**What parents need to know about Instagram**

Instagram is a hugely popular social networking app with over 1 billion users worldwide. The app, which is accessible on iOS and Android devices, allows users to upload images and videos to their feed; create interactive stories; exchange private messages or search, explore and follow other accounts they like. Images and videos can be transformed with an array of filters to suit the short before sharing them with an account or see others’ online galleries if their account is not private. To make posts easier to find, users can include searchable hashtags and captions to their uploads. That’s why we’ve created this guide to help parents and carers understand exactly what Instagram is about.

**Hooked on scrolling**

Many social media platforms, Instagram included, have been designed in a way to keep users engaged for as long as possible. Behavioral scientists, such as Eyal, call this the Hook Model and the Instagram feed is a great example of this. Children and adults may find themselves scrolling to try and get ‘hooked’. Scrolling may be addictive and it can be difficult to stop until children find something they are looking for, possibly losing track of time as they get deeper into their Instagram feed.

**Sliding into DMs**

Direct messages (or DMs) on Instagram allow users to share posts, images, videos, voice messages and calls between each other privately (or in a private group). Even if your child’s account is set to private, anybody has the option to message them and send them content. If the person is not on your child’s friends list, the message will still be sent to their inbox but the user has to accept the request to see the message.

**Influencer culture**

Influencers are sometimes paid thousands of pounds to promote a product, service, app and much more on social media. When celebrities or influencers post such an ad, they should add a disclaimer somewhere in the post which states that they have been paid for it. Commonly, this is well-hidden in the hashtags or in the comments of their post, meaning it is not actually an ad. This can be very misleading to young people who may be influenced by buying into something promoted by somebody they admire, creating a false sense of reality and potentially affecting their mental health and wellbeing.

**Impact on wellbeing**

A report by the RSPH, Instagram was ranked the worst for young people’s mental health. Using filters on photos on Instagram can set unrealistic expectations and create feelings of inadequacy. Children may struggle for more ‘likes’ by using realistically edited photos. Judging themselves against other users on the app may threaten their confidence or self-worth. In early 2021, Instagram banned images of self-harm and suicide, following the suicide of 14-year-old Molly Russell, who had struggled at looking at such material on the platform. They have since extended the ban to include drawings, cartoons and memes.

**Exposed location**

Public locations can be added to a user’s photos/videos and also to their stories. While this may seem like a good idea at the time, it can expose the location of your child. This is particularly more of a risk if it is on their story, as it is real time. A photo which includes landmarks in the area, their school uniform, street name, house and even tagging in the location of the photo uploaded to Instagram can mean that it is easier for strangers to locate them. If their account is public, anyone can access their account and see their location.

**Hacked hashtags**

Hashtags are integral part of how Instagram works, but they can come with risks. One person may use an innocent hashtag with one particular thing in mind, and before you know it hundreds of people could be using the same hashtag for something inappropriate or dangerous that your child shouldn’t be exposed to.

**Top tips for parents & carers**

- **Restrict direct messages**
  - If your child receives a message from somebody they do not know, encourage them not to accept their message request and report the sender.
  - Don’t allow your child to be friends with strangers or allow them to message your child alone.

- **Look out for ads**
  - In 2019, the UK’s Competition and Markets Authority launched an investigation into celebrities who were posting ads on social media and not declaring that they were paid. Users can limit how much time they see the ads by turning on ‘Ads on Instagram’ as well as reporting the account itself.

- **Restrain digital wellbeing**
  - Instagram now has an in-built activity dashboard that allows users to monitor and control how much time they spend on the app. Users can limit how much time they want to spend on Instagram, prompting them to take breaks. Instagram also sends warning messages when users have spent too long on the account.
  - Turn off sharing of personal information.

- **Protect personal information**
  - Your child may unknowingly give away personal information and photos/videos to strangers. Talk to them about what their personal information is and make sure they don’t share it with strangers, including their location, to anyone during a livestream, comment, direct message or any other way for communication on the platform, even to their friends.

- **Manage negative interactions**
  - If your child is receiving unwanted or negative comments, they can block that account so that they can’t interact with them. This stops them seeing and commenting on their posts, stories and live broadcasts. In addition, your child can instantly delete unwanted comments from their posts, turn them off completely and control who can tag and mention them in comments, captions or stories. Instagram always lose this feature.

- **Use a private account**
  - By default, any image or video your child uploads to Instagram is public. Instagram now means that you have to approve a request if somebody wants to follow your child and only people you approve will see your child’s posts and followers in real-time and comment on videos and photos.

- **Manage digital wellbeing**
  - Instagram allows payments for products directly through the app. Users can add a daily reminder to set a limit on how much time they spend on the app.

- **Filter inappropriate comments**
  - Instagram has an ‘anti-bullying’ filter, which hides comments relating to a person’s appearance or character, as well as those that feature peer threats to a person’s wellbeing or health. The filter will also alert Instagram to repeated problems in that they can take action against a user’s account.

- **Turn off sharing**
  - Even though this feature will not stop people from taking screenshots, it will stop others from being able to directly share photos and videos as a story to another account. If you don’t want them to be able to share, we recommend turning off the feature which automatically shares photos and videos from a story to a Facebook account.

- **Remove payment methods**
  - If you have an app that you don’t want to be associated with your child’s Instagram account, we suggest adding a PIN which needs to be entered before making a payment; this will also prevent unauthorized purchases. This can be added in the payment settings tab.

- **Don’t forget to be vigilant & talk to your child about their online activities!**

**Meet our expert**

Parnen Kaur is a social media expert and digital media influencer who specialises in helping parents and children thrive in a digital world.

**For 2020 Instagram Reels**

Instagram Reels is the latest update from Instagram that gives users the ability to record and edit 15-second multi-clip videos with audio, effects, and new creative tools. It is the app’s answer to TikTok and can be accessed via the Stories tab and also from Instagram Explore. Instagram Reels is the latest update from Instagram that gives users the ability to record and edit 15-second multi-clip videos with audio, effects, and new creative tools. It is the app’s answer to TikTok and can be accessed via the Stories tab and also from Instagram Explore.

**New for 2020 Instagram Safety**

At National Online Safety we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information they need to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they need it. This guide focuses on one platform of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.