DIGITAL DRIVER'S ED
INSTAGRAM


SCREEN SANITY™

INSTAGRAM

WHAT IS IT?

Instagram is Gen Z's most popular app. More than 75% of teens use it, averaging 53 minutes per day. It allows users to instantly filter, caption, and share photos and videos, appealing to their desire for artistic, creative self-expression.

THE LINGO

STORIES
Public photos or videos that **disappear 24 hours after they are posted,** and can be viewed an unlimited number of times. Users can now "live stream" their experiences via their Stories.

FINSTA
Short for "Fake Instagram." These second (or third or fourth) accounts **allow teens to get away from the prying eyes of concerned adults** OR simply have a "pressure-free" account. Teens quickly learn hashtags and secret emoji codes that will direct them to explicit content, including the illegal sale of drugs

INSTAPORN
Often hidden under foreign language hashtags, and spread via unsolicited private messages with **pornographic images asking teens to follow their feed** or hashtags, like #addme or #roleplay. Sexually explicit content can be privately shared via "disappearing" photos.

75%
of US teens use Instagram
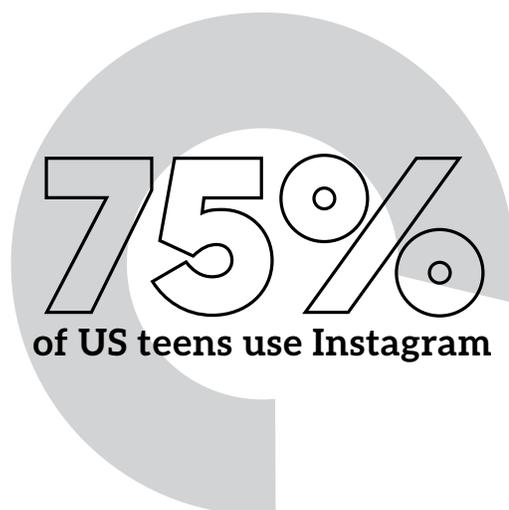
GOOD TO KNOW

The worst app for mental health

A 2017 study ranked IG as the worst app for mental health, likely because pristine images powerfully provoke social comparison, which can trigger feelings of inferiority and negative self-image.

Bots are a thing

Many comments teens receive are posted by a "bot"—an automated marketing tactic designed to catch their attention and drive them to other sites.

DIGITAL**DRIVERS**ED

RIDE. PRACTICE. DRIVE.

One of our **Screen Sanity Rules of Thumb** is "Ride. Practice. Drive." Before you hand your child the keys to a car, they spend many years shadowing you in the backseat, followed by a learner's permit—with you logging hours by their side, coaching them with ongoing support and assistance.

When it comes to Instagram, conversations are the most powerful training tool you have.

(1) RIDE.

ARE THEY PREPPED AND READY FOR INSTAGRAM?

BEFORE YOU SAY YES TO INSTAGRAM...

Make sure you've covered these topics with your child:

- [ ] **Screen Sanity Rules of Thumb**
- [ ] **Pornography**
- [ ] **Sexting**
- [ ] **Online safety + privacy**
- [ ] **Cyberbullying**
- [ ] **Comparison + Self Image**
- [ ] **Digital footprints are permanent**

TEST DRIVE IT AS A FAMILY

Try creating a family account featuring your pet or your family baking endeavors. As you discuss what to post, you'll establish open communication and trust.

LEARN WHY YOUR CHILD WANTS INSTAGRAM

Why do you want to use Instagram?

What do you plan to do on the app?

How do your friends use Instagram?

What are ways you can use the app as a platform for positive influence?

Do you think the app will help you have better community? Why or why not?

Do you know what the dangers of using Instagram are?

How are you going to protect yourself and keep yourself accountable for how you use it?

Do you think it's worth continuing to use Instagram if you accidentally run across graphic content? Why or why not?

How private do you want your content to be?

Do you want to spend more time interacting wtih friends or following public figures?

2 PRACTICE. MENTOR YOUR CHILD DURING A LEARNER'S PERMIT SEASON

START WITH STRONG LIMITS, AND RELEASE THEM SLOWLY.

- Create device-free zones —like mealtimes + bedrooms overnight.

- Make it non-negotiable that passwords are shared with parents.

