At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many issues which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about INSTAGRAM

AGE RATING 13+

Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms in the world, with over 1 billion users worldwide. The platform allows users to upload images and videos to their feed, create interactive 'stories', share live videos, exchange private messages or search, explore and follow other accounts they like – whilst at the same time continuously updating and adding new features to meet the needs of its users.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

ADDICTION

Many social media platforms are designed in a way to keep us engaged on them for as long as possible. There's a desire to scroll often/more in case we've missed something important or a fear of missing out. Instagram is no different and young people can easily lose track of time by aimlessly scrolling and watching videos posted by friends, acquaintances, influencers or even strangers.

PRODUCT TAGGING

Product tags allow users (particularly influencers who are sponsored to advertise products) to tag a product or business in their post. This tag takes viewers, regardless of age, directly to the product detail page on the shop where the item can be purchased and where children may be encouraged by influencers to purchase products they don't necessarily need.

EXCLUSION AND OSTRACISM

Young people are highly sensitive to ostracism. Feeling excluded can come in many forms such as: not receiving many 'likes', not being tagged, being unfriended, having a photo untagged, or not receiving a comment or reply to a message. Being excluded online hurts just as much as being excluded offline – with children potentially suffering lower moods, lower self-esteem, feeling as if they don't belong or undervalued.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Product tagging on Instagram only works on public accounts. If your child wants to share their clothing style, make-up etc and tag items in a post then they may be tempted to change their settings to public, which can leave their profile visible to strangers.

GOING LIVE

Live streaming on Instagram allows users to connect with friends and followers in real-time and comment on videos during broadcast. Risks increase if the account is public because anyone can watch and comment on their videos, including strangers. However, other risks include acting in ways they wouldn't normally or being exposed to inappropriate content or offensive language.

INFLUENCER CULTURE

Influencers can be paid thousands of pounds to promote a product, service, app and much more on social media – the posts can often be identified because they state they're a 'paid partnership'. Ofcom found that young people often attempt to copy-cat influencer behaviour for their own posts to gain likes, sometimes posting content which may not be age-appropriate.

UNREALISTIC IDEALS

Children compare themselves to what they see online in terms of how they look, dress, their body shape, or the experiences others are having. The constant scrolling and comparison of unrealistic ideals can lead to children feeling insecure about their own appearance, questioning how exciting their own lives are and having a fear of missing out.

Advice for Parents & Carers

HAVE OPEN DIALOGUE

Talk to your child about live videos and the risks involved and how they can do it safely with family and friends. Talk to them about ensuring they have safety settings on so only followers can view them live, and maybe help them prepare what they would say when they do go live.

REMOVE PAYMENT METHODS

If you're happy for your child to have a card associated with their Instagram account, we suggest adding a PIN which needs to be entered before making a payment. This can be added in the payment settings tab and will also help prevent unauthorised purchases.

USE MODERATORS

Instagram has launched 'live moderators' on Instagram live where creators can assign a moderator and give them the power to report comments, remove viewers and turn off comments for a viewer. It's recommended to keep devices in common spaces so that you are aware if they do go live or watch live streaming.

FAMILIARISE YOURSELF

Instagram is one social media app which has its safety features available to parents in a user-friendly manner. The document provides examples of conversation starters, managing privacy, managing comments, blocking and restricting and can be found on the Instagram website>community>parents.

FOLLOW INFLUENCERS

Following influencers will allow you to monitor what they're sharing as well as being able to discuss anything which you deem inappropriate. Talk to your child about who they follow and help them develop critical thinking skills about what the influencer is trying to do. For example, are they trying to sell a product by promoting it?

BE VIGILANT AND REASSURE

Talk to your child about the use of filters. While they can be fun to use they don't represent the real them. If you find your child continuously using a filter, ask them why and reassure them that they are beautiful without it to build up their feelings of self-worth. Discuss the fact that many images online are filtered and not everyone looks 'picture perfect' in real life, which can also lend itself to discuss what is real and not real online.

MANAGE LIKE COUNTS

Due to the impact on mental wellbeing, Instagram has allowed users to change the focus of their experiences online away from how many likes a post has by hiding the like counts. Users can hide like counts on all the posts in their feed as well as hiding the like counts on their own posts. This means others can't see how many likes you get. This can be done by going into settings > notifications > posts > likes > off

BALANCE YOUR TIME

Instagram now has an in-built activity dashboard that allows users to monitor and control how much time they spend on the app. Users can add a 'daily reminder' to set a limit on how much time they want to spend on Instagram, prompting them to consider if it's been too long with a 'take a break' message. There's also the option to mute notifications for a period of time. These features can help you have a conversation with your child about how much time they are spending on the app and to set healthy time limits.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant at BCyberAware. She has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety workshops and policies for schools in Australia and the UK. Claire has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviours of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

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Sources: https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/introducing-family-center-and-supervision-tools | https://about.instagram.com/en_US/blog | https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/introducing-family-center-and-supervision-tools | https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/introducing-reels-and-shop-tabs

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