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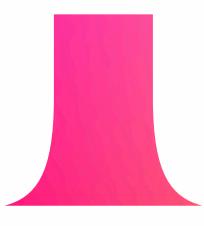# UNDERSTANDING INSTAGRAM:

A Guide for Parents and Guardians

TABLE
OF CONTENTS

TABLE
OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms among teenagers, offering a space for self-expression, connection, and exploration. While it provides opportunities for creativity and communication, it also presents risks, particularly for younger users who may not fully grasp the potential consequences of their online activities. As a parent, it's crucial to be informed and proactive in guiding your teen's Instagram experience. This eBook provides comprehensive tools, strategies, and conversation starters to help you ensure your teen's safety and well-being on Instagram.

CHAPTER ONE

Understanding Instagram and Its Impact on Teens

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS INSTAGRAM?

Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social networking service that allows users to share moments, follow friends, celebrities, and influencers, and explore content from around the world. It's a visually driven platform where users can post photos, videos, and Stories, interact through likes and comments, and engage with various content through hashtags and Explore pages. For teens, Instagram serves as a digital extension of their social life, making it important for parents to understand its features and the role it plays in their lives.

AGE RECOMMENDATIONS

While the legal minimum age for using Instagram is 13, experts recommend waiting until at least 16 before allowing teens to join social media platforms. The recommendation is based on the understanding that younger teens may lack the emotional maturity needed to handle the pressures and potential dangers of social media. Waiting until 16 can help ensure that teens are better equipped to navigate the complexities of online interactions.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TEEN MENTAL HEALTH

Research has shown a significant correlation between social media use and mental health issues among teens. Since the widespread adoption of smartphones and social media in the early 2010s, there has been a marked increase in rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide among teenagers. For instance, studies have found that the prevalence of major depressive disorders in teens has risen sharply since 2010, with girls being particularly affected. This chapter explores these trends and highlights the importance of mindful social media use.

CHAPTER TWO

Setting Up
Instagram Safely

CHAPTER 2

PRIVACY SETTINGS

Ensuring that your teen's Instagram account is private is the first step in safeguarding their online experience. A private account limits who can see your teen's posts, follow them, and interact with them. To set up privacy, have your teen go to their profile page, tap on the hamburger menu (three horizontal lines), scroll down to 'Account Privacy,' and ensure it is set to 'Private.' This setting significantly reduces the risk of unwanted interactions and exposure to harmful content.

FAMILY CENTER AND SUPERVISION TOOLS

Instagram's Family Center and Supervision Tools offer parents a way to monitor and manage their teen's activity on the platform.

These tools allow you to:

- View how much time your teen spends on Instagram
- Set daily time limits and scheduled breaks
- Receive insights about filed reports your teen chooses to share
- View and receive updates on what accounts your teen follows and the accounts that follow your teen
- See your teen's settings and be notified if a change is made to those settings

To set up these tools, both you and your child need Instagram accounts, and you must follow each other.

- **From your Instagram account, navigate to your profile**
- **Tap the menu icon**
- **Go to 'Settings and Privacy,'**
- **Select 'Supervision,' and follow the prompts to connect your child's account.**

Once set up, you'll be able to monitor their activity, manage settings, and receive notifications if changes are made.

While the Family Center is a valuable tool, it has limitations. For more comprehensive monitoring, consider logging into your child's Instagram account on your own device. This allows you to mirror their activity and receive real-time notifications of any direct messages or interactions.

LOGGING IN AS YOUR CHILD

To gain full transparency over what your teen is doing on Instagram, you can log into their account on your phone. This method allows you to see everything they see and receive the same notifications they do.

To do this, go to your profile page, tap on your username, select 'Add Instagram Account,' and input your teen's login information. Now, you can switch between your account and your teen's account by tapping on your username and selecting from the list of logged-in accounts. This step gives you a more hands-on approach to monitoring their Instagram use.

SETTING UP SUPERVISION TOOLS AND MANAGING SCREEN TIME

Once you have access to your teen's account, you can use Instagram's built-in supervision tools. This includes setting daily time limits (from 15 minutes to two hours or completely off) and scheduling breaks. For example, you might block Instagram usage during school hours (e.g., 8 AM to 3 PM).