- In the app settings, toggle Private Account to ON.

- In your phone settings, select Instagram, and toggle location to NEVER.

- Install a monitoring app like Bark as a safety net.

- Only allow a small # of friends and family at first.

- In the beginning, discuss (and approve) all initial posts.

- Decline direct messages (DM) from unknown users, and possibly block and report them.

- As you get going, make sure to log in occasionally to see what types of content they are posting.

RIDE IN THE PASSENGER SEAT

If you are ready to let your child try their own Instagram account, **plan to log some hours in the passenger seat, coaching them through the thrills and hazards of their new app.** You'll also want to occasionally log in to their account to get a sense of what they're posting.

TOPICS TO CHECK IN ON

- How does Instagram make you feel about your self-image? Is comparison a thief of joy?
- What influencers are you following? Do you trust them?
- What do you define as "inappropriate"?
- What do you think happens to a person when they are value for their number of "likes"?
- Do you think your number of followers is a true reflection of your self-worth?
- Have you ever felt or seen bullying on Instagram?
- What are your personal values? How can you avoid posting things that go against your values?
- What hashtags are you following? Which ones are you avoiding? Why?
- *(If you notice a lot of disappearing content in direct messages): Tell me about why you are choosing disappearing content over permanent?*
- What's the difference between privacy and secrecy?
- How much time would you like to spend on Instagram and in that time, how much interacting with people you know vs. public content?
- For you, would you say Instagram is "time well spent"?

ACCIDENTS ARE BOUND TO HAPPEN

Don't freak out when your teen encounters roadblocks or emergencies. **Let them know you are safe harbor; they can tell you anything.**

3 DRIVE. TRUST THEM TO MERGE CAUTIOUSLY + OFFER ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE
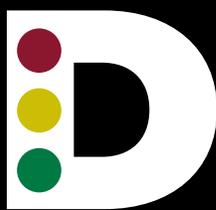
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

DIGITALDRIVERSED

AT WHAT AGE SHOULD I LET MY CHILD USE IT?

According to Instagram's **Terms of Use,** the age requirement to use the service is 13. The reason for this is because of the **Children's Online Privacy Protection Act** (COPPA), which establishes that websites and online services cannot collect data on children under the age of 13 without parental consent. If someone younger than 13 joins Instagram by using a fake birthdate during registration for the app, COPPA cannot protect them.

Just because your child is tech-savvy at the age of 10 doesn't necessarily mean that he or she is mature enough to use social media sites. It can be difficult for children to truly understand the impact of their online actions (or the impact of actions against them), which can be particularly harmful when it comes to cyberbullies, "trolls," and online predators.

Once legally old enough to join the service, it's a good idea to **make sure that your teen's account is private** rather than public and to discuss with your teen the issues surrounding online safety and privacy. Teens often don't understand the permanence and potential repercussions of sending information out into the virtual world.

One more thing to talk to your teen about is the fluidity of online identities. Online profiles make it easy and tempting to "reinvent" ourselves or to project a certain image or persona, even if it's not authentic. It's common for users to even juggle multiple Instagram accounts. Teens are

especially vulnerable to this trap because they are naturally trying to figure out who they are. Help your child engage in activities that establish character, self-worth and identity in the offline world—which is much more fulfilling than designing a new avatar every day.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT FOLLOWERS?

Although Instagram traded in Facebook's "Friend" title for Twitter's more ambiguous "Followers" as a way to refer to those with whom a user connects and interacts, it can be easy for teens to scroll through an Instagram home feed and feel as though they are truly connected to those they follow, to believe they have true insight into their lives, whether or not they have real-word interactions with them. However, it's important to make teens aware that, just as they have the ability to project an inauthentic online image and persona, so do those they follow.

Instagram can be a good tool for connection on one level; however, teens also need to realize that they cannot replace their need for real-world community with virtual interactions. Although social media connections are **cognitively and emotionally easier than real-world ones,** they rob us of the deep, reciprocal interactions that are scientifically proven to improve their mental health. Discuss with your teen how he or she can use Instagram as a way to supplement real-world relationships, instead of allowing the app to replace or diminish them.

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

WHAT ARE HASHTAGS?

