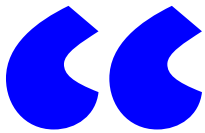


**SOCIAL MEDIA**

A Parent's Guide to  
**INSTAGRAM**

**axis**



We need to teach children how to cope with all aspects of social media—good and bad—to prepare them for an increasingly digitized world. There is real danger in blaming the medium for the message.

— Sir Simon Wessely

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**Contents**

This guide will help you discuss these questions... . . . . . 4

Introduction . . . . . 5

What is Instagram? . . . . . 5

How popular is Instagram? . . . . . 5

How does Instagram work? . . . . . 6

What are Instagram’s important features? . . . . . 7

What are hashtags? . . . . . 11

What is direct messaging? . . . . . 12

What are stories? . . . . . 13

Is Instagram art? . . . . . 14

What is a “Finsta”? . . . . . 15

Why do teens care about likes and followers? . . . . . 16

How do likes and comments affect my teen? . . . . . 17

How does Instagram impact mental health? . . . . . 19

How do I talk to my teen about comparison? . . . . . 21

Is there inappropriate content on Instagram? . . . . . 23

How do I talk to my teens about Instagram? . . . . . 25

A Parent's Guide to  
**INSTAGRAM**

**This guide will help you discuss these questions...**

- What is Instagram?
- Is it healthy?
- What is Instagram used for?
- How does Instagram contribute to body image and comparison issues?
- How does Instagram affect our mental health?
- What are some of the dangers of Instagram?
- How can we use Instagram in a God-honoring way?

## Introduction

Though much younger than its predecessors, Instagram has become a social media behemoth through its simplicity, ease of use, and focus on imagery. Along with Snapchat, it's considered by many teens as a nonnegotiable in their arsenal of online profiles. So what's the good, bad, and ugly of the app? Let's look at how the app is changing us, both for better and worse.

## What is Instagram?

Instagram is a free photo-sharing mobile app that was launched in 2010 to inspire creativity through visual storytelling. It quickly gained traction and now has over [1 billion monthly active users](#), ranging from celebrities to "influencers" (those with large social media followings) to brands to your average person. Since Facebook bought the company in 2012 for \$1 billion, Instagram's growth rate has exponentially increased: it now adds some 100 million users every [few months](#), and [over half](#) of its users use the app daily. Instagram's Stories feature, adapted from Snapchat, now has approximately 500 million daily active users, outpacing [the app it was adapted from](#).

## How popular is Instagram?

Instagram is most popular among people younger than 25, and those users spend on average more than 32 minutes a

day on the app. In addition, “statistics show that 20% of all Internet users are on Instagram, [and the] [Pew Research Center](#) found that 52% of teens say that Instagram is their favorite social networking site.”

## How does Instagram work?

At its most basic, the mobile app (for both iOS and Android) allows a user to take/upload a photo or video, choose whether or not to make edits to the file, add a caption, choose whether or not to share it to their other social media accounts (like Facebook and Twitter), and post it to their profile. Other users who have followed that user will see the post in their feeds and can choose to like (denoted by a heart), comment on, share, bookmark, or report it.

Beyond that, a user can now upload multiple photos or videos in a post, as well as create collages (using Instagram's app [Layout](#)). Photos/videos can also be edited and have filters applied within the app. Posts can be edited (only the captions, not the photo itself) or deleted at any point after posting. In addition, a user can tag another user in a post, which causes that post to appear in a tab on the other user's profile. Finally, a user can add his or her location to a post. (This feature is especially important to discuss with teens.) This article explains:

Teens can easily share the location of where they took the picture when they post. This setting allows a user to tag their picture to a particular address or location. If you click on that location once the post is up, the app brings

you to a map and a small dot that shows exactly where they were when they took the picture. We saw so many pictures that we were able to easily click on and even see the users' home location or their favorite coffee shop that they just might visit regularly. To ensure safety, follow these directions: Go to your teen's phone settings, select "Instagram," click on "location," [select "never."](#)

## What are Instagram's important features?

For those who have no familiarity with the app, Instagram has five distinct pages, or tabs: the home feed, the Explore tab, the Reels tab, a Shop tab, and a tab for your profile.

