What parents need to know about Instagram

HOOKED ON SCROLLING

Instagram revealed that young users spent a minimum of 32 minutes on the app per day. Many social media platforms, Instagram included, have been designed in a way to keep users engaged on them for as long as possible. Behavioral economist Nir Eyal calls this the ‘Hook Model’ and the Instagram feed is a great example of this. Children and adults may find themselves scrolling to try and get a dopamine release. Scrolling may become addictive and it can be difficult to stop scrolling until they find something they are looking for. Children may quickly lose track of time as they get deeper into their Instagram feed.

SLIDING INTO DM’S

Direct messages (or DM’s) on Instagram allow users to share posts, images, videos, voice messages and calls between each other privately (or in a private group). Even if your child’s account is set to private, anybody has the option to message them and send content. If the person is not on your child’s friends list, the message will still be sent to their inbox, but the user has to accept their request to see the message.

INFLUENCER CULTURE

Influencers are sometimes paid thousands of pounds to promote a product, service, app and much more on social media. When celebrities or influencers post such an advert, they should add a disclaimer somewhere in the post which states that they have been paid for it. Commonly, this is to avoid misleading the influencers in the hashtags or in the comments of their post, making it unclear that their photo/videos is actually an advert. This can be very misleading to young people who may be influenced by these influencers and may believe they are being genuine when in fact they are not. Dr Danielle Wagstaff, a psychology professor from Federation University Australia, said that social media and influential culture can sometimes lead to “a false sense of what everyone else is doing” and that “this can definitely have a negative affect on our mental health and well-being.”

DAMAGE TO CONFIDENCE, BODY IMAGE & MENTAL HEALTH

In a recent report by the NSPCC, Instagram was ranked the worst social media platform for teenagers. Photos on Instagram can set unrealistic expectations and create feelings of inadequacy for more ‘likes’ by using realistically edited photos. Judging themselves against the images and standards set for more ‘likes’ by using realistically edited photos. Judging themselves against the images and standards set by influencers online, children may struggle with their confidence or self-worth. In early 2019, Instagram boss Adam Mosseri promised to ban images of harm, following the suicide of 14-year-old Molly Russell, who had reportedly been looking at such material on the platform.

LIVE STREAMING TO STRANGERS

Live streaming on Instagram allows users to connect with friends and followers in real-time and creates a lot of broadcast, but this feature can be turned off. If your child’s account is private, only their approved followers can see their story. It’s important to note they may have accepted a friend request from someone they don’t know, which means they could be live streaming to strangers. Children also risk sharing content they later regret, which could be re-shared online for years to come. Public accounts allow anybody to view, so we suggest your child blocks followers they don’t know. In February 2019, the NSPCC demanded a crackdown on the ‘posted for self-regulation’ after it was revealed grooming and abuse via the app had more than tripled.

EXPUSING LOCATION

Public locations can be added to a user’s photos/videos and also to their stories. While this may seem like a good idea at the time, it can expose the location of your child. This is particularly more of a risk if it is on their story, as it is live time. Posting photos and videos is increasingly popular on Instagram, but with little to no privacy settings, it can be risky. A post which includes landmarks in the area, their school uniform, street name and house can expose even the location of the photo uploaded to Instagram for someone to expose the child’s location, making it easy to locate them. If your account is not set to private, anyone can access their account and see their location.

HGACKED HASHTAGS

Like Twitter, hashtags are also an extremely prominent tool in Instagram and with that comes the dangers for your child. One person may use a seemingly innocent hashtag with one particular thing in mind, and before you know it, hundreds of people could be using the same hashtag for something inappropriate or dangerous that your child certainly shouldn’t be exposed to.

IN-APP PAYMENTS

Instagram allows payments for products directly through the app, it operates under the same rules as Facebook Payments, which state that if you are under the age of 18, you can only use this feature with the involvement of a parent or guardian.

DON’T FORGET TO BE VIGILANT & TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR ONLINE ACTIVITIES!

Top Tips for Parents

RESTRICT DIRECT MESSAGES

If your child receives a message from somebody they do not know, encourage them not to accept the message request and ‘block’ this person; this is the only way to stop them messaging your child again.

LOOK OUT FOR #ADS

In January 2019, the UK’s Competition and Markets Authority launched an investigation into celebrities who were posting adverts on social media and not declaring that they were paid for it. Influencers must clearly state that they have been paid for their posts, for example a hashtag like #ad or #sponsored. Teach your child to look out for the signs of a paid post/advert and discuss with them not that everything they see from celebrities is their personal choice and opinion.

REMOVE PAYMENT METHODS

If you are happy for your child to have a card associated with their Instagram account, we advise adding a PIN which needs to be entered before making a payment; this will also help prevent unauthorized purchases. This can be added in the payment settings tab.

SCROLLING

Instagram added a ‘You’ve completely caught up’ message in late 2020. This message will not show you when you are up to date and there are no more new posts from followers. This feature is enabled automatically, some as young as 5, took place in 18 months. In January 2021, Instagram revealed that young users spent a minimum of 32 minutes on the app per day. Many social media platforms, Instagram included, have been designed in a way to keep users engaged on them for as long as possible. Behavioral economist Nir Eyal calls this the ‘Hook Model’ and the Instagram feed is a great example of this. Children and adults may find themselves scrolling to try and get a dopamine release. Scrolling may become addictive and it can be difficult to stop scrolling until they find something they are looking for. Children may quickly lose track of time as they get deeper into their Instagram feed. The app has additional features like an ‘Explore Page’, which contains videos and images tailored to the user based on accounts and hashtags they follow.

FILTER INAPPROPRIATE COMMENTS

Instagram has an anti-bullying filter, which hides comments relating to a person’s appearance or character, as well as threats to a person’s wellbeing or health. The filter will also alert Instagram to repeated problems so they can take action against the user if necessary. This is an automatic filter, it can be turned off. Make sure it is turned on in the app’s settings.

TURN OFF SHARING

Even though this feature will not stop people from taking screenshots, it will stop others from Instagram directly sharing images from a story as a message to another user. This feature can be turned off in the settings. We also recommend turning off the feature which automatically shares photos and videos from a story to a Facebook account.

www.nationalonlinesafety.com Twitter: @natonlinesafety Facebook: NationalOnlineSafety

Users of this guide do so at their own discretion. No liability is entered into.