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SETTING UP SUPERVISION TOOLS AND MANAGING SCREEN TIME

To do this:

- **Go to the main supervision screen.**
- **Tap on 'Manage Time Limits' to set the daily time limit.**
- **Tap on 'Edit' under 'Take a Break' to set start and end times for breaks.**

You can also monitor who your teen is following and who is following them by tapping on any accounts to review their content. This comprehensive setup ensures your teen has a safer experience on Instagram.

INSTAGRAM TEEN ACCOUNTS

Instagram has introduced Teen Accounts for all users under 18, providing extra protection and privacy settings. Every new Instagram user under 18 is automatically enrolled in a Teen Account, which includes:

- **Privacy and Content Restrictions:** Teen Accounts limit the visibility of sensitive content and enforce private accounts by default.
- **Messaging and Tagging Restrictions:** Only users teens follow can message them, tag them, or mention them in posts.
- **Enhanced Explore Options:** Teens can tailor their feeds to topics they enjoy, creating a safer and more personalized experience.
- **Parental Controls:** Parents can approve settings changes, set screen time limits, and monitor who their teen interacts with, supporting a healthier social media experience. Additionally, Instagram uses AI and age verification to prevent age circumvention, ensuring that Teen Accounts maintain consistent protections.

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CHAPTER THREE

Managing Interactions and Content on Instagram

CHAPTER 3

CONTROLLING WHO CAN INTERACT WITH YOUR TEEN

Instagram allows users to control who can send them direct messages (DMs), tag them in posts, and mention them in comments. It's important to help your teen manage these settings to prevent unwanted interactions.

To manage these settings:
- **Message Controls:**
  - Navigate to 'Settings > Messages and Story Replies > Message Controls.' Decide whether message requests go to the chat list, message request folder, or if they are disabled entirely. We recommend setting message requests to 'Don't Receive' for 'Others on Instagram.'
- **Group Chat Controls:**
  - Limit who can add your teen to groups to 'People You Follow.'
- **Tagging and Mentioning:**
  - In 'Settings > Tags and Mentions,' you can control who can tag or mention your teen on Instagram. We recommend setting tags to 'People You Follow' and mentions to 'Manually Approved Tags.'

SHARING STORIES WITH CLOSE FRIENDS

Instagram's Close Friends feature allows your teen to share Stories with a more selective audience, regardless of whether they have a private or public account.

To create a Close Friends list:
- **Go to 'Settings and Activity,' select 'Close Friends,' and add the desired accounts.**
- **Your teen can add or remove people from this list at any time without notifying those individuals.**

BLOCKING, MUTING, AND RESTRICTING ACCOUNTS

If your teen encounters unwanted interactions, Instagram provides options to block, mute, or restrict accounts:

- **Blocking Accounts: Tap the profile of the account you want to block, select the three dots in the top right corner, and choose 'Block.'**
- **Muting Accounts: Tap on the profile you want to mute, select 'Following,' and choose 'Mute.'**
- **Restricting Accounts: Go to the profile of the account you want to restrict, tap the three dots in the top right corner, and choose 'Restrict.' This ensures that comments from restricted users are only visible to them.**

REPORTING INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Your teen should know how to report content that violates Instagram's community guidelines.

To report a profile, post, or comment:
- **Tap the three dots (ellipsis) in the top right corner and select 'Report.'**

This process helps keep Instagram a safer place and teaches your teen the importance of taking action against harmful content.

CHAPTER FOUR

Promoting Healthy Instagram Use

CHAPTER 4

MANAGING LIKES AND COMMENTS

The number of likes and comments a post receives can significantly impact a teen's self-esteem. Instagram allows users to hide like counts and turn off comments on individual posts.

To do this:

- **Hide Like Counts: Tap on the three dots in the top right corner of a post, then tap on 'Hide Like Count.'**
- **Turn Off Comments: Tap on the three dots in the top right corner of a post, then tap on 'Turn Off Commenting.'**

Encourage your teen to use these features if they feel anxious or stressed about the number of likes and comments their posts receive.

FILTERING OFFENSIVE CONTENT

Instagram's Hidden Words feature allows users to automatically filter out offensive comments. This setting is on by default, but you can customize it further by adding specific words, phrases, or emojis that your teen finds offensive.

