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A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

INSTAGRAM

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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, President, Royal College of Psychiatrists

Instant Gratification or a
Never-Ending Search for Validation?

Though much younger than its predecessors, Instagram has become a social media behemoth through its simplicity, ease of us, and focus on imagery. Along with Snapchat, it's considered by many teens as a non-negotiable 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?

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 800 million users, ranging from celebrities to "influencers" (those with large social media followings) to brands to your average person. Since Facebook bought the company in 2013 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 300 million users, outpacing the app it was adapted from.

How popular is it?

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 it 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 ♡), 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 other 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 (see photo). Finally, a user can also 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 users to tag a picture to a particular address or location. If you click on that location once*
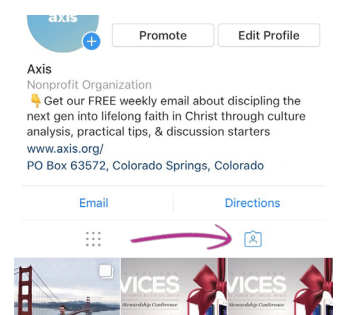
the post is up, the app brings you to a map and a small dot that shows exactly where they were when they took the picture. We saw so many pictures that we were able to easily click on and even see the users' home locations or their favorite coffee shops that they just might visit regularly. To ensure safety, follow these directions: Go to your teen's phone settings, select "Instagram," click on "location," select "never."

It's important to note that though the app was originally designed to work solely via smartphones, there is now a feature-limited web interface from which one can do everything except post (at time of publication). So simply erasing the app from a phone does not fully limit access to it.

Can you explain its important features?

For those who have no familiarity with the app, Instagram has three distinct pages, or tabs: the profile, the home feed, and the explore tab.

Users' **profiles** (see photo) can be set to either private or public, and, much like other social networks, users can "follow" another's profile (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, @AxisIdeas leads to Axis' account. This 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. The reason for 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 birthdate 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 legally old enough to join the service, it's a good idea to make sure that your teen's 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 common for users to even juggle multiple Instagram accounts.* There is a 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 a new identity via social media that might be a far cry
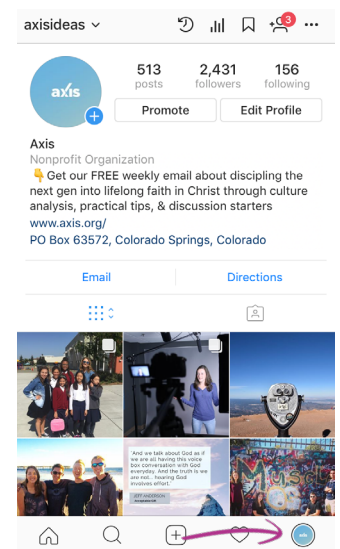
from who we actually are and who God calls us to be.

The **home feed** is the tab (see photo) 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 🔵).
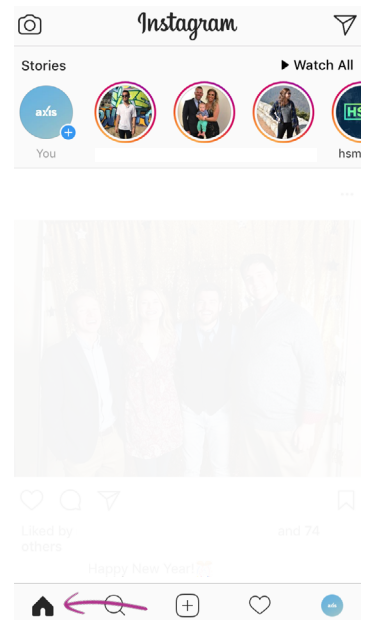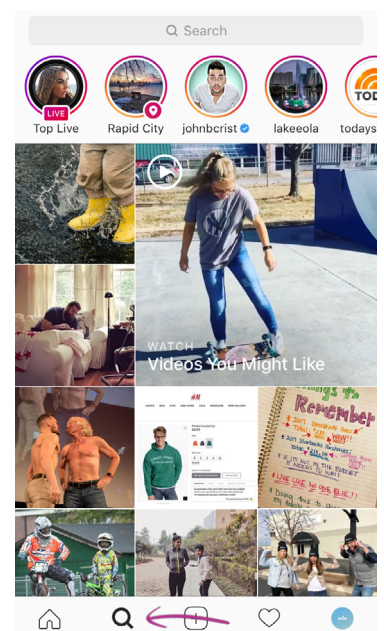
What Parents Need to Know

