

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).

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', go to 'Settings and activity' (tap the person icon in the bottom-right of the app home screen, then tap the 3 lines in the top-right), then go to 'Account privacy' and turn on 'Private account'.

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:

- › Block specific people from interacting with their posts (under 'Block comments from')
- › Decide who can comment on their 'Stories'

Also under 'How others can interact with you', under 'Hidden words', you/your child can:

- › Automatically hide comments that might be offensive (under 'Hide Comments') – 'teen' accounts will already do this
- › Hide other comments and messages they don't want to see by creating a custom list of words, phrases and emojis (under 'Manage custom words and phrases')

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:

- › Swipe to the left (iPhone) or tap and hold (Android) on a comment they've left on your child's post, tap the exclamation mark, and then 'Restrict'; or
- › Go to the user's 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 user's profile, 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**, swipe left over the comment (iPhone), or tap and hold on the comment (Android). Tap the exclamation mark, tap 'Report this comment' and follow the instructions

- To **report an abusive photo, video or message that your child has 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

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

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 guardians 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

Sources

- › [Instagram boosts privacy and parental control on teen accounts, Meta releases 'sextortion' data after mum's criticism](#), BBC News
- › ['It can happen to any child': parents of sextortion victim send out warning, Meta documents show 100,000 children sexually harassed daily on its platforms](#), The Guardian
- › [Instagram Help Centre, Instagram Teen Accounts](#), Instagram
- › [Meta Family Centre](#), Meta
- › [Encountering violent online content starts at primary school](#), Ofcom
- › [Content about suicide, self-harm and eating disorders to be hidden from kids on Instagram and Facebook, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and X failing to remove dangerous suicide and self-harm content – study](#), Sky News

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