



PARENT'S QUICK-GUIDE TO

Instagram

What is Instagram?

Instagram is a social media app used to share photos, videos, and messages. With features like Stories, Feed, Live, Instagram TV, and messaging, teens use Instagram to celebrate big milestones, share everyday moments, keep in touch with friends and family, follow their favorite celebrities, and build communities of support and meet others who share their passions and interests.

Is there a minimum age for Instagram?

The minimum age is 13, in compliance with the U.S. Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. Although against the rules, some younger children deliberately enter an incorrect date of birth, often with a parent's permission. Instagram will delete underage accounts if they're notified and can't verify that the user is over 13. It's important for your teen to join using their correct birth date because Instagram has special safeguards for minors. For example, Instagram won't recommend public accounts of minors to adults, and adults can't message minors who don't follow them.

What are the risks?

The main things parents worry about are typical of all social media: mean behavior among peers, encountering—or creating—inappropriate or dangerous content, overuse, and of course, privacy. There is also the risk of users comparing themselves to others, which can impact their sense of well-being. 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](https://connectsafely.org/instagram) (ConnectSafely.org/Instagram).

Are there tools to protect privacy & safety on Instagram?

Yes. Teens can start by keeping or making their account private so that only people they approve can see and comment on their photos, videos, and posts. There are also tools to block people and report inappropriate posts, which we'll go into in more detail on the next page. In addition to banning people who have repeatedly broken its rules, Instagram now flags accounts with "potentially suspicious behavior" and prevents those accounts from interacting with young people's accounts.

Helping Your Teen Keep Perspective

Instagram often represents a highlight reel of someone's life. Some Instagram users spend a lot of effort making themselves look really good via make-up, lighting, wardrobe, and in some cases, even plastic surgery. Others go to great lengths to make their lives seem extra interesting or fun. It's important not to fall into the comparison trap. People rarely post about their sad or boring moments, but everyone has them. And encourage your teen not to compare themselves to others. Even professional models don't look that great most of the time.

More Advice for Safety & Well-Being on Instagram

Make or keep the account private. By default, accounts are private for teens under 16. If your teen's account isn't private they can (and in most cases should) make it private by going to their profile page (tap on the profile pic in the lower right) and **Settings > Privacy**. The slider will turn blue once the account is private. A private account means only people your teen accepts as followers can see or comment on their posts or send them messages.

Finsta: "Fake" but not sinister. Unlike Facebook, Instagram doesn't require people to use their real names, and they allow users to have up to 5 accounts, with the ability to switch between them. Some young people choose to create separate and more private accounts where they share posts that are relaxed and more "real" among a select group of friends. Although Finsta is slang for "fake" Instagram account, there is nothing sinister about it. You might want to ask your teen what they do to assure their privacy and then ask about Finsta.

Prioritize positive connections. Teens, especially younger teens, should only interact with people they know in real life and only accept followers they know. What and who people see on Instagram largely depends on who they follow and what content they search for. Controlling these aspects of an account—and connecting with others and searching for content in a mindful way—will have a big impact on anyone's experience on Instagram.

Manage privacy settings. There are lots of privacy settings to control who interacts with your teen and their content. Visit **Settings > Privacy** and look through the settings together. Your teen can decide who comments on their posts, tags them in photos (we recommend selecting **Manually Approve Tags**), sends them messages, sees their activity status (when they were last online), and more.

Block and report. Users can block anyone who is bothering them, such as sending them a lot of direct messages or trying to engage them in a creepy conversation. To block a user, go to their profile, tap the three dots, and **Block**. To report inappropriate content or anything that violates Instagram's Community Guidelines, go to the profile, tap on the three dots, and **Report**. Reporting is totally anonymous.

Track time spent on Instagram. Instagram has tools to help people manage time spent in the app. You can set daily reminders to get an alert when it's time for a break, mute notifications, and be notified when you're "all caught up" on what your friends and communities have posted. Access these controls at **Settings > Your Activity**. At the top, there's a dashboard showing the average time spent in Instagram on that device. Tap any bar to see the total time for a particular day.

About ConnectSafely

ConnectSafely is a Silicon Valley, California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to educating users of connected technology about safety, privacy and security. We publish research-based safety tips, parents' guidebooks, advice, news and commentary on all aspects of tech use and policy.