

Instagram parents' guide: everything you need to know about the photo-sharing platform



Most parents will need little introduction to **Instagram**: it's one of the most popular social media apps on the planet, so there's a good chance you use it yourself.

There's also a good chance your child uses it – or is badgering you to be allowed on it soon.

But even if you are a dedicated Instagrammer, you may not know everything about it – so here's our guide to helping your child have a safe, positive experience when using it.

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What is Instagram?

Instagram is a free photo- and video-sharing social media app owned by Facebook.

It's grown rapidly since its launch in 2010 and now has more than 1 billion active monthly users, of which 500 million use it every day – making it the second most popular social media app in the world.

Photo sharing was its main focus for much of its life and is still the biggest draw for many today. Users can post photos on their personal feed by taking a picture directly in the app or uploading one from their phone's photo album. They can then choose to apply filters and other photo-enhancing tools to customise the image.

You can also tag your friends, add your location and share the image on other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, if you choose. After that, you can add a caption and share with your followers – and there's also a direct messaging feature which allows you to share photos or posts with individual followers.

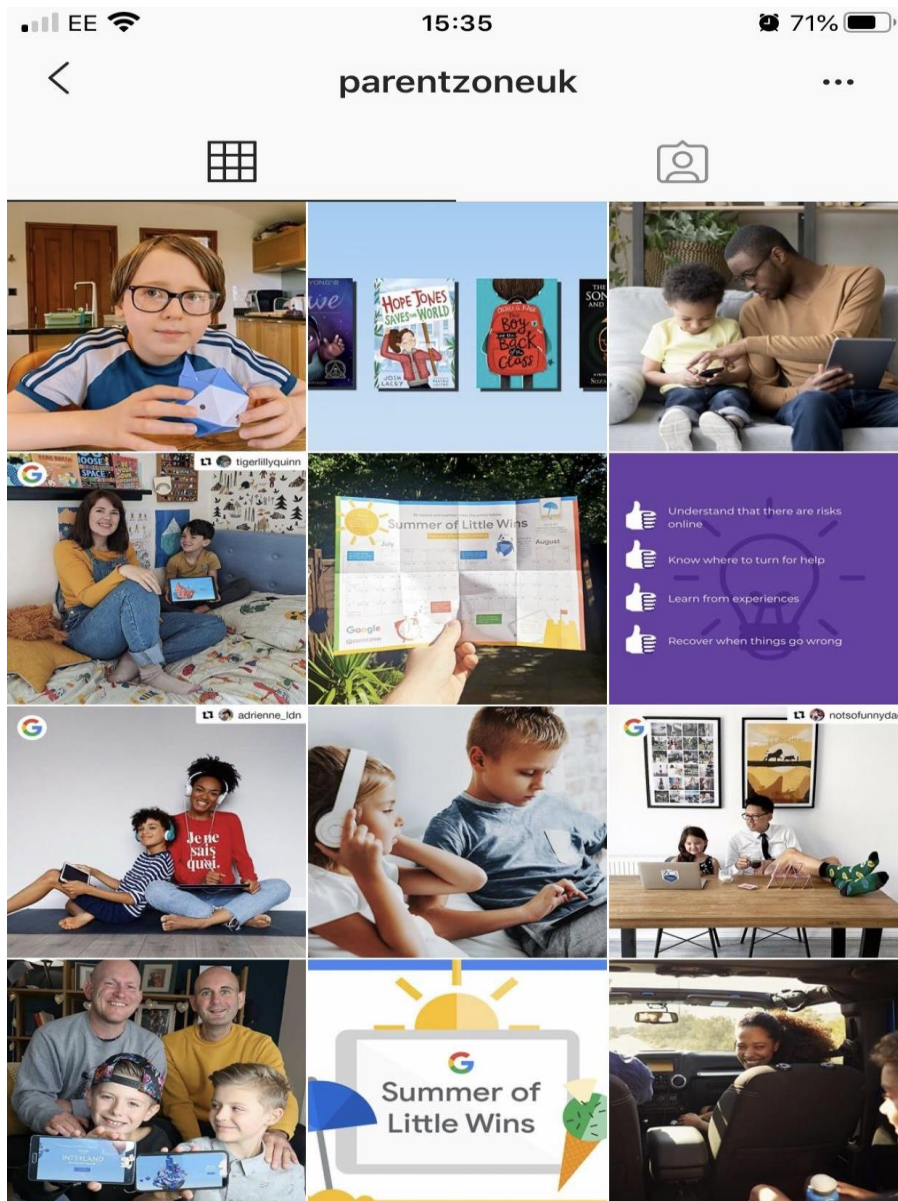
Though it made its name as an image-sharing platform, videos are now every bit as important – you can share them with followers, live stream yourself and watch others, including celebrities, on the IGTV platform. Instagram has also launched Reels, [a feature akin to TikTok](#), which allows you to record 15 second videos and add music.