As with other social media apps, hashtags (i.e. "#" followed by words and/or numbers) have been an integral part of how Instagram operates since its inception. They are essentially a way to promote a photo, though they can also just be a way to add parenthetical humor to a post (a post-workout photo might be captioned with "#mylegsarekillingme"). For example, captioning a photo with "#fitness" will link that photo to all the other content on the app with the same hashtag. Then when a user searches "#fitness" in the Explore tab (or by tapping on the hashtag when it appears below a photo or video), the user is taken to a page with all the content containing that hashtag.

There are many things to understand when it comes to hashtags. For example, it's common practice for users to caption their content with the most popular hashtags **(check out the top 100 here)** in order to gain viewership and followers. In addition, there are many hashtag trends, like hashtags for every day of the week. #mcm = Man-Crush Monday and is used to show affection for a significant other or a celebrity one likes (similar to #wcw = Woman-Crush Wednesday). Also, #tbt (Throwback Thursday) and #fbf (Flashback Friday) are used with a photo from the past, even if that past is as recent as yesterday. Finally, users can also now "follow" hashtags like they follow other users in order to be updated when new content is tagged with that hashtag.

WHAT'S THE EXPLORE TAB?

The Explore tab a search bar for finding other people and content by entering in names, handles, hashtags, words, and phrases. (Note: The app does keep track of a user's search history, but **it can easily be cleared**.) Below this, the Explore tab uses algorithms to show users a variety of curated content based on location, what's trending, and individual users' interests.

This is not content from profiles the user follows; it's content that Instagram algorithmically suggests to the user. Among the thumbnails of photos and other videos, the "Videos You Might Like" personalized video channel is a distinct feature of the Explore tab. You tap on the "Videos You Might Like" thumbnail, wherein the first video is playing on a loop, to watch the full, enlarged version with sound. Immediately after the first video finishes, the screen scrolls down (or you can scroll manually) to the next video.

The quote, "Music may not tell you what to think, but it does tell you what to think about," can easily be applied to Instagram: Instagram may not tell you what to think, but it does tell you what to think about. But it may even go a step further, subliminally telling us what to like, as the author of this **New York Times article** writes: [Instagram's Explore feature] provides curated randomness—a category that can exist only in an era of algorithms. The distance between what I like and what Instagram thinks I might like is oceanic, preposterous, deranged. And yet the algorithm is not wrong. I press the "like" button on a picture of my friend, and the Explore page shows me albino crocodiles. I comment on a cute dog, and the Explore page offers circus contortionists. Suddenly I like those things, too.

Adding to this is Instagram's reorganization of the home feed according to "the likelihood you'll be interested in the content," rather than by the order in which items were posted (a change that was much **protested by users**). Ads were also added to the home feed in 2013. Unlike Facebook, ads on Instagram, however, are shown regardless of the user's interests, which complements the "curated randomness" of the Explore tab. Furthermore, the "Videos You Might Like" channel offers a laid-back viewing experience, the clip-after-clip montage catering to short attention spans and

encouraging more time spent on the app. Talk to your teen about using Instagram to supplement and complement our real-world experiences, rather than letting it curb innovation and actual exploration of the world.

DOES IT REVEAL MY CHILD'S LOCATION?

A can add his or her location to a post (this feature is especially important to discuss with teens). **This article** explains: Teens can easily share the location of where they took the picture when they post. This setting allows users to tag a picture to a particular address or location. If you click on that location once the post is up, the app brings you to a map and a small dot that shows exactly where they were when they took the picture. We saw so many pictures that we were able to easily click on and even see the users' home locations or their favorite coffee shops that they just might visit regularly. To ensure safety, follow these directions: Go to your teen's phone settings, select "Instagram," click on "location," select "never."

WHAT'S INSTAGRAM DIRECT?

It's Instagram's version of private messaging, which was launched in 2013 and is denoted by a paper airplane icon (see photo). Via Instagram Direct, users are able to send messages containing text, photos, videos, and/or others' posts to one or multiple users. Like Snapchat, photos and videos sent in this way can be set to disappear immediately after viewing. It's important to note that users can receive direct messages from users whom they have not allowed to follow their private account, and there are methods to save copies of self-destructing, "disappearing" content. In addition, Instagram Direct conversations can be erased. Talk to your teen about the false security of "private" online interactions and show them how to **decline to view direct messages** from unknown users, as well as **block and report** them.

