INSTAGRAM 101

Social Media 101

What is Instagram?
Instagram is a social media platform where users can share photos, videos and private messages.

Currently, its most-used feature is Stories: videos and photos shared to followers for just 24 hours before they disappear. Users can choose to share Stories to all followers or "close friends", a curated, usually smaller group of followers. It has recently released a feature where posts to the Instagram feed or "grid" can also be published just to close friends.

Instagram has some similarities to other social media platforms – Instagram Reels are similar to TikToks – quick, engaging videos. Disappearing messages sent through direct messages (DMs) are like Snapchats – users send photos or videos directly to others that they can only look at once before they vanish.

Many young people will have more than one Instagram profile – they may each be totally different from each other. This is very normal and not usually cause for alarm. Instagram allows individuals to have up to five accounts.

The home feed shows posts from people you follow and suggests content Instagram thinks you'll like. Instagram's explore feature, just below the search bar, is a personalised feed created by Instagram's algorithm sharing posts based on your Instagram activity and the activity of people you follow.

How can I see what's on Instagram?
While you can see some content on Instagram.com, Instagram is primarily an app – create an account and explore it on your phone or tablet.

What is the age limit for Instagram and what does this mean for how young people use the app?

Instagram is for users 13+, and says it requires users to verify their ages. Users who are 16 and under have their accounts set to private by default. Since May 2022, young people under 18 who sign up for Instagram have some default protections on their account – accounts they don't follow can't tag or mention them, or use their content in Reels remixes or guides. Adults over the age of 19 cannot private message users under 18 unless the young person already follows them.

When new users 16 and under sign up to Instagram, by default their account is set to see "less" sensitive content. Teens who have already signed up are prompted to adjust their account to this setting.

Users aged 13-17 are sent occasional wellbeing reminders to take a break from scrolling if they have this feature turned on (if they don't, Instagram will prompt them to turn this on). Instagram also reminds users in this age group to turn on quiet mode from 10pm.

What parental controls does Instagram have?

Instagram's Supervision tools can be set up between young people and a trusted adult. Both young people and adults can remove these tools at any time (and they're automatically removed once the young person turns 18).

With supervision, adults can set time limits for Instagram use, set breaks, see how much time their young person is using Instagram, see who their young person is following and who is following them and which accounts their young person has blocked. Adults can also look at privacy settings, sensitive content settings and DM settings.

Young people can see what their adults can see while supervising, and notify them if they have reported something on Instagram.