It also has a massively popular time-limited Stories feature. These disappear after 24 hours and bear a striking resemblance to the similar feature on the rival app Snapchat.

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Why is Instagram so popular?

Instagram has skillfully positioned itself as the perfect place for people to showcase their lives – and to peek into the lives of others. Celebrities and influencers use it to project a glamorous image of their world and to give followers a glimpse of what it's like to be them. In recent years, it has also become a powerful tool for brands and advertisers to reach the public.

But even outside of the airbrushed celebrity world, Instagram has succeeded because people just really like sharing – and viewing – photos. Instagram makes that easy, and 95 million of them are shared on the platform every day.

It's also been quick to add new features when users demand them – with video and Stories being the two big ones.

Are there any age restrictions?

Children should be 13 years old before they can create an account – and any account that represents someone under the age of 13 has to clearly state in the bio that it is managed by a parent or manager.

However, Instagram doesn't require users to verify their age, just enter a birth date – so it would be easy for someone below the age of 13 to use the platform. Instagram's policy is to delete underage accounts if notified, but it does not actively seek them out.

Are there parental controls?

In short, no. Instagram says, “unfortunately we can't give [parents] access to the account or take any action on the account at your request”. It's therefore important to discuss the risks of Instagram with your child and make sure they know about responsible photo sharing and what they need to do if something goes wrong when using it.

Could my child see inappropriate content on Instagram?

Instagram does have a set of [community guidelines](#), and these forbid the posting of nude images. The guidelines also state that Instagram “is not a place to support or praise terrorism, organised crime, or hate groups”, among other things.

However, there's no way to filter content on Instagram beyond unfollowing people whose posts you don't want to see – so a 13-year-old using it could see exactly the same content as an adult.

Much of the content on Instagram is suitable for all ages, but with such a vast amount on offer, it is possible your child could see something inappropriate. Sexualised images, for instance, are common.

What other risks should parents be aware of?

Instagram has been accused of contributing to the rise in body image issues among young people. Celebrities post images that have been heavily edited, professionally styled and often retouched, giving an idea of beauty that is both unreal and unattainable for most people, while young people themselves can obsess over taking the perfect selfie.

However, there are some accounts that are striking out against this culture. For example, [@danaemercer](#), who has 1.5M followers, has dedicated her account to exposing the difference between 'insta vs reality' when it comes to body image.

What are the main features of Instagram?

Stories

In August 2016, Instagram launched Instagram Stories. This game-changing and massively popular feature allows users to take photos or videos which disappear after 24 hours.

Users can take photos and videos, apply filters and location geo-tags and then post them to their Story. Once the 24 hour period is over, Stories can be viewed by the user in their Archive.

Young people may think that because a Story only lasts for 24 hours, it's less permanent than other posts. However, there's nothing to stop someone else taking a screenshot of a Story, so they should still be certain that what they're sharing is something they are happy for others to see.

Live

Instagram Live is a feature within Instagram Stories that allows users to stream video to followers and engage with them in real time.

By default, Instagram will share your stream in public and allow messages from anyone. You can adjust this by tapping the settings icon in the upper right corner. Here, you can choose to hide your Story from particular Instagram users, as well as limiting message replies only to people you follow.