WHAT ARE STORIES?

In 2016, Instagram added a Stories feature (adapted from Snapchat, like many of Instagram's features) to its app. This feature allows a user to upload videos and/or photos to their "Story" that disappear after 24 hours. If a user has an active story, a colorful rim will appear around their profile picture. The home feed depicts, at the top of the page, all the profile pictures of users who have active stories. Tapping on an indicated profile picture will show that user's picture(s) and/or video(s) (depending on how many "stories" the user has uploaded in the last 24 hours). The content can be viewed as many times as desired before it disappears. In addition, users can now "live stream" themselves and their experiences in real time via their Stories, a feature that was added later in 2016.

WHAT ARE REELS?

Instagram Reels, launched in August of 2020, are short videos 30-seconds or less and mimic the format of TikTok. Similar to TikTok, videos are consecutively shown and engagement algorithms can track how long the user watches, pauses, and re-watches a particular video to determine what kind of content is of interest. Short video platforms can result in a **rabbit-hole effect** directing teens to harmful content as shown by a **WSJ investigation of TikTok's algorithm**. Much of the content on Instagram Reels is directly copied and re-posted from the TikTok platform, as shown by the TikTok logo seen on many Reel videos. Reels are a quick and seemingly easy way for an account to "go viral" as videos posted publicly are randomly shown to users around the world. Talk to your teen about noticing what kind of content the Reels algorithm is repeatedly pushing them to view, and how they can proactively steer away from harmful and inappropriate topics.

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

WHY WOULD SOMEONE WANT TO POST TO THEIR STORY INSTEAD OF TO THEIR PROFILE?

Instagram was originally meant to be an app for instant photo and video sharing of immediately present moments (hence the prefix "insta-"). Over time, users instead began sharing photos outside of the present moment—photos of moments that had happened previously that were then edited. These photos were often initially captioned with the hashtag #latergram to designate to one's followers that it was not a true instagram.

However, this caption is now usually left off altogether, as users' profiles (and, as a result, Instagram itself) has become more about artistry, photography, and edited content. Users, generally speaking, no longer want to post those blurry, spontaneous, insta-photos.

However, Instagram's adaptation of Snapchat's Stories feature combats this and provides users with the means to post artistic, edited, more professional-looking photos to their profiles—photos which are more permanent in that they do not automatically disappear but, rather, can only be manually deleted—while maintaining the spontaneous, insta-sharing nature of the app. The Stories feature can be good in that it tends to promote authenticity, rather than the "highlight reel" nature of the regular, often highly edited posts. Talk to your teen about the false security that the "disappearing" content lends itself to and the need to be aware and cautious of what is said and done over live stream. (As an example, one Instagram influencer accidentally live-storied herself having sex with her boyfriend. What happens live cannot be taken back.)

WHAT'S A "FINSTA"?

Short for **"Fake Instagram,"** these are second (or third or fourth) accounts that teens have to either get away from the prying eyes of concerned adults OR to simply have a "pressure-free" account in which they're unconcerned about posting the perfect shot or getting lots of likes. While the latter reason is understandable, the former is what's concerning. Teens who have Finstas for this reason often want a place to post pictures they don't want their parents to see.

While many of us are quick to think that our kids would never do that, it doesn't hurt to ask. When doing so, simply be calm and ask if they have a Finsta. If they admit to it, gently move into questions about why they feel the need to have one, if you can see it, etc. If they say they don't, they may be telling the truth! Either way, make sure to remind them that they can tell you anything, that you're there for them, and that you want what's best for them.

WHY DO TEENS CARE SO MUCH ABOUT FOLLOWERS AND LIKES?

Largely (if not exclusively) because of hashtags, one of the primary focuses of using social media apps like Instagram has become self-promotion. It's the new way to build a brand and a business around one's passion. Some of the most recognized celebrities and influencers (like **Kim Kardashian,** for example) now exclusively advertise their products over social media. Beyond that, though, many everyday, average teens want to gain a following and become influencers. Why? It's validating, and it's the new fast track to fame and significance.

