Instagram

A QUICK-GUIDE FOR PARENTS & TEENS

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What is Instagram & why do teens love it?

Instagram is a social media app used to share photos, videos and messages. Whether it's through Stories, Feed, Live, IGTV 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.

Is there a minimum age for Instagram?

The minimum age is 13, in compliance with the U.S. Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. Instagram doesn't ask users to specify their age, and 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.

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What are the risks?

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. Teens can learn to manage these risks, which is why we wrote this Quick-Guide and our longer Parent's Guide to Instagram (*ConnectSafely.org/Instagram*).

Are there tools to protect privacy & safety on Instagram?

Yes. Teens can start by making their account private so that only people they approve can see their photos, videos and posts. There are also tools to block people and report inappropriate posts. On page two of this guide you'll find tips on how your teen can increase their privacy, block bullies and harassers, and delete offensive comments and report other people's inappropriate posts.

Make the account private.

Young teens can (and should) make their accounts private by tapping on the profile button on the bottom right (icon of a person) and then the options button on iOS or the 3 vertical dots on Android. Scroll down to Private Account and move the slider to the right. The slider will turn blue once the account is private.

Block bullies & harassers.

Teens can block anyone who is bothering them, such as repeatedly tagging them in photos they don't like or sending them a lot of direct messages or trying to engage them in a creepy conversation. A person you block can't tag you, contact you directly or mention you in comments. To block a user, go to his or her profile, tap the three dots at the top right and select Block.

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 also report comments by swiping left on the comment you want to report and selecting why you think it's inappropriate.

Manage comments.

Teens 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. On iOS, swipe left on the comment to delete it. On Android, tap the comment and hold.

Track your time on Instagram.

Like adults, teens sometimes lose track of time so Instagram now has tools to help understand and manage the time you spend on the app. You can set daily reminders to get an alert when it's time for a break, you can mute notifications and there is also a feature to let you know you're "all caught up" on what your friends and communities have posted. You can access these controls by tapping "Our Activity." 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.

For More Information & Help

ConnectSafely has an in-depth Parent's Guide to Instagram at *ConnectSafely.org/Instagram.* Instagram also has its own Privacy and Safety Center at *Help.Instagram.com,* along with lots more advice on how to use the app.

Disappearing stories.

Instagram Stories aren't necessarily private, but they do disappear after 24 hours from public viewing unless you add them to highlights. Neither teens nor adults should ever post anything that is inappropriate, harmful or that 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.

ROBLOX

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→ What is Roblox?

Roblox is an online entertainment platform for play that allows people to create games for the public using Roblox's digital tool known as Roblox Studio. There are literally millions of games on Roblox. Though parents can turn off its social features, Roblox may be your child's first experience with digital socializing, which gives you a hands-on opportunity to help your child develop good digital habits that will last a lifetime.

How can I help my child stay safe on Roblox? ←

The "rules" for using any game or service are pretty similar. Everyone should be respectful of themselves and others, be mindful of what they post, and understand how to use any privacy settings, security tools or blocking and reporting mechanisms. Roblox also provides parents with tools to restrict certain activities, like chat, within the platform.

→ Should my child play Roblox with people he or she doesn't know?

There isn't a single answer for every child or family. Roblox does give you a lot of control over who can interact with your child and how. You can choose who can message them, who can chat with them in the app, who can chat with them in the game and so on. Click on **Privacy** under **Settings** to adjust these controls.

How much screen time is best for my child? ←

This is a harder question to answer than it may seem. The American Academy of Pediatrics has recently revised its screen time recommendations and, instead of arbitrary limits, now suggests, "For children ages 6 and older, place consistent limits on the time spent using media, and the types of media, and make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviors essential to health." In other words, use of Roblox or any other service should be balanced with the child's other activities and never interfere with school, family time or other forms of play, especially physical activities.

Stay nearby.

Whether your child plays Roblox on a computer, smartphone, tablet or gaming console, we recommend kids (especially younger ones) play with you or another trusted adult nearby when they're first starting out. You'll want to see what kind of games they're playing, how they're playing (sportsmanship matters online, too) and with whom they're interacting. Even once your child becomes accustomed to Roblox, it's still a good idea to check in once in awhile to make sure they're using it appropriately.

Play Roblox with your child.

See their favorite games and how they interact. Make an account for yourself and add your child as a friend so you can play games together. This will give you a better sense of what types of experiences your child will encounter on the platform and also how they interact with other friends and players inside specific games. And, besides, it might be fun for you, too.

Read and discuss Roblox's Community Rules.