You can also turn message replies off altogether, if you're only interested in sharing your video and not getting responses from live viewers.

TV

IGTV is a feature for watching long-form, vertical video from Instagram creators. It gives users the opportunity to make videos longer than typical Instagram Stories and posts.

While there's a stand-alone IGTV app, you'll also be able to watch from within the main Instagram app.

Videos must be at least one minute long and can last for up to one hour. Instagram also allows you to add IGTV videos into a regular series.

Reels

Reels is a feature within the Instagram app which allows users to record 15 second videos in the app's Camera and add music. Users can then edit the video adding filters, captions, hashtags and changing the speed. They can use music from Instagram's library or upload their own.

Reels can then be shared publicly, and featured in the Explore tab - or kept private. For people who only want to share with their friends, Reels can be posted to your feed, added to your Story, or sent via direct messages.

Activity

In August 2018, Facebook and Instagram launched a feature that enables you to see just how much time you spend on their mobile apps.

You can do this on Instagram by going to Settings > Your Activity.

The feature gives you an overview of your usage for the previous seven days, as well as a daily average. It also gives you the option to set a daily reminder, enabling you to set time limits for yourself ranging from one minute to 12 hours. Once you've reached your limit you will be sent a notification, although this can be ignored.

It's all part of an effort by Facebook and Instagram to tackle social media over-usage. While it won't stop your child indulging excessively, it may help make them more aware of just how much time they are spending on these apps.

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Shop

Instagram now allows brands to market products directly to users. Simply tap on a Product Tag on a post or Story and you'll be whisked over to the brand's shop. From there, you can view the product on the brand's website, view other items from the shop, and save products.

Influencers

Due to Instagram's popularity, it is regularly used by companies and influencers for commercial purposes. An influencer is someone with a large following who is paid by a company to promote a product. Influencer marketing has become popular because it allows brands to reach their target audience in a way that feels far more genuine than traditional advertising, building on the loyal relationship between the influencer and their followers. In 2019, 87 per cent of users said that influencers have inspired them to make a purchase.

However, it is not always clear to Instagram users that they are seeing advertising. The Advertising Standards Authority has said that online ads, such as those on Instagram, should be "obviously recognisable" but that some users with big followings have broken the rules, by not making it clear they were being paid to promote the products they were posting about. Instagram created an official 'Paid partnership' tag, which sits above a post to inform users that a brand is collaborating with that influencer. However, it is important for your child to be aware of influencer marketing and to have a critical eye for it.

What steps can you take to keep your child safe when using Instagram?

Privacy settings




By default, content your child shares on Instagram can be seen by anyone, but accounts can be made private, so their photos and videos are seen only by approved followers. To do this tap the profile icon on the bottom right, then tap the settings symbol in the top right of your profile. Under Privacy, tap on Account privacy. If turned off, you can make your account private by toggling the switch to on.

Even if your posts are private, anyone can see your profile photo, username and bio. It may be worth having a discussion with your child about what is appropriate for them to say and show on their bio screen.







The Add Location feature allows users to specify where the photo they are posting was taken. Encourage your child to think carefully about whether this is something they really want people to know.