Users' profiles can be set to either private or public, and, much like other social networks, users can follow other profiles (if the profile is private, they must first be [approved by the user](#) before viewing any of their posts). To follow an account, locate the other user by searching for their name or "handle" (aka username; denoted by the @ symbol). For example, @AxisConnection leads to the Axis account. A profile includes the user's profile picture, any personal information the user shares in his or her bio ([limited to 150 characters](#)), number of followers, number followed by that account, and, most notably, all the photos/videos the user has posted or been tagged in.

## What Parents Need to Know

According to Instagram's [Terms of Use](#), the age requirement to use the service is 13. This is because of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), which establishes

that websites and online services cannot collect data on children under the age of 13 without parental consent. If someone younger than 13 joins Instagram by using a fake birth date during registration for the app, COPPA cannot protect them.

Just because your child is tech-savvy at the age of 10 doesn't necessarily mean that he or she is mature enough to use social media sites. It can be difficult for children to truly understand the impact of their online actions (or the impact of actions against them), which can be particularly harmful when it comes to cyberbullies, "trolls," and online predators.

Once your teen is legally old enough to join the service, it's a good idea to make sure their account is private rather than public and to discuss with your teen the issues surrounding [online safety and privacy](#). Teens often don't understand the permanence and potential repercussions of sending information out into the virtual world.

Other conversation topics: The fluidity of online identities. Online profiles make it easy and tempting to "reinvent" ourselves or to project a certain image or persona, even if it's not authentic. It's even common for users to juggle multiple Instagram accounts. There is a big difference between re-creating our image over social media and being transformed into the likeness of Christ—between the biblical concept of "taking off the old self and putting on the new" and projecting an identity via social media that might be a far cry from who we actually are and who God calls us to be.



The home feed is the tab where a user can scroll through all the photos/videos posted by accounts a user follows, as well as “sponsored” posts (i.e., ads). The profiles a user follows can be those of other individuals, impersonal accounts (e.g. @cats\_of\_instagram), or verified accounts of celebrities, influencers, and brands (indicated by a blue check mark).

## **What Parents Need to Know**

Although Instagram traded in Facebook’s “Friend” title for Twitter’s more ambiguous “Follower” as a way to refer to those with whom a user connects and interacts, it can be easy for teens to scroll through an Instagram home feed and feel as though they are truly connected to those they follow, to believe they have true insight into their lives, whether or not they have real-world interactions with them. However, it’s important to make teens aware that, just as they have the ability to project an inauthentic online image and persona, so do those they follow.

Instagram can be a good tool for connection on one level; however, teens also need to realize that they cannot replace their deep, God-given need for real-world community with virtual interactions, which can be a false and unfulfilling substitute. It’s simpler to settle for virtual interactions because they are cognitively and emotionally easier than real-world ones, but easier does not mean better, deeper, or more authentic.<sup>12</sup> Discuss with your teen how he or she can use Instagram as a way to supplement real-world relationships, instead of allowing the app to replace or diminish them.

More information about identity and community in regards to Instagram can be found below in the discussion about Instagram and mental health.

Instagram's Explore (i.e., search) tab was added in 2012. At the top of the tab is a search bar for finding other people and content by entering names, handles, hashtags, words, and phrases. (Note: The app does keep track of a user's search history, but it can [easily be cleared](#).) Below this, the Explore tab uses algorithms to show users a variety of curated content based on location, what's trending, and individual users' interests. This is not content from profiles the user follows; it's content that Instagram algorithmically suggests to the user. Among the thumbnails of photos and other videos, you'll also find videos from the Reels tab. Tapping on any one of them will take you to the Reels section of the Instagram app.