Review Roblox's Community Rules with your child, especially their "guiding principles" which are written to be easy to understand. Also consider drawing up a family agreement that outlines your expectations for their online behavior. Make it a discussion (never a lecture) and remember to explain to your child that along with rights and privileges come responsibilities. Be clear about consequences for any violation of the agreement.

Parental controls.

All accounts have the option to enable an "Account PIN," which, when active, requires a 4-digit code to make changes to an account. These settings can be adjusted from within the Security tab of the Account Settings page, accessed by clicking on the gear icon in the upper-right corner of the site. Parents can use this feature for very young or new players, but, for most families, the goal should be to help your child make responsible decisions without relying on the extensive use of parental controls.

Passwords and other personal information.

Starting at an early age, talk with your kids about the importance of keeping passwords and other personal information private. Friends can become ex-friends, and use your child's account in mean or inappropriate ways. Scammers can also lure kids into giving private information in exchange for "free" Robux (the online currency that players can use to buy digital items on the Roblox platform). Help your child get into the habit of updating passwords regularly.

For More Information & Help

ConnectSafely has an in-depth parent's guide to Roblox at *ConnectSafely.org/Roblox.*

Blocking and reporting.

Roblox's human and digital moderators can't police every player and game, so it also relies on reports from its users when people break the rules. Players can use the Report Abuse links located throughout the app and in the Report tab of every game menu. Talk to your child about what to report (including bullying, inappropriate behavior, scams and other violations) and how to make a report. Or, ask your child to come to you if they experience a problem so you can help make that report.

Cyberbullying

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⊙ What is cyberbullying, anyway?

For the most part, cyberbullying is bullying, only it happens on phones and other connected devices. Most experts agree that it involves repeated harassment and some type of power imbalance – and, when young people are involved, it usually has something to do with what's happening with peers at school. It's important to remember that not every mean comment or unpleasant interaction rises to the level of bullying.

How likely is it? ⊙

Centers for Disease Control reports that 15% of high school students were electronically bullied in 2017. Cyberbullying Research Center estimates about 25% of all teens experience cyberbullying. Either way, it's too many, but it's important to note that most teens don't bully others. We point this out not to minimize a serious problem, but to emphasize that bullying is not a norm. Kindness, not cruelty, is the norm.

⊙ What are the signs?

Often there are no signs, but you might notice that your child has difficulty sleeping, a change in online habits (such as checking social media constantly), declining grades, not wanting to go to school, feelings of helplessness or decreased self-esteem. In the case of physical bullying, there could be broken or missing items or injuries.

What do I do if my child is cyberbullied? ⊙

If your child does experience cyberbullying, as a target or a bystander, supportive parenting can go a long way toward minimizing the impact. It's usually best for your child to not react or retaliate, but to block the person who is bullying and save the evidence in case it's needed. But the most important thing to do is talk with your kids about what's going on, help them think through what happened, how they feel about it, and what they're going to do about it. It's important to involve your child in the process, not just take over yourself. (Continued on reverse.)

It's good if your child asks for help.

Children who are bullied don't always tell their parents so if your kids do, that's a good thing. Your first task is to listen – find out not only what happened but how your child feels about it and is dealing with it. Never panic or retaliate. Gather the facts and assure your child that you're there for support.

Work with your child.

There are two reasons why you'll want to keep your child involved. Bullying and cyberbullying usually involve a loss of dignity or control over a social situation – involving your child in finding solutions helps him or her regain that.

Respond thoughtfully, not fast.

What parents don't always know is that they can make things worse for their kids if they act rashly. A lot of cyberbullying involves somebody getting marginalized (put down and excluded), which people who bully may think increases their power or status. If you respond publicly or if your child's peers find out about even a discreet meeting with school authorities, the marginalization can get worse, which is why any response needs to be well thought out.

Remember the ultimate goal is restored self-respect.

What your child needs most is to regain a sense of dignity. Sometimes that means standing up to the bully, sometimes not. Together, you and your child can figure out how to get there. It's about healing your child more than punishing those who bully.

The power of resilience.

One positive outcome we don't think about (or hear in the news) enough is resilience. We know the human race will never completely eradicate meanness or cruelty, and we also know that bullying is not, as heard in past generations, "normal" or a rite of passage. We need to keep working to eradicate it. But when it does happen and we overcome it – our resilience grows. Resilience isn't something that can be "downloaded" or taught. We grow it through exposure to challenges and figuring out how to deal with them. So sometimes it's important to give our kids space to do that and let them know we have their back.

What if my child cyberbullies others?

