

# THE PARENT'S GUIDE TO INSTAGRAM

Instagram is a social media app used by more than one billion people around the world to share photos, videos and messages.

Whether it's through Stories, Feed, Live, IGTV (an app from Instagram that lets users share longer videos) or Direct, teens use Instagram to celebrate big milestones, share everyday moments, keep in touch with friends and family, build communities of support and meet others who share their passions and interests. It runs on the Apple iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch as well as Android phones and tablets.

Instagram lets you follow people and be followed by them, but unlike Facebook it's not necessarily a two-way street. You can follow someone even if they don't follow you and vice versa. Users with a private account can control who can follow them. Unless you change the default to private, anyone can see what you post.



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## POSTING ON INSTAGRAM

Posting on Instagram is easy: You take a picture or up to 60 seconds of video and have the option to customize it with filters and other creative tools. Then you hit Next to add a caption and location and tag people in the picture and choose how you want to share - just to your Instagram followers or outside the app, via email, Facebook, Twitter or Tumblr. You can also use Instagram to "broadcast" a live video. (More on that later.)

There are four ways to share on Instagram: privately, publicly, directly and via Instagram Stories. With Instagram Direct, you have the option to share a particular photo privately to a group of people (15 max), whether or not you follow them or they follow you. You can also share via Instagram Stories where your post or live video can be seen by your followers for up

to 24 hours. As with all digital media, even a disappearing Story, video or photo can be captured by other users, so never assume that what you post will necessarily be irretrievable after 24 hours.

If your kids are using Instagram, the best way for you to learn about how it works is to ask them. Kids are often glad to teach their parents about their favorite tech tools and asking them about Instagram is not only a great way to learn about the app itself but also about how your children interact with their friends on social media. That's very individual, which is why we suggest you ask them about it, but if you want a little general information about using and staying safe in Instagram, here goes:

## RESPONSIBLE SHARING

**You control your privacy.** By default, photos and videos you share in Instagram can be seen by anyone (unless you share them directly) but you can easily make your account private, so you get to approve anyone who wants to follow you. In most cases, we recommend that teens make their account private, but parents of older teens might consider making an exception in some cases, as we discuss later in the guide.

To make the account private, tap the profile button (an icon of a person on the bottom right and then the options button in iOS) or the 3 vertical dots in Android). Scroll down to Account Privacy and Private Account and move the slider to the right. The slider will turn blue once the account is private.

# TOP 5 QUESTIONS

## 1. Why do teens love Instagram?

Because they love consuming and creating media, sharing it and socializing, and Instagram makes all that doable in a simple, eye-catching way. Teens also like the ability to create “stories” that disappear after 24 hours.

## 2. Does Instagram have a minimum age?

Yes, it's 13, in compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. But Instagram doesn't ask users to specify their age, and, despite the rules, there are many younger children who use the service, often with their parents' permission. Instagram will delete underage accounts if they're notified and can't verify that the user is over 13.

## 3. What are the risks in using Instagram?

Though there's nothing inherently dangerous about Instagram, the main things parents worry about are typical of all social media: mean behavior among peers, inappropriate photos or videos that can hurt a teen's reputation or attract the wrong kind of attention, overuse, and of course, privacy. Parents are also concerned that people their kids don't know can reach out to them directly. Kids can learn to reduce the likelihood of these risks, which is why we wrote this guide.

## 4. Are there tools to help limit how much time your kids spend on Instagram?

Instagram now offers tools to help users of any age better manage the time they spend using the app. That includes an activity dashboard, a daily reminder and enhanced ways to limit notifications. As we explain later in the guide, you can access these tools from Instagram's settings menu.

## 5. Should my teen's profile be private?

We recommend teens have a private account so that only followers they approve can see their posts in the Photos tab of Search & Explore or on hashtag or location pages. (Accounts are public by default.) A more public presence may be appropriate for some older teens, such as those who are advocating for a cause, raising money for charity or participating in discussions about sports, issues or hobbies. If you think your older teen might benefit from a public account, be sure to speak with them about how to avoid posting anything that could jeopardize their safety, personal privacy or reputation. It's important to note that Instagram's privacy settings don't follow if the posts are shared to Facebook, Twitter or Tumblr. Instead, the privacy settings for those services will apply.

If your teen already has a public account, they can switch to private at any time; they can also go from private to public. They can remove followers, choose who can comment and more. Your teen can also turn off “Show Activity Status” so friends can't see when they're online.

*Instagram Direct* is automatically private. Anyone, including people you don't follow, can send you an image or video that only you and up to 32 other people can see or comment on. If you follow that person, the message will appear in your inbox. If you don't follow the person, it'll arrive as a request in your inbox. To decline or allow the message, swipe left on the message and tap Decline or Allow.

