

Keep your child safe on Instagram



What's the problem?

- There have been lots of media stories about bullying on Instagram, and children seeing harmful images and advice about weight loss, self-harm and suicide
- It's a popular platform 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 their own photos to your child
- Children can feel pressure to look a certain way – for example, feeling like they should look like other users who share weight-loss content
- The **minimum age** to have an account is **13**, but it's easy to pretend to be older to sign up

In August 2020, Instagram launched a new feature called 'reels', where users can share short videos with effects and music with their followers and with other Instagram users, similar to TikTok. If your child has a public account, their 'reels' might appear on Instagram's 'Explore' page, meaning strangers could watch and comment on a video they've shared.

6 steps to help your child use Instagram safely

1. Set profile to 'private' to limit what strangers can see

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, including 'reels'. Anyone can send you a photo or video directly, though.

To do this, go to 'Settings' (tap your profile picture in the bottom-right of 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 them 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:

- On iPhone only, 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 restricting, blocking and reporting

Restricting is a feature meant to tackle bullying, that's a bit of a halfway house to blocking someone. 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 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, 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', then tap 'Block' again to confirm
- 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 swipe to the left (iPhone), 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**, 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 and with who

It's easy to screenshot messages or images and share them with others. Before they share anything on Instagram, tell your child to ask themselves: "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. Apart from being illegal, it can have lasting consequences and make your child vulnerable.

5. Consider setting a daily limit on use

You might have seen stories about children becoming obsessed with Instagram. Setting a limit for how much time your child spends on the app is one thing you can do to prevent this.

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

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

Signs they may be being targeted by a gang or groomed for other reasons include having new, unexplained possessions, changes in friendship groups, behaviour and mood, and unexplained injuries.