Get them to stop the bullying but try not to overreact. Talk with your child, get all the facts and consider probing further in their devices and accounts. Look for underlying issues and problems that might be affecting your child. Even though your child may be engaged in bullying, she is not "a bully." Education, communication and caring – not labels – are the best ways to help her improve.

95%
Of teens aged 13-17 have access to a smartphone.

*Pew Research Center

15%
Of high school students experience electronic bullying.

*Centers for Disease Control

45%
Of teens say they are online near-constantly.

*Pew Research Center

Media Literacy & Fake News

A QUICK-GUIDE FOR PARENTS & EDUCATORS

ConnectSafely

What is media literacy and why is it important?

In short, media literacy is the ability to think critically about the information you consume and create. It includes the ability to distinguish fact from opinion or even false information, and to understand how media can sometimes be used to persuade people. A 2016 study by Stanford Graduate School of Education found that more than 80% of middle and high school students surveyed were unable to distinguish between advertisements and real news stories. As parents and educators, it's our job to help our students become more savvy consumers—and creators—of content.

What is fake news and why do people create it?

Fake news is any information that is deliberately meant to be wholly or largely false or misleading. Motivations for creating fake news include financial gain—by getting people to click on sites so they're exposed to advertising—or to persuade others to take an action, purchase a product, or support or oppose a cause or political candidate. Some people perpetuate fake news just for the sake of deceiving people or as a prank. Honest mistakes happen and they are not fake news. But those who publish or say something that they later find out to be untrue have an obligation to correct the record.

How do we explain the difference between facts and opinions?

Both fact and opinion help us understand the world around us. Facts are accurate reports of what happened or what exists, while opinions are an interpretation of the meaning or impact, usually from an individual's perspective. It's legitimate for an opinion to be influenced by a person's world view, but even those who express an opinion should back them up with facts.

How do you spot fake news?

Consider the source and other stories coming from that source. Do they ring true? Is the URL legitimate? Does the "news story" seem one-sided or biased toward a particular point of view? Also, consider the article's author. Is there evidence that it's a real person? Search for the source and author to see what else they've published and what others are saying about them. While it's never OK to spread fake news, it is OK to comment on links to fake stories with your own correction, to help set the record straight.

A little (more) context.

Until fairly recently, media were concentrated in the hands of a few organizations, but now it's all around us. In addition to the so-called "mainstream media" outlets, there are now many online blogs, podcasts, and videos from a wide variety of providers from all walks of life, as well as social media where anyone can be a "citizen journalist." While this has created a vibrant and dynamic array of information sources, it has also made it more difficult to know which sources can be trusted. So, regardless of whether you're a media consumer, media creator or both—the need for media literacy is greater now than ever. The need to evaluate information critically applies not only to media sources, but to politicians, businesses, public officials and anyone who may have an agenda.

Fact vs. opinion in the news.

Both fact and opinion help shape our understandings of information. The facts are the foundation while the opinions help us determine how those facts affect the people and society we are connected with.

TIP: Teachers and parents can ask students to take a news story or an historical event and write two editorials from opposing perspectives. It could be about a bill before a legislative body, a school issue or the significance of a scientific discovery or a controversial historical event. The idea is to push them to see the same set of facts from at least two different perspectives.

The difference between mistakes and lies.

Whether the author is a professional journalist or someone posting on their social media account, knowingly publishing false information online or in print is always wrong, but recognizing intentional lying is not as simple as it might seem. There are different kinds of lies: blatant lies, partial lies, and lies by omission. It's important to help young people understand the difference. It all comes down to the intent of the author. As parents and educators, we must encourage children to look past the information and consider the reliability and motivations of the source.

TIP: If you come across something that is falsely reported, help young learners investigate more about the source. Then ask them whether that source would have any reason to spread false information.

Dealing with conflicting reports.

Often, as new information is coming to light or even when we review hotly contested historical events, there might be conflicting reports by different sources. When faced with this, sometimes young learners will look to adults and ask which is accurate. Adults should redirect that thinking toward examining why there might be conflicting reports in the first place. Sometimes what looks like conflicting reports or "facts" is actually two different perspectives or "sides" that need to be examined. Other times there are so-called conflicting facts because only one set of information is actually true while the other is a mistake or a lie.

TIP: When faced with the reporting of conflicting facts, encourage students to take their time to develop their own understandings. Analyzing and interpreting information is not a race. Ask them:
- How many other sources are reporting the same facts? Find corroboration.
- Do the corroborating sources seem to be reporting other believable facts?
- Do any of the sources or facts seem biased or skewed to favor one side?

How people's ability to make informed decisions shapes our democracy.