## **What Parents Need to Know**

The quote "Music may not tell you what to think, but it does tell you what to think about" can easily be applied to Instagram. But it may even go a step further, subliminally telling us what to like, as the author of this New York Times article writes:

Instagram's Explore feature provides curated randomness—a category that can exist only in an era of algorithms. The distance between what I like and what Instagram thinks I might like is oceanic, preposterous, deranged. And yet the algorithm is not wrong. I press the "like" button on a picture of my friend, and the Explore page shows me albino crocodiles. I comment on a cute

dog, and the Explore page offers circus contortionists. [Suddenly I like those things, too.](#)

Ads became part of the home feed in 2013. Unlike on Facebook, ads on Instagram are shown regardless of the user's interests, which complements the "curated randomness" of the Explore tab.

Other conversation topics: What does it mean to explore? Instagram defines exploration as something that happens on a screen. How is this different from exploring God's creation through real-world experiences, discovery, and adventures? How can we use Instagram to supplement and complement our real-world experiences, rather than letting it curb innovation and actual exploration?

## What are hashtags?

As with other social media apps, hashtags (i.e. "#" followed by words and/or numbers) have been an integral part of how Instagram operates since its inception. They are essentially a way to promote a photo, though they can also just be a way to add parenthetical humor (a post-workout photo might be captioned with "#mylegsarekillingme"). For example, captioning a photo with "#fitness" will link that photo to all the other content on the app with the same hashtag. Then when a user searches "#fitness" in the Explore tab (or by tapping on the hashtag when it appears below a photo or video), they are taken to a page with all the posts containing that hashtag.

There are many things to understand when it comes to

hashtags. For example, it's common practice for users to caption their content with the most popular hashtags (check out the top 100 at [top-hashtags.com/instagram/](https://top-hashtags.com/instagram/)) in order to gain viewership and followers. In addition, there are many hashtag trends, like hashtags for every day of the week. #mcm (Man-Crush Monday) is used to show affection for a significant other or a celebrity one likes (similar to #wcw—Woman-Crush Wednesday). Also, #tbt (Throwback Thursday) and #fbf (Flashback Friday) are paired with a photo from the past, even if that past is as recent as yesterday. Finally, users can now follow hashtags like they follow other users in order to be updated when new content is tagged with that hashtag.

## What is direct messaging?

It's Instagram's version of private messaging, which was launched in 2013 and is denoted by a paper airplane icon. Via Instagram Direct, users are able to send messages containing text, photos, videos, and/or others' posts to one or more users. Like Snapchat, photos and videos sent in this way can be set to disappear immediately after viewing.

It's important to note that users can receive direct messages (DMs) from users whom they have not allowed to follow their private account, and there are methods to save copies of self-destructing, "disappearing" content. In addition, Instagram Direct conversations can be erased.

Other conversation topics: The false security of "private"

online interactions; how to decline to view direct messages from [unknown users](#), as well as block and report them. (If you have access to your teen's direct messages and notice a lot of disappearing content, talk to them as to why they choose disappearing over permanent.)

## What are stories?

In 2016, Instagram added a Stories feature (adapted from Snapchat, like many of Instagram's features) to its app. This feature allows a user to upload videos and/or photos that disappear after 24 hours. If a user has an active story, a colorful rim will appear around their profile picture at the top of the home page. The home feed shows all the profile pictures of users with active stories. Tapping on one of these profile pictures will show that user's picture(s) and/or video(s) depending on how many Stories the user has uploaded in the last 24 hours. The content can be viewed as many times as desired before it disappears. In addition, users can now livestream themselves and their experiences in real time via their Stories, a feature that was added later in 2016.

## **Why would someone want to post to their Story instead of to their profile?**

Instagram was originally meant to be an app for instant photo and video sharing of immediately present moments (hence the prefix "insta-"). Over time, users instead began sharing photos outside of the present moment—photos of moments that had happened previously and were then

edited. Initially, these photos were often captioned with the hashtag #latergram to indicate that they were not true Instagrams. However, this caption is now usually left off altogether, as users' profiles (and, as a result, Instagram itself) has become more about artistry, photography, and edited content. Users, generally speaking, no longer want to post those blurry, spontaneous, insta-photos.

