

Instagram and Kids: A parent's guide to privacy and safety

What is Instagram?

Instagram is an online social networking service that lets you share photos and apply a variety of filters to them. This started in 2010 as a photo-sharing platform viewable only amongst its user base and has since expanded to include a wide variety of social media, including Twitter and Facebook. The Instagram application is distributed worldwide through the Apple Store and Google Play. Instagram photos are easily recognizable because the pictures have a square shape reflective of the Instamatic and Polaroid photos the program was modelled after. Instagram was acquired by Facebook in 2012 and quickly continued to grow in popularity. In December 2012 a new Terms of Service was released by Instagram, which gave them the resale rights for all photographs. The instant public outcry forced them to retract the terms and retract their publishing rights to the photos.

It Looked Fine?

Like anything else it has a dark side. Many malicious users have corrupted what was promised to be a simple, fun way to share photos. Is your child already on Instagram? Perhaps, after doing your research and looking at everything you weren't too worried. The program was great to send out photos, but it was too awkward to really browse through the photo histories. Odds were pretty good that no one was going to go through that much trouble. When you let your teen sign up, you did everything a parent should do. You talked about appropriate photos, had them set the account to private and told them to only share with friends. You even occasionally looked to see what they are posting. There haven't been any problems and you want to keep it that way. Unfortunately, since your child signed up, things have changed. In April 2012 Facebook acquired Instagram and its use has since exploded. Now those photos can go almost anywhere and to make matters worse you can browse through all of them in a few brief moments by going to [Instagram.com/\[USER NAME\]](https://www.instagram.com/[USER NAME]). Now it's only a matter of seconds for someone to find last year's photo of your daughter in a bikini or your bare-chested son lifting weights. The worst part is that it might not even be your children posting them, it's their friends.

What Parents Need to Know about Instagram

Instagram is the newest mega-social network that every parent needs to be aware of. Instagram is a photo editing and sharing 'app' that allows users to edit photos taken on their phone and post them to Instagram, Facebook and Twitter with the click of a button. Instagram photos are open to the public by default and Instagram lets users browse public photos posted by others and by people whom they follow. Sounds innocent enough, but it presents several threats to children. As is the case with virtually all-social networks, signing up for an Instagram account requires that the user provide a Username. In many cases young children are using their real first and last names to create their accounts. To make matters worse, the sign-up process has an optional phone number section where users can submit their phone number as part of their public profile. The key word here is 'public.' Many Internet crime authorities are reporting increases in the number of online predators leaving lewd or sexually suggestive comments on tween and teen photos. To make matters worse, online predators leaving lewd comments isn't the only thing you have to worry about. While pornography involving minors is still illegal, there are dozens of websites dedicated to bikini and sexually suggestive pictures of minors, which are legal. In other words, those beach vacation pictures your daughter is innocently posting to Instagram may in fact end up on a message board for perverts. Once an Instagram profile has been created, anyone can browse them and follow other Instagram users. There is an option to make an Instagram profile private, and similar to Facebook, users have to send a request to connect to that person. However, as is the case with dating sites and other social networks, online predators use fake names and fake profile photos to make them appear to be someone they are not.

Instagram Followers

Once a connection has been accepted they become a follower. All followers have access to both the user's profile information and photos. For unsuspecting children who don't know any better, this means they have access to their first and last name and phone number. As a parent, the last thing you want is an online predator having access to your child's name and phone number displayed right alongside a photo history of their daily activities.

Instagram Sign up

Odds are pretty good that your teen knows what Instagram is and even uses it on their phone to share photos with their friends. Instagram is available for anyone 13 years and up, so it's not hard for anyone to have an account on it. Signing up for an Instagram account is easy and takes only a few minutes. Unfortunately all that you need is an Android or Apple based phone. Go to the Apps section of your phone and do a search for Instagram. Once it appears select and load it, then select sign up. Once you do this you will be able to share your photos with others online. The simplicity of the sign up is why parents should closely monitor the bill as your teen doesn't need to verify identify or secure your permission to obtain an account.

Instagram Privacy

Security of your child is important to you, no matter what their age. Now that they have an account here are some areas that you should find important.

Instagram picture sharing

Once the account is created it is vital that you, as a parent, discuss limits and restrictions with your teen. Let them know what you expect of them and occasionally review their photo stream so you can be sure that they aren't posting or receiving inappropriate photos.

- Choose a secure password, don't use common words, birthdays or cities. To increase the security of the password use a mix of numbers and symbols with upper and lower case letters.
- Ensure that the photo sharing is set to Private this will prevent the photos from going out publicly where anyone can view them. You can set the Privacy setting through the Instagram interface by going to Settings and scrolling down to the setting labelled "Photos are Private" or "Photo Privacy" and ensuring it is turned on.
- Work with your teen to select an appropriate profile photo that you can both agree on. It's best to avoid using an actual photo of your teen and instead find something that best represents your teen or their interests.

The photos may not be going out publicly but everyone that has chosen to follow your teen can still view them. If you want to see who is viewing their photos, then go to Settings on the Instagram interface. You will see a number of Instagram followers, tap the number and it will list out the followers of your teen. By tapping on each name you can view their profile. If you wish to block them tap on the menu button and the option to report them for spam or to block them. Once they are blocked or reported they will no longer see your teen's photos and your teen will no longer see them. Just setting the privacy on Instagram may not be enough. If the account is connected to Twitter, Facebook or another form of social media you will have to ensure that each of those programs are also set to private and will not share the photos.

Photo Map

Another thing to be aware of for your teen's privacy is the Photo Map. This creates a map of where each photo was taken. If your photos are already set to private, then no one, not even the followers can see the map. If you are worried about the photomap being made public it is easy to remove, just ensure that the "Add to Photo Map" option is set to off.