Although Instagram traded in Facebook's "Friend" title for Twitter's more ambiguous "Followers" 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-word 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 God-given, deep need for real-world community with virtual interactions, which can be a false and unfulfilling substitute. It's easier 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. 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 (see photo) was added in 2012. At the top of the tab is a search bar for finding other people and content by entering in 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, the "Videos You Might Like" personalized video channel is a distinct feature of the Explore tab. You tap on the "Videos You Might Like" thumbnail, wherein the first video is playing on a loop, to watch the full, enlarged version with sound. Immediately after the first video finishes, the screen scrolls down (or you can scroll manually) to the next video.

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: Instagram may not tell you what to think, but it does tell you what to think about. 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.*

Adding to this is Instagram's [reorganization of the home feed](#) according to "the likelihood you'll be interested in the content," rather than by the order in which items were posted (a change that was [much protested by users](#)).

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

Furthermore, the "Videos You Might Like" channel offers a laid-back viewing experience, the clip-after-clip montage catering to short attention spans and encouraging more time spent on the app.

Conversation topics: What does it mean to *explore*? Instagram is defining 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 to a post (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), the user is taken to a page with all the content 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 [here](#)) 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 and 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 used with a photo from the past, even if that past is as recent as yesterday. Finally, users can also now "follow" hashtags like they follow other users in order to be updated when new content is tagged with that hashtag.

What's Instagram Direct?

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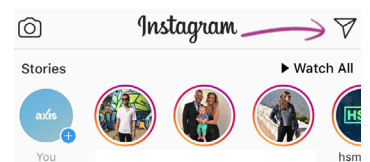
Snapchat, photos and videos sent in this way can be set to disappear immediately after viewing.

It's important to note that users can receive direct messages 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.

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 to their "Story" that disappear after 24 hours. If a user has an active story, a colorful rim will appear around their profile picture (see photo). The home feed depicts, at the top of the page, all the profile pictures of users who have active stories (see photo). Tapping on an indicated profile picture 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 "live stream" themselves and their experiences in real time via their Stories, a feature that was added later in 2016.
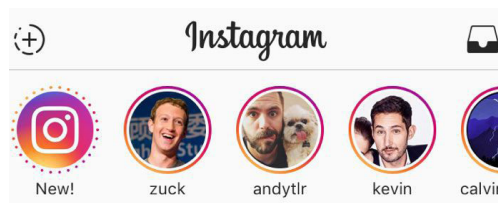
Why would someone want to post to their Story instead of to their profile?

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 that were then edited. These photos were often initially captioned with the hashtag #latergram to designate to one's followers that it was not a true instagram. 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 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—while maintaining the spontaneous, insta-sharing nature of the app. The Stories feature can be good in that it tends to promote authenticity, rather than the "highlight reel" nature of the regular, often highly edited posts.

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 live stream. (As an example, one Instagram influencer accidentally live-storied herself having sex with her boyfriend. **What happens live cannot be taken back.**)

Is Instagram "art"?

For many, Instagram is an 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 also contribute to changing art standards by replacing museums as the art authority. Fei also 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's a "Finsta"?

Short for "Fake Instagram," these are second (or third or fourth) accounts that teens have to either get away from the prying eyes of concerned adults OR to simply have 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 so much about how many followers and likes they get?

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 everyday, average 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 based on their stage in 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.