However, Instagram's adaptation of Snapchat's Stories feature combats this and provides users with the means to maintain the spontaneous, insta-sharing nature of the app, while still having the option to post artistic, edited, more professional-looking photos to their profiles—photos which are more permanent in that they do not automatically disappear but, rather, can only be manually deleted. The Stories feature tends to promote authenticity rather than the “highlight reel” nature of the regular, often highly edited posts.

Other conversation topics: The false security that the “disappearing” content lends itself to; how to keep personal information private and out of one's Story; the need to be aware and cautious of what is said and done over livestream. (As an example, one Instagram influencer accidentally livestreamed herself having sex with her boyfriend. What happens live cannot be taken back.)

## **Is Instagram art?**

For many, Instagram is a platform for artistic, creative expression. In her fascinating TED talk, Jia Jia Fei discusses

Instagram's impact on art standards and the entire art world. Art standards are becoming more relative and subjective. Now everyone is a photographer. Instagram, other social media sites/apps, and the Internet as a whole are also contributing to changing art standards by replacing museums as the art authority. Fei talks about how the way we experience art has changed through the digitization of images. However, she ends her presentation on a hopeful note by calling on museums to cross over into the digital space, reclaim their authority in the art world, and utilize apps like Instagram for engagement and education.

Conversation starter: Watch Fei's TED talk with your teen, then discuss the topics she covers and questions she poses during her presentation. How can we keep creativity and artistic expression via Instagram from becoming more about convenience than quality?

## What is a “Finsta”?

Short for “Fake Instagram,” these are second (or third or fourth) accounts that teens have either to get away from the prying eyes of concerned adults or simply to enjoy a “pressure-free” account in which they’re unconcerned about posting the perfect shot or getting [lots of likes](#). While the latter reason is understandable, the former is what’s concerning. Teens who have Finstas for this reason often want a place to post pictures they don’t want their parents to see.

While many of us are quick to think that our kids would



never do that, it doesn't hurt to ask. When doing so, simply be calm and ask if they have a Finsta. If they admit to it, gently move into questions about why they feel the need to have one, if you can see it, etc. If they say they don't, they may be telling the truth! Either way, make sure to remind them that they can tell you anything, that you're there for them, and that you want what's best for them.

## Why do teens care about likes and followers?

Largely (if not exclusively) because of hashtags, one of the primary focuses of using social media apps like Instagram has become self-promotion. It's the new way to build a brand and a business around one's passion. Some of the most recognized celebrities and influencers (like Kim Kardashian, for example) now exclusively advertise their products over social media. Beyond that, though, many regular teens want to gain a following and become influencers. Why? It's validating, and it's the new fast track to fame and significance.

In essence, one's number of followers, likes, and views has to come to equate to one's social value. The more followers and likes, the more popular—and valuable—a person is. In fact, most Gen Zers care less about being invited to parties or having lots of friends at school and much, much more about their number of followers, their "Snap Scores" (see our Parent's Guide to Snapchat for more info), how many positive comments they get, [etc.](#) So if your teen happens to be obsessing over their numbers, this is likely why.



Developmentally this all makes sense. Teens are especially preoccupied with identity and ego at this stage in their life. It's not anything bad; in fact, it's age appropriate. They are learning who they are, what makes them unique, and what makes them special. But if they continue to seek significance or validation from others instead of finding their inherent worth as Christ's beloved, their thirst for external significance will never be quenched.

Other conversation topics: What are your reasons for wanting an Instagram account? Could there be an element of self-promotion and/or validation? Or is there another, greater purpose? What would it look like to use your profile for positive influence? What do you think happens to a person when they are valued for their "numbers"? Do you think your social following is a true reflection of who you are and your value? How does this mentality line up with what God says about our worth and value?