If there are already several photos tagged into the photomap you can remove them by doing the following;

1. Go into the profile and select the Photo Map button
2. Select a photo from the map and zoom into it
3. Select the edit button and tell it to unpin the photo and proceed to tap on each photo. It will ask you if you wish to confirm the deletion.

Delete Instagram Pictures

There will always be those moments of regret when something was posted that really shouldn't have been. Sometimes they are accidentally posted, other times they were of the spur of the moment. Unfortunately you cannot have the pictures unseen, but you can remove them from your feed.

1. Go into the profile
2. Below the profile details there should be all of the photos that have been shared in Instagram. They will either be displayed as a grid or on a scroll bar, depending upon your system.
3. Just to the bottom right of the photo you will see a menu button, select it and a pop-up menu will appear.
4. Select Delete from the menu, confirm deletion and the photo is gone from the feed.

Protecting Your Children

The boom in social media has led to the subsequent misuse of innocent social tools by predators and bullies. As a result there is a chance, albeit small that your teenagers photos will fall into the wrong hands.

Of course, you cannot protect them from everything and they will be exposed to things that we would rather they weren't. The best approach is to teach your children the importance of being safe online. They get driving lessons to protect them on the road; they learn fire safety to keep from getting burned. Teach them Internet safety to protect their future.

Provide Them the Tools

The best thing you can do is provide them the tools to deal with it and let them know the best way that they can protect themselves.

Pseudonyms

Work with your teen to come up with a good screen name. Pick one that can be identifiable as them and is as unique as they are. Ensure that it's not a screen name that will haunt their future, many of us still use the same screen names we created twenty years ago, and those names have become as identifiable with us as our given names. They don't need to put their real information out there.

Privacy Settings

Ensure that your teens profile and photos aren't out there for everyone to look at. If their profile isn't on private then switch it over. This will ensure that only approved friends will see the photos.

Location Settings

Turn off the Geo-tagging or Location of photos, that way even if a photo gets out to the public, hopefully no one knows where your child is.

Accepting Followers

If they don't know who the person is in real life, then they probably shouldn't accept them as a follower.

Avoid Portraits

Teens are a vain lot, but try to discourage them from posting photos of themselves or their friends. If there aren't photos out there, then they can't slip out.

Talk

Continue to talk to your children about what they are posting and what they are allowed to post. Encourage them to talk to their friends about appropriate posting and their own privacy settings. Your teen may do everything correctly, but all it takes is a careless friend and that beach photo could end up public.

Monitoring Instagram

Talk to them and make them aware of the dangers while still allowing them a modicum of earned freedom. Insist that your teen grants you periodic access to their account so you can check their postings and what their friends are posting. Join Instagram yourself, so that you are aware of their processes and terms and follow your teen so that you have a remote way of checking what is accessible on their accounts and you can see what others have access to.

Instagram Privacy Concerns

Some of the aforementioned policy changes became big news because they originally proposed that members' names, photos and other content could be used in advertising and marketing. This posed a threat to the security and privacy of its users. After the big initial outcry, Instagram removed that portion of the ToS.

But since Instagram became associated with Facebook, there have been other issues cropping up that had previously gone relatively unnoticed. Kids as young as 10 are using Instagram, and while the majority of its use is innocent and kept among friends there is the chance that the photos will be viewed and used inappropriately.

Picture Ownership

You know that Instagram is an online social networking service used for sharing photos. It lets you take a picture and apply a digital filter and tags to it then share with family and friends. When the pictures are uploaded they become known as streams and other people will enjoy looking at them.

Copyright Violations

It's not all light and cheery; there is a dark side to using this social networking site. One of the negative aspects is that people will take pictures and repost them onto their own accounts without giving credit to the original owner. This is a blatant violation of Instagram policies. It is important to monitor the pictures that teenagers are putting on this social networking site in order to ensure that they are not in breach of the terms. When people open an account on Instagram they are agreeing to only use content that they actually own or have a suitable license to use. Another term that is stated on the site is that the use and posting of content on the site does not violate privacy rights, copyright laws, contract rights or publicity rights. Unfortunately there is no enforcement of these terms, and even if there was, it only takes a matter of minutes for someone to open a new account and begin again. If your teen is reposting other photos without giving credit, put a stop to it. Let them know what they are doing wrong. Ask them how they would feel if someone reposted something of theirs and claimed credit? Or if one of their photos went out to the public?

Private Photo Distribution

It is not uncommon for people to take pictures from other accounts and use them as their own. Many times these photos are reposted on boards that you do not want your teen associated with. If your teens photo ends up on these boards there is often nothing that the site can or will do. Making it difficult to remove the photos. Even if you do remove the photos the damage has already been done and that picture of your teen has been seen by tens or even hundreds of people you didn't want looking at your child.

Teenagers are spontaneous and often do things without thinking. The last thing you want is for your teen to be adversely affected by a photo that they posted. By monitoring your teens Instagram photo stream you can be aware of what they are posting and be prepared to put an instant stop to it before that photo goes too far. The last thing you or your teen need is to find that the photo has gotten into the hands of a bully, or even worse, a stalker or molester. You can protect your teen by having an open and honest conversation about what you expect them to post and not post on their Instagram account. Let them know that you are watching, not because you distrust them, but because you care.

Protect Your Children on Instagram

Remember that the shocking news stories are set out there in order to shock you and grab your attention, these incidents only represent a small percentage of what actually occurs. However, as a parent you have a right to be concerned and protective. You don't want your teenager to be one of the news stories and that is nothing to be ashamed of.

Social media is growing and everyday it becomes a more intricate part of our daily lives as the new generation is absorbed into it. Let's teach this next generation about taking control of their own safety and show them how to stay aware when they are online