In essence, one's number of followers, likes, and views has to come to equate to one's social value. The more followers and likes, the more popular—and valuable—a person is. In fact, most Gen Zers **care less about being invited to parties** or having lots of friends at school and much, much more about their number of followers, their "Snap Scores" (see our **Parent's Guide to Snapchat** for more info), how many positive comments they get, etc. So if your teen happens to be obsessing over their numbers, this is likely why.

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

Developmentally this all makes sense. Teens are especially preoccupied with identity and ego based on their stage in life. It's not anything bad; in fact, it's age appropriate. They are learning who they are, what makes them unique, and what makes them special. But, if they continue to seek significance or validation from others instead of finding their inherent worth, their thirst for external significance will never be quenched. Talk to your teen about whether they see their social following as true reflection of who they are and their self-worth.

HOW DO LIKES AND COMMENTS EXPLOIT MY TEEN?

The validation of having someone else like or leave an encouraging comment on your content is a form of positive reinforcement, which releases serotonin. And the unpredictability of whether or not feedback will be positive is what makes social media addiction a real phenomenon. Shirley Cramer, Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Public Health **(RSPH),** says that "Social media has been described as more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol, and is now so entrenched in the lives of young people that it is no longer possible to ignore it when talking about young people's mental health issues."

Ironically, if a teen has a public account, chances are many of the comments he or she receives are posted by a "bot"—basically, an automation that goes on **"following, commenting, and liking sprees"** as a "rogue-marketing tactic meant to catch the attention of other Instagram users in hopes that they will follow or like the automated accounts in return."

Bob Gilbreath, Chief Executive of Ahalogy (a marketing technology company in Cincinnati), **explains:** "The follower count is really completely meaningless. It's untrustworthy for the true following, and it's certainly untrustworthy

for the quality of the creative work." Calder Wilson, a professional photographer, says, "When you have [a bot] coming in there and leaving fake comments like 'stunning photo' and 'stunning gallery' and there's no one behind it and then the likes—it's as if they hijacked that personal neuropathway in your brain."

For teens who are even more vulnerable to this type of "hijacking," getting more likes, comments, and followers can be exhilarating and validating. But the opposite is also true: When they don't receive the numbers they were hoping to receive on a post, they will often feel rejected, unloved, and unwanted. Many will remove posts if they don't perform as desired.

We can protect teens from this kind of false commenting simply by ensuring that their accounts are kept private and unable to be accessed by random accounts. HOWEVER, simply requiring that they keep their accounts private without any explanation will do us and them no good. We must help them understand why we require this, which means having loving conversations about validation, worth, fame, "friendship," comparison, and much more. If we skip the conversations, this will only serve to alienate them from us, and if they're determined enough, they will find ways around our rules.

To help protect teens from cyberbullying via comments (and this applies whether a teen has a private account or a public one), in December of last year Instagram rolled out a **tool** that allows users to block comments containing specific keywords, and a month later the company introduced a **feature** that allows users to disable comments completely on individual posts.

HOW DOES THE APP IMPACT MY TEEN'S MENTAL HEALTH?

The **#StatusOfMind** study, published in the U.K. by the RSPH's Young Health Movement, examined the positive and negative effects of social media platforms on young people's mental health. It revealed that Instagram is the worst app for young people's mental health. The 1,479 14- to 24-year-olds polled were asked to rate five different social media platforms—YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram—on 14 different issues, including anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep (quality and the amount of sleep), body image, bullying, and FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out). Instagram received the worst marks on every issue (the other social media platforms were ranked in the order given above, with YouTube being the most positive). Instagram was most positively rated on self-expression (the expression of your feelings, thoughts, and ideas) and self-identity (ability to define who you are). But, as previously discussed, conversations need to happen even around these "positively-rated" issues. However, Sir Simon Wessely, president of the U.K.'s Royal College of Psychiatrists, encourages educating young people about how to use social media platforms well, rather than demonizing social media. He says **"I am sure that social media plays a role in unhappiness, but it has as many benefits as it does negatives.** We need to teach children how to cope with all aspects of social media—good and bad—to prepare them for an increasingly digitized world. There is real danger in blaming the medium for the message" (emphasis added). Instagram and other social media platforms can also lure users into **comparison** (with other users by viewing their posts and content), which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and envy—commonly referred to as "Facebook Envy." Not coincidentally, the two worst-ranked platforms—Snapchat and Instagram—are both image-focused.