## **How do likes and comments affect my teen?**

The validation of having someone else like or leave an encouraging comment on your content is a form of positive reinforcement, which releases serotonin. And the unpredictability of whether or not feedback will be positive is what makes social media addiction a real phenomenon. [Shirley Cramer](#), chief executive of the Royal Society of Public Health (RSPH), says, "Social media has been described as more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol, and is now so entrenched in the lives of young people that it is no longer

possible to ignore it when talking about young people's mental health issues."

Ironically, if a teen has a public account, chances are many of the comments he or she receives are posted by a "bot"—basically, [a program](#) that goes on "liking, following, and commenting sprees" as a "rogue marketing tactic meant to catch the attention of other Instagram users in hopes that they will follow or like the automated accounts in return."

Bob Gilbreath, chief executive of Ahalogy (a marketing technology company in Cincinnati), explains: "The follower count is really completely meaningless. It's untrustworthy for the true following, and it's certainly untrustworthy for the quality of the creative work." Calder Wilson, a professional photographer, says, "When you have [a bot] coming in there and leaving fake comments like 'stunning photo' and 'stunning gallery' and there's no one behind it and then the likes—it's as if they hijacked that personal neuro pathway in your brain."

For teens who are even more vulnerable to this type of "hijacking," getting more likes, comments, and followers can be exhilarating and validating. But the opposite is also true: when they don't receive the numbers they were hoping to get on a post, they will often feel rejected, unloved, and unwanted. Many will remove posts if they don't perform as desired.

We can protect teens from this kind of false commenting simply by ensuring that their accounts are kept private and are unable to be accessed by random accounts. However, simply requiring that our teens keep their accounts private

without any explanation will do us and them no good. We must help them understand why we require this, which means having loving conversations about validation, worth, fame, friendship, comparison, and much more. If we skip these conversations, this will only serve to alienate our kids, and if they're determined enough, they will find ways around our rules.

To help protect teens from cyberbullying via comments (and this applies whether a teen has a private account or a public one), Instagram rolled out a tool that allows users to block comments containing [specific keywords](#), and also introduced a feature that allows users to [disable comments](#) completely on individual posts.

## How does Instagram impact mental health?

A study called [#StatusOfMind](#), published in the UK by the RSPH's Young Health Movement, examined the positive and negative effects of social media platforms on the mental health of young people. It revealed that Instagram is the worst app for young people's mental health. The 1,479 14- to 24-year-olds polled were asked to rate five different social media platforms—YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram—on 14 different issues, including anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep (the quality and amount of sleep), body image, bullying, and FOMO (fear of missing out). Instagram received the worst marks on every issue. (The other social media platforms were ranked in the order given above, with YouTube being the most positive.)

Instagram was most positively rated on self-expression (the expression of your feelings, thoughts, and ideas) and self-identity (ability to define who you are). But, as previously discussed, conversations need to happen even around these “positively rated” issues.

Instagram and other social media platforms can also lure users into comparison (with other users by viewing their posts and content), which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and envy—commonly referred to as “Facebook envy.” Not coincidentally, the two worst-ranked platforms—Snapchat and Instagram—are both image-focused.

[Hanna Krasnova](#), coauthor of a study on Facebook and envy, says, “A photo can very powerfully provoke immediate social comparison, and that can trigger feelings of inferiority. . . . If you see beautiful photos of your friend on Instagram, one way to compensate is to self-present with even better photos, and then your friend sees your photos and posts even better photos, and so on. Self-promotion triggers more self-promotion, and the world on social media gets further and further from reality” (emphasis added).

The #StatusOfMind study found this issue of comparison most prevalent among young women in regards to body image. [The author of the report](#) explains that Instagram draws young women into comparison by promoting “unrealistic, largely curated, filtered, and Photoshopped versions of reality.” A hundred years ago, a young woman likely had only a small pool of others to compare herself to: those in her local community. Now young women are throwing their posts and self-images up against unlimited

numbers of others. This is new territory.

