A Quick Guide to
Instagram (for Parents)

What is Instagram?

Instagram (commonly abbreviated Insta) is a social network with a major emphasis on photo and video sharing via its mobile app. Instagram was acquired by Facebook in 2012 for US $1 billion.

The app allows its users to upload content that can be edited with filters and tracked with hashtags and geotags. Users follow one another within the app and are able to 'like', 'comment' and 'repost' amongst each other. Trending content often arises from posts with a significant amount of 'likes'. The most 'liked' photo on Instagram is a picture of an egg with 54 million likes, whilst the most followed account belongs to soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo who has over 259 million followers.

In terms of usage, Instagram is the third most popular social network choice for Gen X (40%), Millennials (61%), Gen Z (69%) and Generation Alpha (19%).[1]

Considerations for Parents

When Instagram was introduced in 2010 it was a basic social networking app where users could share images amongst their followers. Now owned by Facebook Instagram has more than 1 billion monthly active users and acts as a primary news, communication, retail and entertainment source for many, especially young people. With such overwhelming growth parents need to consider how to manage both their own use and that of their child. Parents should ensure they are safe, aware of what data they are making available, and able to manage the challenges that using Instagram can sometimes present, simultaneously respecting their young person's right to their own privacy.

Instagram is forever updating their features and policies. It is important that parents stay up-to-date with these updates, so that they can determine what the best practices are for upholding their child's rights, with particular reference to their right to privacy.

Instagram Age Rating as listed on the App Store:

– 12+

– Infrequent/Mild Profanity or Crude Humour

– Infrequent/Mild Sexual Content and Nudity

– Infrequent/Mild Alcohol, Tobacco or Drug Use or References

– Infrequent/Mild Mature/Suggestive Themes

App Privacy

The developer, Instagram Incorporated, states that the app's privacy practices may include handling of data as described below:

Data Linked to the user includes:

- Location
- Identifiers
- Sensitive Info
- Health and Fitness

- Contacts and Contact Info
- Purchases
- Search History
- Financial Info

- Browsing History
- Usage Data
- User Content
- Diagnostics

Data Used to Track a User

– Contact Info (Name, Physical Address, Email Address and Phone Number)

– Identifiers (User ID and Device ID aka face ID or fingerprint)

Photo by Julia M Cameron

Top ten tips to ensure your child's Instagram is child safe

1 ENABLE device-level parental controls

Instagram states that the social media app is intended for users who are 13 years and over, and has a 12+ App Store rating. If you have enabled 'Parental Controls' from Google and/or Apple the app will automatically be blocked on an underage child's device.

2 SET the account to private

Instagram accounts are automatically set to public. A public profile means that anyone can see the account's content or send private messages via the 'Direct Message' (DM) platform. Set the account to private in 'Account Privacy' so that you can support your child to approve or deny follower requests.

3 MANAGE unwanted interactions

You can show your child how to block users at any time, for any reason. Removing a follower will curtail that user's ability to send your child's account a direct message, while 'Blocking' will also stop them from interacting with or viewing your child's account content at all.

4 RESTRICT other accounts without them knowing

Sometimes young people aren't comfortable blocking or unfollowing someone because they feel it could lead to uncomfortable situations. 'Restrict mode' allows a user to protect their account from unwanted interactions without making the person concerned aware that they have been restricted. Once someone is restricted, comments made by that person will only be visible to them. Restricted people aren't able to see when your child is active on Instagram or when your child has read any direct messages they may have sent.

5 REMOVE images from Google search

Your child's Instagram images may appear in Google search results if you or they have logged into your account using a web viewer, which has been authorized to access their profile and images. These third-party sites have been created with Instagram's API (application program interface) but are not affiliated with Instagram directly.

Instagram suggests that if you don't want your or your child's photos or videos to appear on Google it is best to revoke access to the third-party website or set your child's account settings to private. However, it may take some time for these sites and Google to re-index and remove the images even if you do delete your or your child's account. You can also contact the app that's displaying your child's photographs on Google to expedite the process.

6 CHOOSE which notifications to receive

Instagram notifications can be very distracting and may increase the time your child spends on the app. You can turn off or limit notifications send to your child under 'Push Notifications'. Your child can also monitor and set a daily limit for the amount of time they spend on Instagram under the 'Your Activity' settings.

7 CONTROL the comment section

Whether an account is private or public, you and your child can decide who they want to allow to comment on their posts – or you can agree to restrict comments on posts altogether. Comment filters can also be used to block custom and offensive keywords. This option is found under 'Comment Controls'. Turning off '@ Mentions' will also restrict other accounts from mentioning your child's account in any form.

8 TURN OFF 'activity status'

People who follow or have direct conversations with an account can see when the account was last active on Instagram. To change the visibility of an accounts activity status turn off 'Show Activity Status' in 'Privacy'.

9 REPORT anything that violates Instagram guidelines

Anything that violets Instagram 'Community Guidelines' can be reported directly through the app. This can be content or a profile displaying self-injury, harassment, bullying, hate speech, nudity, copyright infringement or spam and can be done using the 'Report' button.

10 ACCESS account data

Instagram has a new feature where users can now 'Download Data' or 'Access Data' from their account. This includes detailed logging of dates and times when the account was switched from public to private, search history, logins, logouts, story responses and more. This can help a parent monitor their child's usage of an Instagram account, especially if chidren are using other family member's devices.

Considerations for parent's personal Instagram accounts

It is important to consider how you model use of social media and your account including content that you are sharing and how this could impact your child both now and in the future. These considerations must also be made when sharing content that includes other people's children.

- If you are posting images of children under 18 keep your account private.
- There is an option to 'Set a minimum' age for people who can view your content in 'Settings'
- Ask a child's permission before sharing any content and ensure they have informed consent.
- If your child follows you on Instagram consider the type of content that you are sharing and whether it sets a good example.

- Exercise healthy screen practices in front of your child eg limit your own screen time.
- Avoid setting up an account featuring your child as they develop, or if you do make sure they are aware that you're doing this and that you ask their permission before posting any images or content about them. Read the Sharenting Fact Sheet for information relating to best practice for parents using social media.

Read Instagram's 'Community Guidelines' and 'Platform Policy' for further information. App functions and settings are constantly evolving.

For further information download 'A Parent's Guide to Instagram' from Instagram: https://help.instagram.com/299484113584685

and visit the website for the Australian Government's e-SafetyCommissioner: https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/how-to/social-media-online-chat

Endnotes

1 Results are based on in-depth Roy Morgan Single Source interviews undertaken over a 6 month period from October 2019 to February 2020 with more than 25,000 Australians aged 14+ and 1,000 interviews with young Australians aged 6-13 years undertaken during the six months from July to December 2019.

Photo by Luke Porter