Hanna Krasnova, co-author of a study on Facebook and envy, says that "**A photo can very powerfully provoke immediate social comparison,** and that can trigger feelings of inferiority. If you see beautiful photos of your friend on Instagram, one way to compensate is to self-present with even better photos, and then your friend sees your photos and posts even better photos, and so on. Self-promotion triggers more self-promotion, and the world on social media gets further and further from reality" (emphasis added).

The #StatusOfMind study found this issue of comparison most prevalent among young women in regards to body image. The **author of the report** explains that Instagram draws young women into comparison by promoting "unrealistic, largely curated, filtered, and Photoshopped versions of reality." A hundred years ago, a young woman likely had only a small pool of others to compare herself to: those in her local community. Now young women are throwing their posts and self-images up against unlimited numbers of others.

HOW DO I TALK TO MY TEENS ABOUT COMPARISON AND BODY IMAGE?

There is now a trend gaining momentum to combat comparison and the unrealistic standards that young women have been attempting to attain for so long. The forerunners of this movement include **Tess Holliday, Lena Dunham,** and **Ashley Graham**—all celebrities and influencers with huge followings on Instagram. Phrases like "body love," "self love," "love yourself," and "love the skin you're in" are often attached to this movement. Tess Holliday, who is involved more in the online aspect

of it, calls it BoPo—short for "body positive." **Body Positivity** is ultimately about embracing the normalcy of all body types and characteristics, not just those traditionally labeled as beautiful, and about "opening the door" to those who have disabilities, disorders, and stereotypically un-beautiful appearances, in a way that "transcends language" and "is visual in nature." These influencers, as well as Claire Mysko, the Chief Executive of National Eating Disorders Association, encourage Instagram users to curate their feeds and online experiences to that end.

However, parents still play the most critical role in confirming our daughters' intrinsic worth through words of validation and affirmation. Young women may be less inclined to seek that validation from social media or be made insecure by what they're exposed to there if they are edified within the home. Pay attention to the accounts your teenage daughter follows and notice if there are accounts that have a disproportionate number of selfies, especially revealing ones. Ultimately, the Body Positivity movement fights a negative emphasis on physical appearance with a positive emphasis on physical appearance.

However, guiding teenage daughters into confidence and security in their physical appearance, helping them to recognize their intrinsic worth, and helping them grow their character will have an even deeper impact than any influencer-led movement could inspire.

CAN A USER ACCESS INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT ON THE APP?

Instagram desires to foster a positive environment and has strict **"community guidelines"** and policies against inappropriate and sexually explicit content. Public content is moderated by Instagram and can be reported as inappropriate by other users and subsequently removed by the company.

That being said, teens can quickly learn hashtags and secret emoji codes that will direct them to explicit content. Certain hashtags have been used for the illegal sale of drugs, and porn is often hidden under foreign language hashtags.

Instagram has combatted users' attempts to circumvent their policies regarding explicit content by implementing two different strategies: a "hard ban" and a "soft ban." A hard ban means that a **hashtag will return no results** (for example, searching for #porn yields no results), whereas a soft ban means that certain images will be prevented from appearing under a hashtag. Other content is viewable but with a warning and an option to get help. For example, searching the hashtag #thinspo (short for "thin inspiration," often used by young women struggling with eating disorders) will only return results for #healthinspo, while searching for #thinspiration will result in a pop-up that warns the user that he/she is searching a hashtag often linked with self-harm and allows him/her to choose to "See Posts Anyway" or "Get Support."

Luckily, **"Instagram's strict community guidelines** on nudity and aggressive band of content moderators mean that most of the really titillating stuff has a relatively short shelf life. The term 'Instaporn' has a double meaning: It's porn that's gone in an instant."

So although there is sexually explicit content on the app, Instagram typically makes it difficult enough to find and view the content that it's not worth the effort when it's so readily available elsewhere. A more legitimate reason for concern may be your teen being lured to follow an Instagram influencer's porn account on Snapchat, as well as the reality that sexually explicit content that can be privately shared between users via "disappearing" photos and videos.