However, Sir Simon Wessely, former president of the UK's Royal College of Psychiatrists, encourages educating young people about how to use social media platforms well, rather than demonizing social media. He says, "I am sure that social media plays a role in unhappiness, but it has as many benefits as it does negatives. We need to teach children how to cope with all aspects of social media—good and bad—to prepare them for an increasingly digitized world. There is real danger in blaming the medium for the message" (emphasis added).

## How do I talk to my teen about comparison?

A trend is gaining momentum to combat comparison and the unrealistic standards that young women have been attempting to attain for so long. The forerunners of this movement include Tess Holliday, Lena Dunham, and Ashley Graham—all celebrities and influencers with huge followings on Instagram. Phrases like "body love," "self love," "love yourself," and "love the skin you're in" are often attached to this movement. Tess Holliday, who is involved more in the online aspect of the movement, calls it BoPo—short for "body positive." Body positivity is ultimately about embracing the normalcy of all body types and characteristics, not just those traditionally labeled as beautiful, and about "opening the door" to those who have disabilities, disorders, and [stereotypically un-beautiful appearances](#) in a way that "transcends language" and is

“visual [in] nature.” These influencers, as well as Claire Mysko, the chief executive of National Eating Disorders Association, encourage Instagram users to curate their feeds and online experiences to that end.

But this is tricky. The body positivity movement is meant to combat an area of our culture that desperately needs to be addressed and changed—the unrealistic standards of physical beauty and the constant attack on young people’s self-worth—but the cultural answer to this problem rings hollow (and can even promote narcissism) because it’s still based on externals. Sure, it changes the conversation to broaden our perspective on beauty, but in the end, the body positivity movement finds our intrinsic worth in our bodies rather than in Christ.

If the identity and worth of human beings—and, in this context, specifically young women—is completely dependent upon God’s identity and the worth he’s given us, how can we adequately create change in this area apart from him? What the body positivity movement offers is only a shadow of the abundant life and secure identity that God desires for young women. We must affirm to our teenage daughters that worth is not something they have to fight to assert and assign to themselves (as the body positivity movement often encourages them to do); it is already intrinsic to who they are because of who God is and who he says they are. Identity is not meant to be self-assigned but, rather, divinely authored.

As parents, it’s also important that we confirm God’s truth about our teenage daughters through words of validation

and affirmation. Young women may be less inclined to seek that validation from social media or be made insecure by what they're exposed to there if they are edified and their God-given worth affirmed within the home.

Pay attention to the accounts your teenage daughter follows and notice if any of them have a disproportionate number of selfies, especially revealing ones. Ultimately, the body positivity movement fights a negative emphasis on physical appearance with a positive emphasis on physical appearance. However, biblically, our emphasis should not be on the physical at all. "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment. . . . Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Peter 3:3-4). Guiding teenage daughters into confidence and security in their physical appearance and helping them to recognize their God-given worth—while also teaching them to value even more the fashioning of their character—cannot adequately be addressed in this guide (nor is that the primary purpose of it). However, there are other helpful resources for starting this conversation with your teenage daughter, which we'll share at the end of this guide.

## **Is there inappropriate content on Instagram?**

Instagram desires to foster a positive environment and has strict community guidelines and policies against inappropriate and sexually explicit content. Public content



is moderated by Instagram and can be reported as inappropriate by other users and subsequently removed by the company.

That being said, teens can quickly learn hashtags and secret emoji codes that will direct them to explicit content. Certain hashtags have been used for the illegal sale of drugs, and porn is often hidden under foreign-language hashtags.

Instagram has combated users' attempts to circumvent their policies regarding explicit content by implementing two different strategies: a "hard ban" and a "soft ban." A hard ban means that a hashtag will return no results (for example, searching for #porn yields no results), whereas a soft ban means that certain images will be [prevented from appearing under a hashtag](#). Other content is viewable but with a warning and an option to get help. For example, searching the hashtag #thinspo or #thinspiration will result in a pop-up that warns the user that he/she is searching a hashtag often linked with self-harm and allows him/her to choose to "Show Posts" or "Get Support."

