# YOUR KIDS & INSTAGRAM YOUTH
## What your family needs to know

Children experience incredible growth in the elementary and middle school years. Kids need to find meaningful outlets for self-expression and connection with their peers. So, when Facebook announced that they were going to create an Instagram for kids, a kid-centered version of the popular app for children as young as 8, we immediately asked, "Will this be good for kids' development?" The short answer is definitely not! Even though Facebook promises that the new version would have better parental controls and more kid-friendly content, Instagram Youth will not be created with children and their psychological development in mind. Instead, it will put them at risk.

**This isn't a guide for how to use the proposed platform safely.** In fact, the best thing to do for your child will be not to use Instagram Youth! Below we outline why and how you can join the movement to Stop Instagram for Kids.

### But my kid already uses Instagram. Isn't this better?

Instagram, like most social media platforms, is restricted to people 13+. You might think that is because Facebook and other social media companies want to protect younger children. In reality it's because the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) sets strict limits on collecting data from kids under 13, and the way Instagram and other sites use data violates the law if a child is under 13. But 81% of parents surveyed in a National PTA study said their children started using social media between the ages of 8 and 13.[1] In order to do so, these children must have lied about their age at registration, and by declaring that only people 13 and older use the platform, Instagram avoids having to comply with COPPA.

Facebook claims that an Instagram designed specifically for kids will keep them from lying their way onto the adult version of Instagram. But there's no evidence to suggest that children who are currently lying about their age would transition to a kids' site they are likely to view as babyish. In fact, kids have said they "wouldn't even be interested in downloading an Instagram Youth if it was available."[2] The most likely audience for Instagram Youth is young children who do not already have an Instagram; in other words, it isn't about protecting kids – it's about increasing use of Instagram!

> We all know social media — especially Instagram — allows us control over what we share with the outside world. Many of us prefer to show our "best light" and/or a "filtered" version of our life. When children see this version of life and then compare it to their own, it often creates feelings of anger, frustration, resentment, depression, and stress they don't know how to emotionally process on their own. It doesn't matter if you explain to them "it's all fake," because the part of their brain needed to fully comprehend and understand this concept isn't fully developed until around the age 21-25.
>
> -Bethany Cook, Clinical Psychologist[10]

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## But I want my child to have meaningful social connections.

The term "social media" is deceptive. Instagram relies on interactions that are transactional – you show me a picture, I'll give you a like. They are restrictive and can deeply impact children's self-esteem and creativity.

Psychologist Teodora Pavkovic notes, "These aren't ways of being *social*; these are ways of following a user's manual for a product. A product that happens to involve other people." Pavkovic, in her recent Medium article (which we recommend reading in full) outlines **6 psychology-informed reasons that children should not use social media**[3] They are:



- **Being watched and watching:** The "always on" reality of social media means that children become hyper-aware of themselves and others in a time when their identity is really developing. Children can become anxious and hypervigilant about their online identity as they watch and are watched by others.

- **Constant social comparisons:** When children watch others, they are likely to follow others' rules for how to be (instead of their own), which can not only impact their own identities, but also cause feelings of self-doubt, self-harm, and FOMO, or "fear-of-missing out." As kids follow the trends of older youth, this can also lead to sexualization of even the youngest children.

- **The currency of self-esteem:** On social media, the currency is likes and attention, not effort and skills. When we fail to emphasize the process by which kids learn and explore the world around them, we fail to really see them. On Instagram, kids exchange virtual attention for edited versions of themselves. This emphasizes that their self worth is quantifiable in the form of likes.

- **Self-augmentation:** Filters and editing are very popular on Instagram. When we allow young children who are not yet comfortable with their bodies to constantly edit themselves to look more "beautiful," more "socially acceptable," what message are they getting?

- **Thinking inside the box:** The elementary and middle school years are times for kids to figure out how to express themselves. Offline, creativity blossoms and children find their "thing." Social media platforms, however, place constraints on children's creativity; instead of helping children discover new interests or find enriching content, algorithms serve the content that is most likely to keep kids scrolling on their platforms.