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

IS IT BAD TO ASK TO BE FRIENDS WITH MY CHILD?

There's something to be said for interacting with your teen in this digital space--for some kids, connecting with them on Instagram could be the only way you can reach them or the way they prefer to communicate with you. But, it's a good idea to keep your online presence in balance— no need to comment on everything they post. Younger generations are all about authenticity, so using the app without understanding its nuances and etiquette could actually bother your teens more than help you reach them. And being connected with your child on Instagram doesn't mean you can see everything he/she does, so be aware of this limitation. If you're concerned about inappropriate online behavior or relationships, don't threaten to take the app away permanently. A good approach might be temporarily pausing app privileges and having conversations with them about your concerns until trust is restored.

HOW DO I DELETE AN APP OR AN ACCOUNT?

Simply erasing an app does not fully limit access to it. Here are instructions for **deleting the whole account.** But please be aware! Simply deleting the app from your child's device or deleting his/her account doesn't mean that he/she won't find ways to access it later. Many parents have mentioned that their teens simply login from a friend's phone or give their friends their login info so that their friends can use their account and keep connection going. Or they will simply use a friend's phone to create a new account, though they will lose their number of followers and have to start all over again, which could do more harm than good for their relationship with you. Having a conversation with them about why you think they're using it inappropriately or how it's harming them could be much more beneficial than simply reacting out of anger or fear and making them delete their account.

MY CHILD IS USING DM TO SEXT! NOW WHAT?!

First, wait 24 hours to address the issue. It can be a shock to discover your child doing something inappropriate or that you never thought he/she would do, but taking the time to calm down, and think rationally about the situation is worth it. It is important to let your child you are safe harbor so they will keep coming to you as a mentor and guide. Once you have your "I'm not shocked" face in place, address the situation by asking questions and understanding their perspective and motivations. From there, show your child why such behavior dishonors and disrespects others, and harms them. Often, teens engage in such behavior because of pressure to be like everyone else, to be "cool," or to keep guys interested in them. Usually they haven't taken the time to consider other outcomes of their behavior, so widening their perspective can help them see the action very differently. And finally, allow your teen to experience the consequences of his/her actions. Examples: Have him/her apologize to those impacted by the behavior, including other teens' parents. Pause social media privileges until trust has been reestablished. Don't allow devices into bedrooms or behind closed doors.

A FINAL WORD ON BOUNDARIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Instagram is a fun, powerful social media platform. As with any similar platform, there are many risks involved with allowing your child to be on it. But it's not inherently evil, and with the right guidance and wisdom from you, it can be a fun platform through which your child can connect with friends. Yet accountability is paramount in our tech-based world, and as the parent, you can establish good boundaries and practices that better protect your children.

ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

While there is no filter that is 100% fool proof, you might sleep better by downloading a software to monitor (to some extent) your teen's use of the app. (For some starter ideas, check out our **Filters + Settings Guide**.) Some of these services—like **Bark** and **Qustodio**--allow parents to monitor how much time teens spend on social media. This is important because, according to the #StatusOfMind study, "The report also found that it's not just what young people are engaging with on social media but also how long they are engaging with it. Young people who spend more than two hours per day connecting on social networking sites are more likely to report poor mental health, including psychological distress." Setting boundaries around how much time teens spend on different social media platforms can protect them against the addictive-nature of those platforms.

Another strategy is to turn off Instagram notifications so that teens do not feel compelled to enter the app every time they are notified of activity around their account. You might even discuss with your teen the benefits of occasionally taking a vacation from Instagram. Taking intermittent social media breaks is a way to create space in our lives to reprioritize and self-evaluate and to remind ourselves that social media apps can be useful tools, but they are not our source of life, value, identity, or joy. When you implement boundaries, help your children see that your motivation is to help them flourish and live their best life.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Smartphone Sanity
by David Eaton, Jeremiah Callihan and the Axis Team with Sarah Miles

Social Media Contract for Tweens
Very Well

Protect Young Minds
Very Well

Teen Online & Wireless Safety Survey

The Online Mom

The Challenges of Raising a Digital Native
TedX Talk

Acknowledging Teens' Perspectives Leads to Stronger Self-Worth, Less Depression
PsychCentral

Helping Your Teen Navigate Instagram Safely
Instagram