Conversation questions: 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 the "liking" and "commenting" features 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 that "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, an automation that goes on "following, commenting, and liking 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 neuropathway 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 receive 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 unable to be accessed by random accounts. ***HOWEVER***, simply requiring that they 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 the conversations, this will only serve to alienate them from us, 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), in December of last year Instagram rolled out a tool that allows users to block comments containing specific keywords, and a month later the company introduced a feature that allows users to disable comments completely on individual posts.

How does the app impact my teen's mental health?

A new study, called #StatusOfMind and published in the U.K. by the RSPH's Young Health Movement, examined the positive and negative effects of social media platforms on young people's mental health. 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 (quality and the 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.

However, Sir Simon Wessely, president of the U.K.'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).

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, co-author of a study on Facebook and envy, says that "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.

How do I talk to my teens about comparison and body image?

There is now a trend 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 it, 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 standard of physical beauty young women struggle under and their self-worth that culture constantly attacks—but the cultural answer to the cultural 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 is still placing one's worth on the body and not our intrinsic worth in Christ.

If the identity and worth of human beings overall, and specifically young women in this regard, is completely dependent upon God's identity and the worth He's created into 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 identity-security that God desires for young women. We must affirm to our teenage daughters that worth is not something they have to exhaustively fight to assert and assign to themselves (as the Body Positivity movement often tends to encourage young women 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 there are accounts that 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, the emphasis is not 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, NIV). Guiding teenage daughters into confidence and security in their physical appearance, 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 the primary purpose of it). However, there are other helpful resources linked at the end for getting this conversation with your teenager started.

—— Can a user access inappropriate content on the app?

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 combatted 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 (short for "thin inspiration," often used by young women struggling with eating disorders) will only return results for #healthinspo, while searching for #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 "See Posts Anyway" or "Get Support."

Luckily (and somewhat surprisingly), "[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' 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 the app and its place in their lives?

Open-Ended Discussions
Allow their interest in and use of Instagram to be an on-going but balanced conversation (it might not a good idea to comment on *everything* they post). Let them know that you are a safe place to go to 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/when 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 there is software you can download to monitor (to some extent) your teen's use of the app, which are linked to in the resources section at the end of this Guide.

One of these, [Qustodio](#), allows parents to monitor *how much* time teens spend on social media apps. This is important because, according to the #StatusOfMind study, "The report also found that 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 protect 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, the teen could only access social media apps on his or her phone from 5-6pm, 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 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 around 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 re-prioritize 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.

—— Final thoughts

Instagram is not inherently evil. Like Sir Simon Wessely said, we cannot blame the medium for the message. 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 them about how to have wisdom in this increasingly digitized culture.

One of Axis' traveling teams of 20- to 24-year-olds was once told by a wise mother they met while traveling: "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 and the comparison and competition of highlight reels. But how can we encourage our teens to use this app as *one way* in which they are able to 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 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 discipling, conversing with, and loving them, always guiding them toward the high-but-fulfilling standards God has set.

—— Resources

Social Media Contract from Youth Ministry Media
Social Media Contract for tweens from Very Well
Bark, an app for tracking texting and social media activity
Circle, a device that helps put healthy boundaries on device activity
Forcefield, an app for tracking and limiting time spent online
Qustudio, an app for tracking and limiting time spent online
Screentime, an app for tracking and limiting time spent online
Connect Safely website
Protect Young Minds website
Teen Online & Wireless Safety Survey
The Online Mom website
U Know Kids website
Six Ways to Build Your Teen's Identity from Focus on the Family
Backwards Beauty: How to Feel Ugly in 10 Simple Steps by Jessie Minassian
How to Help Our Youth Find Their Identity in Christ from Faith Radio
Who Do You Think You Are? Developing a Biblically Based Self-Image from jashow.org
Twelve Ways to Instill Self-Worth in Your Teen from Lifeway
Parenting the Internet Generation ebook from Covenant Eyes

"The Challenges of Raising a Digital Native" TedX talk
Equipped: Raising Godly Digital Natives ebook from Covenant Eyes
Acknowledging Teens' Perspectives Leads to Stronger Self-Worth, Less Depression from PsychCentral

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