To set up Hidden Words:

- **Go to 'Account Settings > Hidden Words,' and toggle on all settings.**
- **Add custom words and phrases by tapping on 'Manage Custom Words and Phrases.'**

SETTING BOUNDARIES WITH QUIET MODE AND NOTIFICATION MANAGEMENT

To help your teen focus and set healthy boundaries, Instagram offers Quiet Mode, which mutes notifications, changes the profile's activity status, and sends auto-replies to DMs.

To activate:
- **Go to 'Settings > Notifications > Quiet Mode' and customize Quiet Mode hours to fit your teen's schedule.**

Additionally, the Pause All Notifications feature allows your teen to silence all Instagram notifications for a set period.

To enable:
- **Go to 'Settings > Notifications,' toggle on 'Pause All,' and choose a time limit.**

EDUCATING YOUR CHILD ABOUT HEALTHY SOCIAL MEDIA USE

A key part of promoting healthy Instagram use is educating your teen about responsible social media habits. As a parent, it's important to discuss the potential impacts of social media on mental health, privacy, and personal relationships. Engage your teen in conversations about the content they encounter and how it influences their self-image and interactions with others. This ongoing dialogue will help them make informed decisions and encourage a balanced approach to their online presence.

ENROLLING IN DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP COURSES

As parents and guardians, you can take a proactive step towards enhancing your children's digital literacy by enrolling them in our **Digital Citizenship** course. Tailored for students in **1st through 3rd grade** and **4th through 8th grade,** this program is specifically crafted to equip them with essential skills, providing a solid foundation to navigate the digital world responsibly.

By offering structured learning opportunities, this course supplements the ongoing dialogue at home, ensuring that children not only understand the theoretical aspects of online safety but also practice them in a practical, age-appropriate context. This comprehensive approach ensures their safety and fosters a positive online experience, helping them develop the skills they need to be responsible digital citizens.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Enhancing Safety
with OurPact

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION TO OURPACT

OurPact is an easy-to-use app designed to help parents manage their children's screen time and ensure their safety online. With OurPact, you can set up schedules to block screen time during school hours or bedtime, ensuring your kids stay focused when they need to. The app allows you to decide which apps your kids can access, making it simple to separate fun games from educational tools. You can also instantly block devices to prevent distractions whenever necessary and reward good behavior with extra screen time.

Additionally, the Family Locator feature helps you keep track of your kids' whereabouts, allowing you to coordinate pickups and receive alerts when they arrive at or leave certain locations. **OurPact** also blocks adult content and encourages healthy screen habits by setting time allowances, fostering a balanced digital environment. For added peace of mind, you can monitor your kids' online activities by taking remote screenshots, providing you with insights into their digital behavior.

OurPact makes it simple to create a safe and balanced digital environment for your children. Sign up **HERE** for a 14-day trial and receive 10% off an annual subscription.

SETTING UP AND USING OURPACT

Installing OurPact on your teen's device allows you to block inappropriate websites, set screen time limits, and monitor their device activity. One of the key features of OurPact is the "View" function, which takes periodic screenshots of your teen's device and analyzes them for any potentially harmful content. If the app detects concerning activity, it immediately alerts you. You can customize the screenshot intervals and even take screenshots on demand. This tool provides deeper insights into your teen's online behavior and helps you address any issues early on.

CHAPTER SIX

Open Communication: The Key to Safe Social Media Use

CHAPTER 6

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Starting a conversation about social media with your teen can sometimes be challenging. Here are some suggested conversation starters that can help:

1. "I noticed you've been using Instagram quite a bit lately. How do you feel social media impacts your mood and daily routine?"
2. "What are some positive and negative aspects of Instagram that you've noticed in your own experience?"
3. "How do you decide what to share on Instagram? Do you ever feel pressure to post certain types of content?"
4. "Do you think the time you spend on Instagram affects your schoolwork or other activities? How can we find a balance?"
5. "Are there any accounts or posts on Instagram that inspire you or make you feel good about yourself? Let's talk about why."
6. "What are your thoughts on privacy and safety while using Instagram? Are there any concerns you have?"
7. "Have you ever had a negative experience on Instagram, like cyberbullying or feeling left out? How did you handle it?"
8. "How can we ensure that social media doesn't interfere with our family time or face-to-face interactions?"
9. "Let's discuss setting some guidelines together for using Instagram. What do you think would be fair and reasonable?"
10. "Have you ever compared yourself to others on Instagram? How did it make you feel?"

