Instagram – Is It Okay for Kids? What Parents Need to Know

In many ways, and without reinventing the wheel, Instagram is changing the way people share photos with each other. The mobile app, which is only available on the iPhone, is steadily growing in popularity among the kid and teen crowds, causing parents to take notice and ask, what exactly is Instagram, and is there anything I should be worried about?

Just like with any social sharing application, there are a few things parents need to know about Instagram and how their teen may be using it, so the Yoursphere for Parents editorial team did the research. But first, what is Instagram?

What Is Instagram?

Instagram is a photo sharing mobile app that's (currently) only available on the iPhone and iPod Touch. Users can either upload a photo from their device's library or take a photo right then and there and use Instagram to change the way the photo looks.

The user then has the option to simultaneously upload this photo to a number of social networks, including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Foursquare, depending on which ones they sync to their Instagram account. The photo will also be uploaded to the Instagram community where people can like and comment on it.

In many ways, Instagram is a photo-sharing social network on its own. Users have a profile with the option to fill out information such as first and last name, username, birthday, gender, bio, email address and phone number. Popular photos from all over the world are shared under the "Popular" tab, and every user has the option to follow other Instagram users and vice versa.

The idea behind Instagram is simple, really. And they execute it so beautifully. But just like with any social sharing application, there are some privacy and concerning content issues that can ruin the Instagram experience for a family with kids and younger teens.

What Parents Need To Know

Privacy

The only information required when signing up for Instagram is an email address and desired username. Though they ask for a phone number, it's very clear during sign up that this is optional, so please consider your privacy or your teen's privacy before entering a phone number here.

The single most important thing to realize is that, by default, anyone can view the photos that you upload to Instagram. In other words, your profile and your photos are publicly viewable unless you tell it otherwise.

If you only want your followers to see your photos, then you need to set your profile to private by following these steps:

Go to your profile page (tap the Profile tab)

Scroll down to the bottom of the Profile page, where you'll see a "Photos are private" switch

Toggle the "Photos are private" switch to ON to turn on privacy.

Once you set your profile to private, anyone who wants to see your photos will need to be your friend/follower first, meaning they'll have to send a request and you'll have to approve.

Geotagging

During the process of uploading a photo, the geo-location data of the photo you're uploading can easily be shared with your followers if you're not careful. Fortunately, Instagram turns geotagging off by default, but it's easy to accidently turn it on.

When uploading a photo, be sure to avoid tapping the button shown in this screenshot. If you do, you can always tap it again to turn it off. This is just something to be aware of as geotagging is a huge risk to you and your teen's privacy online. You can learn more about how geotagging works, here.

Age-Appropriateness

Instagram is not for children under the age of 13, and in my opinion, not suitable for slightly older teens, either. If you're 12 years old, there isn't even a 1999 year to choose when signing up. Instagram has strict Terms of Use and Community Guidelines that make their age requirement clear. Also, there's an obvious connection between Instagram and other adult-intended social networks like Facebook and Twitter.

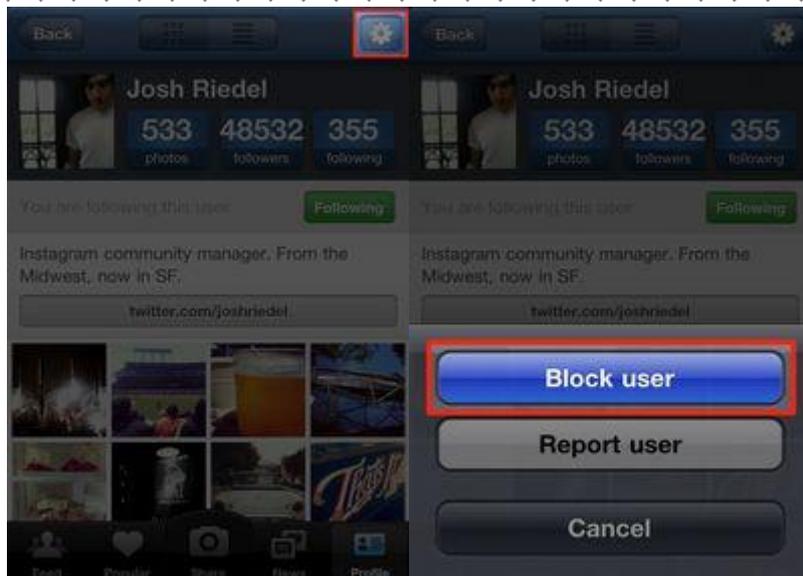Blocking and Reporting Users and Content

While there are tools for reporting/blocking users and inappropriate content, know that people will, and do upload nude photos. In fact, the editorial team found a multitude of bestiality photos in less than one minute when searching for friends. It's a sad fact, and another commonsense reason that you shouldn't allow your children to use Instagram. If you are an Instagram user, they provide easy-to-use tools to block or report someone. The steps below show you how:

Blocking a user –

Navigate to their profile page (tap Profile > Search Instagram > Names and usernames, then search for and tap on their username).

Tap the button in the top right corner of the screen (gear icon).

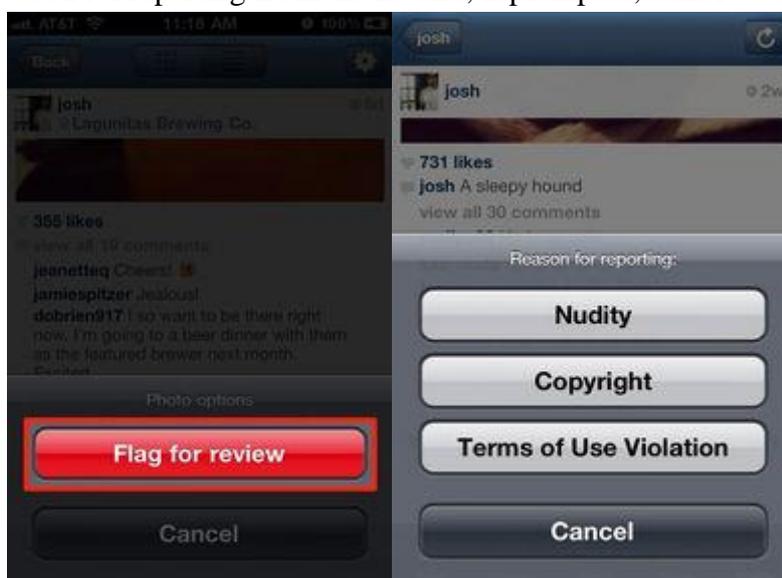Tap "Block user" to prevent the user from viewing your account.

The same steps can be followed to report a user, in addition to giving a reason why you're reporting them.

Reporting a photo –
Tap the "…" below the photo you would like to report and then "Flag for review"
Select the proper reason for reporting from the list and, if prompted, a short description.

NOTE: All flags are anonymous and go directly to Instagram.