*Instagram Stories* aren't necessarily private, but they do disappear after 24 hours from public view unless you add Never post anything that is inappropriate, harmful or can

get you into trouble, but if you just want to post something silly that won't be part of your “permanent record,” Stories might be your best option.

**Privacy can't be perfect.** Even if your posts are private, your profile is public (anyone can see your profile photo, username and bio). You can add up to 10 lines of text about yourself, so parents and kids may want to talk about what's appropriate to say or link to on their bio screens.

**Respect other people's privacy.** If someone else is in a photo you post, make sure that person's OK with your sharing or tagging them in it.

**Your posts have impact.** Think about how media you post affects others. Sometimes it's the friends who aren't in the photo or video who can be hurt, because they feel excluded.

**Think about your location-sharing.** In most cases, your child should avoid posting their exact location when they upload a photo or video. Advise them not to add locations to their posts or use hashtags that reveal their location. To prevent Instagram from capturing your location on the iPhone, go to the phone's settings and tap Instagram. Tap Location and select Never. With recent versions of Android, go to the phone's settings, tap Apps and notifications, click on Instagram, select permissions and uncheck Location (older versions of Android may be different). Turning off location in Instagram does not hide your location when using other apps.

**Sharing beyond Instagram.** By default, you're sharing your media only on Instagram, but you have the option to share more widely by clicking on "Email," "Facebook," "Twitter," etc., then Share. If you do share elsewhere, be aware of the privacy settings on that service. For example, unless your Twitter profile is private, Twitter shares to everyone by default, including media shared from your Instagram account, regardless of your Instagram privacy settings. Facebook, by default, will share media posted from Instagram to friends only. But after you share on Facebook, you can change that setting in Facebook by selecting it and changing the audience.

## HOW YOU REPRESENT YOURSELF

**Your media represent you.** That probably seems obvious but remember it can keep on representing you well into the future, because content posted online or with phones is sometimes impossible to take back. So it's a good idea to think about how what you post now will reflect on you later. If you think it might hurt a job prospect, damage a relationship or upset your grandmother, consider not sharing it. If you later decide it's not appropriate, delete it. A lot of teens spend time reviewing their posts when it's time to apply for college or a job.

**Manage your visibility.** The photos you're tagged in can be visible to anyone unless your account is private. Others can tag you in photos they post but, if you don't like the way you're shown, you can hide a photo from your profile or untag yourself (it'll still be visible on Instagram but not associated with your username and not in your profile). If you don't want photos to appear on your profile automatically, tap (profile button), then (options button), and select Photos of You. Deselect Add Automatically. (Android users, tap the three small squares.)

**Consider the whole image.** What's in the background of a photo or video could indicate where it was taken or what the people in it were doing at the time. Is that information you want to convey?

**Your media could show up anywhere.** Instagram videos can be embedded in any website, and it's important to remember that anything digital can be copied and shared by others. So even if you limit the audience, be careful not to share anything that could be a problem if someone were to pass it around.

## WHY SOME TEENS HAVE MORE THAN ONE ACCOUNT

**There are two words your kids probably know: "Rinsta" and "Finsta."** Rinsta stands for "real Instagram account." The f in "Finsta" stands for fake.

For teens who have both types of accounts, their "real" Instagram ("Rinsta") is probably tightly curated for a wider audience and their "fake" Instagram ("Finsta") is used for a close circle of friends. There's nothing sinister about a teen having more than one Instagram account - it's how they project their different sides to different audiences. The Rinsta for their polished, idealized selves, and the Finsta for their casual, authentic side, where they can let their guard down a bit, act silly and not edit out every blemish.

**Use a strong password, and don't share it.** This gives you some control over how you're represented in social media because other people won't be able to use your password to impersonate you. Also use different passwords for different services (for advice on passwords visit [ConnectSafely.org/passwords](https://connectsafely.org/passwords)).

**Keep perspective.** Remember that Instagram often represents a highlight reel of someone's life. Some Instagram users spend a lot of time on Instagram making themselves look really good or their life seem extra interesting. We're not suggesting that you don't try to look good online or post your life's highlights, but try not to fall into the comparison trap. People rarely post about their sad or boring moments, but everyone has them.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE BEING HARASSED

**Block someone if necessary.** If someone's harassing you, such as repeatedly tagging you in photos you don't like or sending you a lot of direct messages or trying to engage you in a creepy conversation, you can block them so they can't tag you, contact you directly or mention you in comments. They also won't be able to see your profile or search for your account. To block a user, go to his or her profile, tap the three dots at the top right, and select Block. When you block an account, that person isn't notified and you can unblock an account at any time.