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Interactions

-  Comments >
-  Tags >
-  Mentions >
-  Story >
-  Activity status >

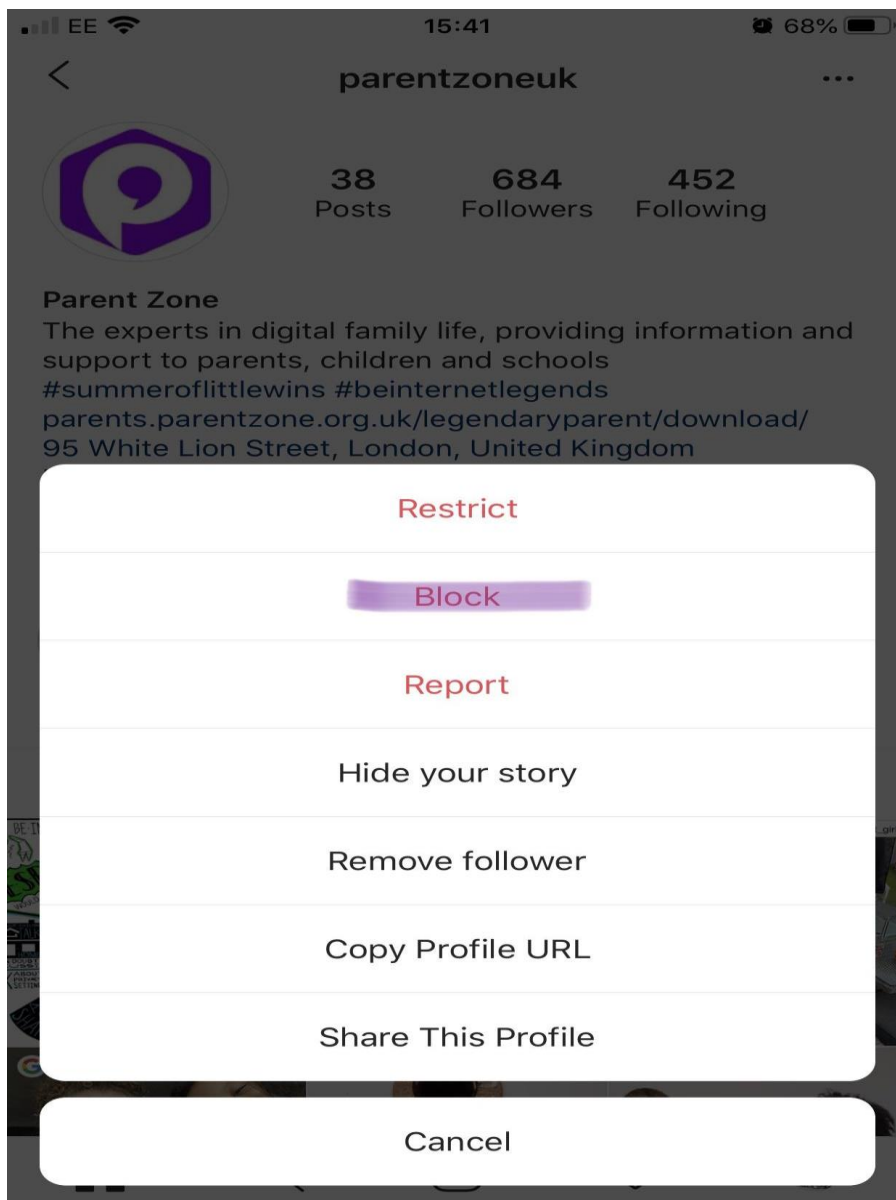
Connections

-  Account privacy Private >
-  Restricted accounts >
-  Blocked accounts >
-  Muted accounts >
-  Close friends >
-  Accounts you follow >

Blocking

If someone is harassing your child you can block them, so they can't tag, contact or mention them in comments. They also won't be able to see your child's profile or search for their account. To block a user, go to their profile and tap ... on the top right side, then select Block.

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You can also filter out comments. In the "Comment controls" section of the app settings, users can choose to: allow comments from everyone, people they follow and those people's followers, just the people they follow or their followers. Users can also remove comments entirely from their posts. Comment controls also allows users to hide comments that contain specific words or phrases.

