

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 pressure 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 suggests Instagram can make body image issues worse for teenage girls especially
- If your child has a public account, their 'reels' (a feature where users share short videos with effects and music) might appear on Instagram's 'Explore' page, meaning strangers could watch and comment on a video they've shared
- 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.

6 steps 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', 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 'reels'. Anyone can send them a photo or video directly, though.

To set 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 > Account privacy, and turn on 'Private account'.

Tell your child to only 'approve' people they know and trust in real life.

2. Restrict comments and interactions on posts to limit harmful interactions

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

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

Also in 'Settings', under 'Hidden words', your child can:

- Automatically 'Hide comments' that might be offensive (under 'Hide offensive content') – also known as the 'anti-bullying filter'
- Choose words and emojis they never want to see on their posts (under 'Manage custom word list')

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

Restricting is a feature meant to tackle bullying. If you restrict someone, other people won't see their comments on your posts, and you won't be notified about their comments or messages from

them either. You can still view their comments, and approve or delete them. They also won't see when you've read their messages.

To **restrict** someone:

- Swipe to the left (iPhone) or tap and hold (Android) on a comment they've left on your post, tap the exclamation mark, and then Restrict; or
- Go to their 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 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 post, then (iPhone) swipe to the left, or (Android) tap and hold on the comment. 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 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 '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 to screenshot messages or images and share them with others. 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 is illegal. They should ignore any pressure from others to share nude or semi-nude pictures of themselves.

5. Consider setting a daily limit on use

Agree a time limit together. Then go to 'Settings' > 'Account' > 'Your activity' > 'Time' > 'Set daily reminder', and choose a time limit. Your child will then get a reminder once they've reached the limit.

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

Signs they 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

- [Instagram biggest for child grooming online – NSPCC finds, Instagram 'helped kill my daughter'](#), and [Instagram eating disorder content 'out of control'](#), and [Instagram makes under-16s' accounts private by default](#), BBC News
- [Rescue and Response: pan-London county lines service](#), Greater London Authority
- [Facebook aware of Instagram's harmful effect on teenage girls, leak reveals](#), The Guardian
- [Instagram Help Centre](#), and [Empowering our community to stand up to bullying](#), Instagram
- [Instagram](#), and [What is Instagram Reels?](#), Net Aware

This factsheet was produced by [Safeguarding Training Centre from The Key](#): thekeysupport.com/safeguarding