**Report problematic posts.** You can report other people's inappropriate photos, videos, stories, or comments - or users who violate Instagram's community guidelines. Just click on the three dots next to the username, then Report.

**You can untag yourself.** Only the person who posts can tag people in the post, but - if that person's profile is public - anyone tagged by the poster can untag themselves. You can untag yourself by tapping on your username in a post, but only if the post is public or if you follow the person who tagged you.

**Ignore messages labeled "Request".** If you don't want to receive a message from someone you don't know, ignore any messages in your inbox marked Request. If you want to see images only from people you know, limit who you follow.

### To report a photo or video:

Tap the three dots next to the photo you'd like to report and then Report.

### To report a comment:

Tap the message bubble below the comment. Swipe left over the comment (iPhone) or tap and hold the comment (Android) you'd like to report. Tap the ! button and choose Spam or Scam or Abusive Content.

## MANAGING COMMENTS

Instagram users can control who can comment on their photos and videos. In the “Comment Controls” section of the app settings, they can choose to: allow comments from everyone, people they follow and those people’s followers, just the people they follow, or their followers. Teens can also remove comments entirely from their posts.

Instagram also has controls that help you manage the content you see and determine when comments are offensive or intended to bully or harass. There are filters that automatically remove offensive words and phrases and bullying comments. Your teen can also create their own list of words or emojis they don’t want to appear in the comments section when they post by going to “Filters” in the Comment Controls section. However, we’re not at the stage where “artificial intelligence” can remove everything that’s offensive, depressing or annoying. Teens should continue to look at the comments and delete any that they find inappropriate or bothersome.

### To delete a comment:

- Tap the message bubble below the photo or tap any comment
- Swipe left over the comment (iPhone) or tap and hold the comment (Android) you'd like to delete
- Tap the trash symbol.

## TRACKING TIME ON INSTAGRAM

Instagram (and Facebook) have launched tools to help users better understand and manage how much time they’re spending on the services.

- You can access these controls on Instagram by tapping Your Activity in the settings menu.
- At the top, you’ll see a dashboard showing your average time for that app on that device. Tap any bar to see your total time for that day.
- Below the dashboard, you can set a daily reminder to give yourself an alert when you’ve reached the amount of time you want to spend on the app for that day.

You can change or cancel the reminder at any time. You can also tap on “Notification Settings” to quickly access the new “Mute Push Notifications” setting. This will limit your Instagram notifications for a period of time.

## YOU'RE ALL CAUGHT UP

Instagram has also added a “You’re all caught up” message to let people know you’re caught up to date on everything their friends and communities are up to. This can relieve the pressure that some teens feel to be constantly checking Instagram to make sure they’re not missing anything.

## KNOWING WHO YOU’RE FOLLOWING

Instagram has added an “About This Account” tool that provides details about accounts that reach “a large audience,” including when the account started, the country in which it’s located, other accounts with shared followers and any username changes in the last year and any ads the account is currently running. It won’t help your teen when it comes to most individual Instagram users, but it will give them information about accounts from celebrities, companies and others with large followings.

To learn more about an account, go to their Profile, tap the ... menu and then select About This Account.

Instagram has also instituted a verification badge, similar to Facebook’s, that celebrities, journalists, politicians, companies and other prominent account holders use to prove that they are who they say they are. This information could help your teen avoid following fake accounts impersonating as public figures and celebrities.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS FOR PARENTS

Instagram is one of many social media apps for smartphones and no single service, app or tool covers all digital social activities or even a single category, but research shows that socializing face-to-face is still the main event for teens.

Remember that your kids can be on Instagram even if they’re not on Instagram. Sounds unlikely, but not in social media. Even if a parent bans all social media, his or her child’s photo and other information can be posted by friends via their accounts. And for teens, there’s the fear of missing out that even has its own acronym, “FOMO.” While not all teens need to or necessarily even want to use social media apps, for many it’s embedded into their social lives. Of course, parents should help their teen make good choices, but banning social media may not be the best solution.

There are many options for digital socializing, with new ones popping up on different platforms all the time. Some do a better job of protecting privacy and safety than others, and parents can’t possibly be on top of all of them. We also can’t always understand the context of photos, videos and comments our kids are part of in social media. That’s why it’s important to keep the lines of communication with your kids as open as possible and work together to figure out what’s appropriate for them, in terms of safety, privacy, reputation and time management. It generally just works better to talk with our kids about their favorite tools – with genuine interest, not fear – because they’re more likely to come to you if they ever need help.

Finally, we all need balance in our lives. You and your kids need to take breaks from your devices. Use Instagram’s time management tools and, set family policies that apply to parents as well. Having dinner together without devices, turning off (or at least silencing) devices at bedtime and making sure that tech use is balanced with exercise, school work and other activities is all part of a healthy lifestyle.