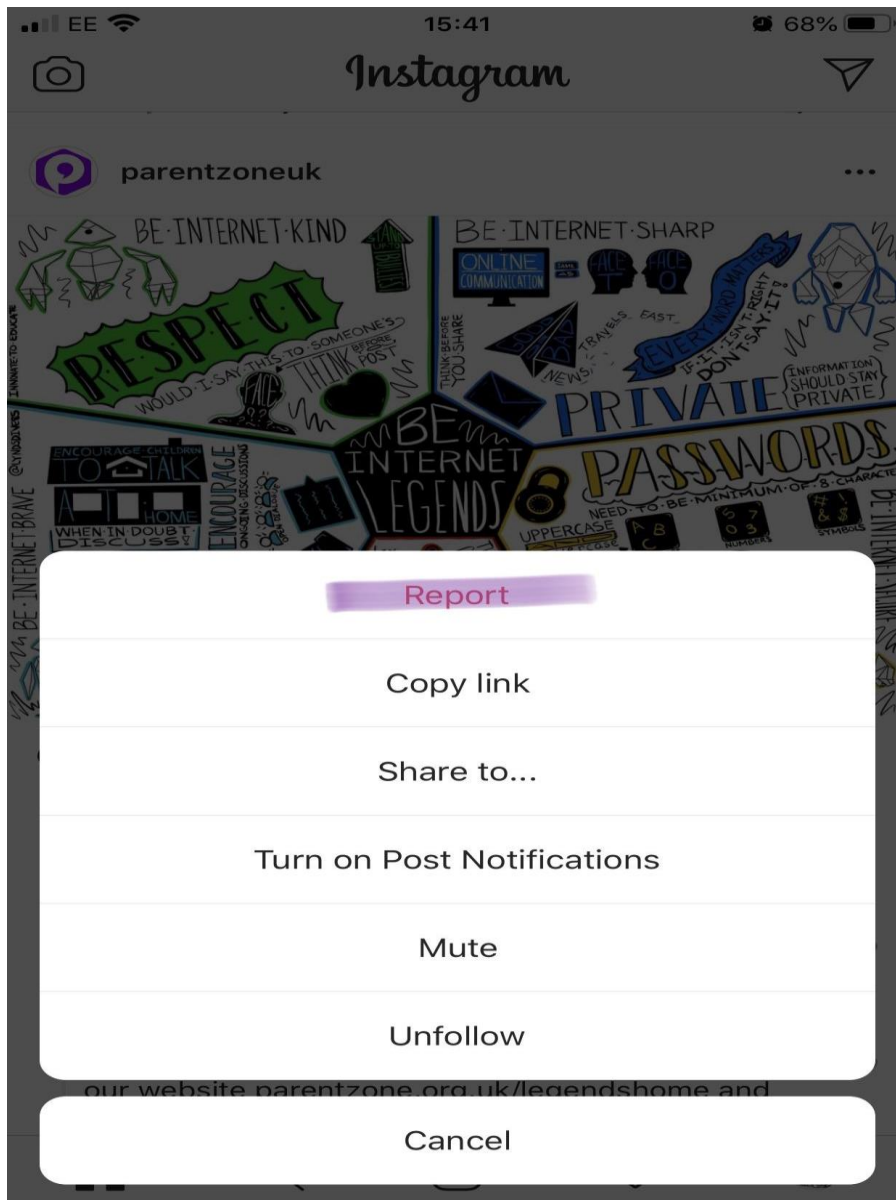
Reporting

You can report anyone who is not following Instagram's Community Guidelines and Terms of Use. Reasons for reporting a post falls under two categories: it is spam or it is inappropriate. Reporting is completely anonymous, so the person you report will not know that you have done so.

To report a photo/video:

Tap ... above the photo you'd like to report and then tap Report.

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To report a comment:

Tap Comment above the image, swipe left on the comment you'd like to report, tap ! and then choose Spam or Scam or Abusive Content

Having conversations

It's important to start a conversation about your child's instagram usage, so they understand the opportunities and implications of how they choose to use the app.

Some starter questions include:

- What are some of the things you think about before you post something on Instagram?

- Do you know all your followers?
- Have you ever felt uncomfortable about something you saw on Instagram?

Instagram: the Parent Zone verdict

Instagram plays a major role in the social lives of many young people.

It can help them stay in touch with friends, provide entertainment and, depending on who they follow and how they use it, introduce them to a world of creativity. Whether they have an interest in photography, nature, social affairs, fashion or virtually any other subject, they're sure to get plenty of inspiration from what they see.

However, as we've outlined above, it's not without risk. There's a reason why it's intended for age 13 and up – so if your child is using it before that age (with or without your permission), you should be aware of what those risks are.

Whatever your child's age, it's a good idea to talk to them about their use of the app and encourage them to talk to you about their time on it, in order to help them have the most positive experience on it.

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