In an article about how to get around explicit content filters, the writer points out, "Instagram's strict community guidelines on nudity and aggressive band of content moderators mean that most of the really titillating stuff has a relatively short shelf life. The term '[Instaporn](#)' now has a double meaning: it's porn that's gone in an instant."

So although there is sexually explicit content on the app, Instagram typically makes it difficult enough to find and view the content that it's not worth the effort when it's so



readily available elsewhere. A more legitimate reason for concern may be the content that can be privately shared between users via “disappearing” photos and videos.

## **How do I talk to my teens about Instagram?**

### **Open-Ended Discussions**

Allow their interest in and use of Instagram to be an ongoing but balanced conversation (it might not be a good idea to comment on everything they post). Let them know that you are a safe place to go when they experience struggles with or need wisdom about social media. If you allow your teen to have an Instagram account, consider setting up one for yourself as well so you can better monitor their activity, relate to them, and interact with them in the digital spaces they occupy.

### **Accountability and Boundaries**

If you choose to allow your teen to have an Instagram account, he/she will need your guidance and wisdom to interact with this social media app well. Establishing boundaries and accountability is part of this. Instagram does not have any parental controls within the app, but you can download software to monitor (to some extent) your teen's use of the app. Some of these programs are listed in the resources section at the end of this guide.

One of these software programs, Qustodio, allows parents to monitor how much time teens spend on social media apps. This is important because, according to the

#StatusOfMind [study](#), “it’s not just what young people are engaging with on social media but also how long they are engaging with it. Young people who spend more than two hours per day connecting on social networking sites are more likely to report poor mental health, including psychological distress.” Setting boundaries around how much time teens spend on different social media platforms can guard them against the addictive nature of those platforms. Qustodio also allows parents the ability to set certain hours during which their teen can access different social media apps (for example, only from 5 to 6 p.m., after school hours but before dinnertime). Qustodio can also block certain apps from being downloaded, and it can disable your teen’s phone completely—except for calls—during set times (like during the night).

Another strategy is to turn off Instagram notifications so that teens do not feel compelled to enter the app every time they are notified of activity related to their account.

Finally, consider and discuss with your teen the benefits of occasionally “fasting” from Instagram. Taking intermittent social media breaks is a way to create space in our lives to reprioritize and self-evaluate—and to remind ourselves that social media apps can be useful tools, but they are not our source of life, value, identity, or joy.

## Conclusion

Instagram is not inherently evil. Whether or not we decide to allow our teens to use Instagram (which is a personal

parenting decision based on each teen and their journey), ultimately we need to educate our kids about how to have wisdom in today's culture.

As one of our readers once said to us,, "Don't live your life to make an impression; live your life to make an impact." Instagram can easily become about making a good impression—about comparing and competing with our highlight reels. But how can we encourage our teens to use this app as one way in which they can have an impact? How can we encourage them to use Instagram in ways that are others-focused—to give, encourage, influence, and impact—instead of ways that seek to get validation, entertainment, escape, etc.? How can they utilize Instagram (instead of letting the app control them) as a platform for positive influence?

Ultimately, we want to raise our kids to passionately pursue the best life God has for them. We don't do that by allowing them to do whatever they want whenever they want, nor by banning everything and explaining nothing. Rather, we do that by disciplining, conversing with, and loving them, always guiding them toward the high-but-fulfilling standards God has set.

## Additional Resources

- “Creating a Social Media Contract for Students”: <http://www.youthministrymedia.ca/creating-a-social-media-contract-for-students/>
- “The Social Media Contract That Will Get You and Your Kids Talking”: <https://lindastade.com/useful-social-media-contract/>
- Bark, an app for tracking texting and social media activity
- Circle, a device that helps put healthy boundaries on device activity
- Qustodio, an app for tracking and limiting time spent online
- Screentime, an app for tracking and limiting time spent online
- Connect Safely: <https://www.connectsafely.org/>
- Defend Young Minds: <https://www.defendyoungminds.com/>
- The Online Mom: <https://www.theonlinemom.com/>

