974694511/

Sources used for this factsheet

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