As parents and educators it's our job to help young people hone their critical thinking skills so they can analyze information effectively and come to their own conclusions. It's essential for all aspects of their lives and all decisions they will face ranging from what to buy, what media to create and how, who to form relationships with and, of course, how to vote. We should not tell them what to think, but rather should teach them how to think for themselves, based on accurate information.

This Quick-Guide is based on the free booklet "The Parent & Educator Guide to Media Literacy & Fake News" by Kerry Gallagher, J.D., and Larry Magid, Ed.D, at ConnectSafely.org/fakenews. Creative Common License – attribution required.

TikTok

A QUICK-GUIDE FOR PARENTS & TEENS

For a more in-depth look, go to ConnectSafely.org/TikTok.

→ What is TikTok?

TikTok is an app that gives users the opportunity to create and share short-form videos with friends, family, and the entire world. The app is especially popular with teens and young adults, who enjoy using its tools to combine video, music, and graphics into fun sketches, and creative shorts. TikTok runs on both Apple and Android phones and tablets and has selected a 12+ rating on the App Store and Google Play so that parents can use the device-level parental controls provided by Apple and Android.

Why do so many teens like TikTok? ←

The app and its user community are known to value creativity and authenticity over follower counts and likes. As a result, users find it a refreshing atmosphere where they can be themselves. Also, TikTok videos can be fun to watch and – because they are so short – be enjoyed during brief breaks. If a half hour TV show were a meal, TikTok would be a snack.

→ Are TikTok videos private or public?

By default, TikTok accounts are Public, which allows anyone to view a user's profile and posted videos. Users have the ability to change their profile to Private. This allows users to approve or deny followers. It also means that only your approved followers can view your videos.

How can I help my teen use TikTok safely? ←

Start by talking with your teen about how they use TikTok. Make sure they understand that the videos and comments they post affect their reputation and that they should never post anything that jeopardizes their privacy and security. Make sure your teen knows how to block anyone who bullies, threatens, or harasses them or if they don't want that person to see their content or comment on their videos.

TikTok also provides users (or their parents) the ability to filter out more mature content by enabling Restricted Mode. Parents can set these restrictions only if they have access to their teen's device, username, and password. TikTok has resources for parents, including a "Top Ten Tips for Parents" primer, safety videos, and other tools which you can access at ConnectSafely.org/TikTok.

*For more information and a printable pdf, visit ConnectSafely.org/TikTok.

Read and discuss TikTok's Community Guidelines.

TikTok has community guidelines that limit what can be posted. This includes anything that is illegal, content that depicts dangerous activity, including self-harm, threats against any person or group, any form of hate speech based on race, ethnicity, religious sexual orientation and other characteristics, and any nudity or sexual content. There are other rules and restrictions. There's a link to TikTok's Community Guidelines at ConnectSafely.org/TikTok.

How to block people from seeing your content or interacting with you.

To prevent someone from following you, seeing your content or commenting on your videos, go to that user's profile, tap the three dots in the right corner and tap Block.

Moderation and abuse reporting.

To enforce its Community Guidelines, TikTok uses a combination of policies and human- and machine-based moderation practices to handle content that may violate its guidelines. To report a comment: Tap on the comment and then Report. To report an inappropriate video, tap the arrow in the bottom right corner of the video, tap Report and select the reason. You can report a profile by going to that profile, selecting Settings and then Report.

Parental controls.

TikTok's settings menu (click on Me in the lower right corner and then the three dots at the top left corner) has a "Digital Wellbeing" section that allows a parent (or user) to enable Restricted Mode that "will limit the appearance of content that may not be appropriate for all ages." There is also a Screen Time Management feature that can require the user or parent to enter a passcode to use the app beyond a specified period of time (40 to 120 minutes a day). Both of these controls require access to the teen's device and TikTok account to create, change, or remove the passcode or configure the settings. Parental controls have their place, but sometimes conversations can accomplish even more. For general advice on parental controls including suggestions for talking about them with your kids, visit Connectsafely.org/parental-controls.

Passwords and other personal information.

Talk with your kids about the importance of keeping passwords and other personal information private. Friends can become ex-friends, and use your teen's account in mean or inappropriate ways. Scammers can also lure kids into giving private information.

Time management and life balance.

Whether it's TikTok or any other app, it's important for teens (and adults too) to put down their phones and interact with others in person. No app should ever keep you or your teen from getting exercise, doing chores, work or anything else that keeps us healthy, happy, and productive. If you need a nudge, use the time management features in the TikTok app or Apple and Android phones.

For More Info

ConnectSafely has an in-depth parent's guide to TikTok at *ConnectSafely.org/TikTok*.

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