To set up Supervision, follow the instructions provided by Instagram. As young people grow into their teens, some of these features may feel intrusive. Think about whether you really need them or if there are alternative ways to ensure your young people use Instagram safely.
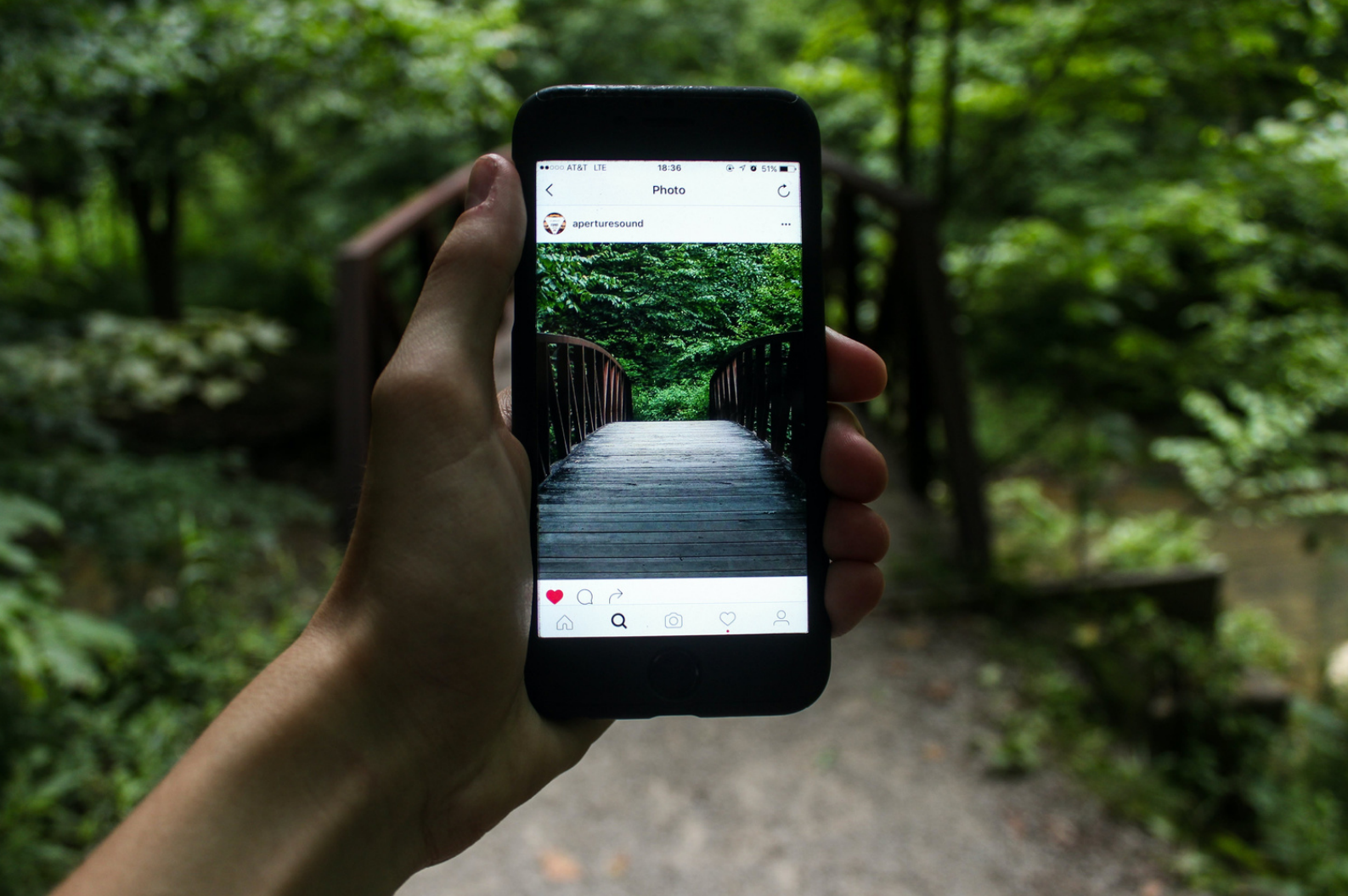
What other things do I need to be aware of to keep my young person safe on Instagram?
Get to know Instagram's privacy and account settings, and make sure you're both comfortable with the settings on your young person's account. Is their account public or private? Who can comment on it? Who can DM them? Who can add them to group chats? Are they in group chats with people they don't know? Make sure your young person knows how to block people (you can report all of an individual's accounts and future accounts they may set up) and report harmful content and behaviour.

Explore Instagram together, ask them what things they like about it, make sure you understand enough about the platform to judge whether they're safe on it and take action if they're not, and have fun together on it. Be there and stay involved with their online life, and make sure they know they can come to you if they're ever feeling uncomfortable or unsafe.

The Instagram algorithm is sending my young person content that is harmful or inappropriate. What can they do? They can:
- Reset their algorithm by:
  a. Clearing their search history – this will help to reset the Explore page and the suggested posts Instagram sends to their home feed.
  b. Tell Instagram what they're not interested in. Find the three dots (they're in different places on pictures vs Reels), tap them and then tap 'not interested' – tell Instagram why.
  c. Engage with content they do like (like, comment , react and share) – this will encourage the algorithm to show more of it.
- Report inappropriate content, messages or users to Instagram.
- Change their sensitive content controls
- Review who they're following – a quick way to clean up their feeds is to tap "Following" and then "Least Interacted With".