PARENT/CARER FACTSHEET

Keep your child safe on Instagram

What's the problem?

- There have been many media stories about bullying on Instagram, and about children seeing harmful content about weight loss, self-harm and suicide
- Children can feel pressurised to look a certain way – they might feel like they should look like other users who share weight-loss content
- Primary-aged children are coming across violent material on social networking apps like Instagram, according to research from Ofcom
- Instagram is 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
- News stories have highlighted how it's also used for 'sextortion', often targeted at children – the child is tricked into sharing an intimate image, which the abuser then threatens to share if the child doesn't pay or perform some other favour

The **minimum age** to have an account is **13**. Instagram has added features to make it harder to lie about your age, but it's still possible.

7 ways to help your child use Instagram safely

1. Check that your child is on a 'teen' account

This new feature is still being rolled out, so your child may not yet have a 'teen' account.

When they do:

- Children under 16 will automatically be switched to a 'private' account (more on these below)
- Children under 18:
  - Won't be able to receive messages from, or be 'tagged' or 'mentioned' by, anyone they don't 'follow'
  - Will see less 'sensitive content' (though this feature might not always work, according to news reports)

If your child is under 16 and wants to change their 'teen' safety settings, they'll need to add you to their account as a parent or guardian, and you'll be able to decide which features to change.

Older children can change these settings themselves, unless their account is supervised by a parent or guardian (read more about supervision in number 6 below).

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

- 'Teen' accounts and any Instagram account created by a child under 16 since July 2021 will automatically be set to 'private', but older 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 your child a message directly, though (unless they have a 'teen' account). Tell them to only approve 'Follow requests' or view 'Message requests' from people they know and trust in real life.
- To set an account to 'private' on an iPhone follow the instructions from the Instagram Help Centre here
- To set an account to 'private' on an Android device follow the instructions from the Instagram Help Centre here

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

Open 'Settings', scroll down to 'How others can interact with you', and then 'Comments'. Here, your child can:

- Decide who can comment on their 'Stories' using the instructions here

You can also:

- Automatically hide comments that might be offensive and offensive words or phrases, as well as custom words, phrases or emojis by following the instructions here for iPhone and here for Android

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

Restricting is a feature designed to protect children against bullying.

If your child restricts 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 the restricted person's 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:

- Follow the instructions here for Android or
- Follow the instructions here for iPhone

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

- To **block** an account follow the instructions here for iPhone and here for Android
- To **report a comment** follow the instructions here for iPhone or here for Android
- To **report a post** or to **report a profile**, follow the instructions here for iPhone or here for Android
- To **report an abusive photo, video or message your child has received directly**, follow the instructions here for iPhone or follow the instructions here for Android

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

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.

6. Consider setting up supervision

Instagram allows parents or carers to supervise their child from their own account. You can set this up by going to 'Settings' on your or your child's account, then selecting 'Family Centre'.

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
- Receive notifications if your child reports a post or an account

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

It isn't always easy to spot signs of cyberbullying. 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 that many new phone numbers, texts or e-mail addresses show up on their device
- Your child doesn't want to go to school or meet up with their 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/or mood
- Unexplained injuries

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Sources

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