- **Parasocial relationships**: A parasocial relationship is one that is one-sided, like a preschooler's love of Elmo; Elmo will never love them back. On Instagram, kids form para-social connections with one another, without real friendship; these are relationships built on likes and appearance. "Kids need all of the immediacy and messiness of real life friendships in order to develop vital social-emotional pathways in their brains," says Pavkovic.
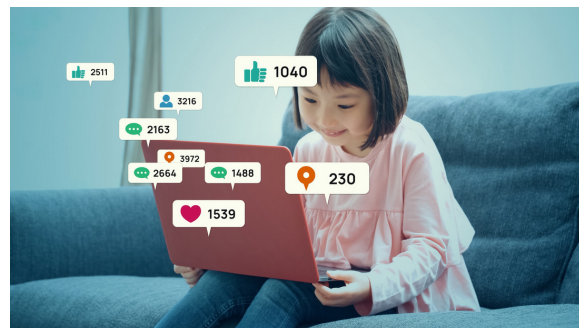
"Now, what does that mean, exactly, a 7 year-old 'keeping up with their friends'? What is it that one 7 year old is doing that another 7 year-old should be 'keeping up with' on a regular basis?," asks Pavkovic. In the age of remote connection, video calls, written notes, and drawings are a much better way for children to build relationships as needed, not social media.

## But won't Instagram Youth be safer for my kid?

There is no evidence to suggest that Facebook is going to adequately protect your child's identity and well-being on Instagram Youth. In addition to the social harms it enables, Instagram is driven by algorithms that predict what will be most appealing (not healthiest!) to your child. And young children are highly persuadable by algorithmic prediction of what they might click on next. Instagram, like many social media platforms is specifically designed to keep kids on their devices for as long as possible. We know that kids need limited screen time, and we know that it's already hard enough to help your child strike the right balance. We don't need the apps themselves working against you, too!

One in every three posts on Instagram is an advertisement. Worse, in addition to formal advertisements, undisclosed sponsored posts and influencers are rampant on the platform. Influencers are especially harmful to young kids who feel like they are watching their friends, when in reality they're being targeted by marketers.

While Facebook has said there will be no ads on Instagram Youth, they've said nothing about influencer marketing. A recent report by RESET Australia offered that Facebook already targets 13 to 18 year-olds who identify as "at risk" and pushes them toward behaviors like extreme weight loss, gambling, and drug use.[4] In 2017, Facebook was caught targeting kids who were feeling "worthless" with problematic ads.[5] And already, teenagers are speaking out. One respondent to RESET Australia's survey said, "It's horrible. Teenagers are being targeted in every aspect of their everyday life. They are also most vulnerable when seeing advertisements."[6]

Peer to peer cyberbullying is also frequent on these platforms, as well as sexual grooming by adults.[7,8] Outside of interpersonal threats directed to individual kids, children can learn and be exposed to racism, misogyny, homophobia, and bullying without the tools to deal with them. With 8 to 13 year-olds using Instagram, the possibility for this type of negative social interaction is extremely high. Experts call these platforms "the new classrooms for hate."[9]

We hope you can see what we see. An Instagram for kids isn't a better alternative to the existing Instagram. The business model relies on maximizing engagement and monetizing sensitive personal information. An Instagram for kids goes directly against children's right to privacy and their need for a wide variety of offline experiences and interactions.

## Okay, how can I help stop Instagram Youth?

Help us tell Facebook to stop building an Instagram for kids by sharing your concerns in your community and adding your name to the growing list of folks who want to stop this app in its tracks.

- Sign our petition.
- Share on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram.
- Email us with your story about how Instagram has impacted your family.
- Visit StopInstagramforKids.com to keep up with the action!

This resource was created by Fairplay, with inspiration and permission from psychologist, parenting coach & digital wellness consultant Teodora Pavkovic. Learn more about Teodora's work here: www.teopcoaching.com

## References

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