These questions are designed to encourage reflection and open up dialogue about your teen's social media use.

WHY OPEN COMMUNICATION MATTERS

Maintaining open lines of communication with your teen is crucial in helping them navigate social media safely. By discussing their Instagram use regularly, you can stay informed about their online experiences and provide guidance when needed. It also helps build trust, making your teen more likely to come to you with concerns or questions.

ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES TOGETHER

Creating guidelines for Instagram use is most effective when both you and your teen are involved in the process. Discuss what you both think is fair and reasonable, and agree on rules that ensure a healthy balance between online activity and other responsibilities. Establishing clear expectations and consequences will help your teen make better decisions online.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Real-Life Scenarios and Practical Tips

CHAPTER 7

HANDLING PEER PRESSURE AND SOCIAL COMPARISON

Peer pressure and social comparison are common issues that teens face on Instagram. They may feel pressured to post certain types of content to gain likes or fit in with their peers, leading to feelings of inadequacy or low self-esteem. Encourage your teen to focus on their own achievements and well-being rather than comparing themselves to others. Remind them that what people post on Instagram often reflects a curated version of reality and not the full picture.

Practical Tips:
- **Encourage Self-Reflection:** Help your teen recognize when they feel pressured or compare themselves to others. Encourage them to take a step back and reflect on their feelings.
- **Promote Positive Self-Expression:** Suggest that your teen use Instagram to share content that genuinely reflects their interests and values, rather than what they think others want to see.

RECOGNIZING WARNING SIGNS

It's important to be aware of the warning signs that may indicate your teen is struggling with their Instagram use. These could include changes in mood, withdrawal from social activities, or a decline in academic performance. If your teen seems overly focused on Instagram, frequently checks their phone for likes or comments, or becomes anxious when not using the app, they may be experiencing social media-related stress.

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Practical Tips:

- **Monitor Changes in Behavior:** Pay attention to changes in your teen's behavior, such as increased irritability, anxiety, or isolation. These could be signs of social media stress.
- **Have Open Conversations:** Regularly check in with your teen about their Instagram use. Ask them how they feel about their time on the platform and if they've encountered any issues.
- **Encourage Healthy Habits:** Promote a balanced lifestyle by encouraging offline activities, such as sports, hobbies, or spending time with friends and family. This helps reduce the focus on social media and fosters a more well-rounded life.

DEALING WITH NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Negative experiences like cyberbullying, harassment, or feeling left out can significantly impact your teen's mental health. It's crucial to provide them with the tools and support to handle these situations effectively. Teach your teen how to block or mute harmful users, report inappropriate content, and seek help from trusted adults when necessary.

Practical Tips:

- **Empower Your Teen:** Teach your teen how to use Instagram's features to protect themselves, such as blocking, muting, and reporting users or content. Make sure they know they have control over who interacts with them.
- **Create a Supportive Environment:** Let your teen know they can come to you or another trusted adult if they encounter any negative experiences. Reinforce that they are not alone and that it's okay to ask for help.

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CONCLUSION

As a parent, your involvement in your teen's Instagram use is essential to ensuring their safety and well-being online. By setting up privacy controls, using supervision tools, and maintaining open communication, you can help your teen navigate social media in a healthy and positive way. Stay proactive, stay informed, and most importantly, stay connected with your teen.

For a deeper dive into ensuring your child's safety online, consider reading *"Parenting in the Digital World: A Step-by-Step Guide to Internet Safety (3rd Edition)" by Clayton Cranford*, the nation's leading law enforcement educator on social media and online safety for children and recipient of the National Bullying Prevention Award. This book answers parents' most important questions about making their children safe online and provides comprehensive strategies to protect them in the digital age.

With the tools, strategies, and resources provided in this eBook, alongside the insights from Parenting in the Digital World, you'll be well-equipped to create a balanced and secure online environment for your children. Together, we can ensure a safer digital world for the next generation.