

Online Safety Newsletter

September 2022



Instagram

Instagram is used to post photos and videos. Users can also DM (direct message), send disappearing messages, add to their stories (these disappear after 24 hours) and broadcast live. You should be over 13 years of age to set up an account. To create an account, you must enter a date of birth (but this is not verified).

Account Privacy

When you set up your account, it is automatically set as public. This means that anybody can see what you share. We would recommend changing this to private so only those your child approves to follow them can see their content. *To change a profile to private go to profile, tap Settings, tap Privacy, then under Account Privacy, tap to toggle Private Account on.*

IMPORTANT: Even if your child has set their Instagram profile to private, your child's bio (at the top of their profile) can still be seen by everyone. Check they have not included any personal information in their photo and bio info (e.g. they should not be wearing their school uniform in their photo).

Other additional privacy settings include:

- Story control – you can choose to allow message replies from 'your followers', 'followers you follow back' or turn off.
- Sharing – you can choose whether followers can share your photos and videos from your story in a message.
- Hidden words – turn this option on to hide comments that may be offensive in a separate section.
- Activity status – if switched on, other accounts you follow and anyone you message can see when you were last active or if you are currently on.

Make sure your child understands that there is a risk that content they upload can never be removed (other users can screenshot it for example) so they must only share content that they are comfortable with others seeing.

New Supervision features

You can now supervise your child's Instagram accounts. This gives you the ability to see who they follow and who follows them, see how much time they are spending on Instagram, set daily time limits and schedule breaks. Your child can also easily share when they have made any reports to Instagram with you. Learn more here:
<https://familycenter.instagram.com/our-products/family-center/>

Safety Features

Ensure your child knows how to report posts and people as well as how to unfollow and block people, delete and turn off comments. View here:

https://help.instagram.com/269765046710559/?helpref=hc_fnav

Online Games

Is your child playing or watching others play games online? Your child could be using Twitch, Steam, Roblox, YouTube etc to access games or watch others play. We need to make sure that what they are viewing is appropriate for them. It is important to talk to your child to see what they are interested in so you can have a look first to see if they are appropriate. For example, there are games that may appear to be appropriate but are actually horror/ survival games and characters can turn more sinister as the game progresses. It is important to remember that children may be playing the game, watching videos of it on sites such as YouTube or playing replicated versions on Roblox for example.

3 ways to make gaming safer for your child

1. Talk with your child about gaming. Talk with your child to learn the games they like and the content and features of these. This will help you to understand more about how your child plays games and how appropriate different games are. You can use NSPCC's online safety hub to find out more information on safer gaming.
2. Learn together. Use our resources to teach your child about safer gaming at all ages. For primary age children you can use our Jessie & Friends (ages 4-7) and Play, Like, Share (ages 8-10) resources. Secondary age children can access advice about gaming through our website.
3. Set boundaries and safety settings. Internet Matters provides step-by-step guides for putting safety settings in place for each console or device. Spend time setting these up with your child and make sure they know how to block and report on the games they are playing. You should also talk with your child to create an agreement for gaming; think about how much time they can spend, which games they can access, if you will allow in-app purchases and what spaces they can play in. For primary aged children it is advisable to have them play in shared spaces or in the same room as you.

How risky is in-game chat?

Gaming is often a social activity for children and talking with friends is part of their enjoyment. However, in-game chat can pose risks such as:

- chatting with people they don't know. This can include adults that are seeking to make contact with children with the intention of sexual grooming.
- inappropriate or unmoderated chat. Whilst a lot of chat is moderated, chat is live and there is a risk of exposure to sexual language, swearing or bullying.
- requests to make chat private. Once chat is moved off a monitored platform, no one is moderating it. This can be used to pressurise children into sharing personal information, photos, video or chat that they don't want to.

More information <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/onlinegames/>

Minecraft

Check the age ratings: Minecraft is rated by PEGI as 7+ or 12+ depending on which game version you are playing. The App store rate it as 9+ and the Google Play store rate it as 10+.

Minecraft remains ever popular and can be a great learning tool that is often used in schools to teach planning skills, recreate famous buildings in 3D and coding. Players use building blocks to create their own worlds.

Which mode?

You can choose between Creative or Survival mode - creative mode removes the survival elements of the game (no mobs appearing at night) so may be a more appropriate mode for your child to play (particularly when played in single player mode).

What should I be aware of?

- Multiplayer – children can interact with others (including strangers), you can switch this option off within settings or choose to play offline.
- Chat facility – you do have the option to switch this off.
- Block and report players – if your child is playing with others, make sure they know how to block and report players within the game.
- Additional purchases – be aware of in app purchases and the purchase of additional items (skin packs) to support (although not needed) game play.

In addition, protect your child's privacy by using a nickname (don't include their age/birth year) rather than their real name for their profile and chat to your child to make sure that when playing online they know not to share personal information. Also, make sure they know they can talk to you or a trusted adult if anybody or anything is making them feel uncomfortable.

Do not forget to make sure you have set up appropriate parental controls on the device your child is using to play Minecraft as well.

Further information <https://help.minecraft.net/hc/en-us>

Omegle

You must be 18+ to use or 13+ with parental permission. Omegle is a social networking/chat website that connects two strangers together for either a text or a video chat. Chats are anonymous unless a user provides this information. Omegle states that "Omegle video chat is moderated". However, moderation is not perfect. You may still encounter people who misbehave."

What should I be aware of?

- No registration is required to access Omegle (therefore no age verification) and there are no reporting facilities.

- Users are given an option to save the chat's log and share the link. It is also possible for other users to take screenshots of text and video chats.

We recommend that Omegle is not used by children due to the potential imagery shared and language used which can be explicit.

You can find out more information from Internet Matters, including ways of keeping your child safe:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/news-blogs/what-is-omegle-whatparents-need-to-know/>