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Instagram: Photo and Video Posting Dangers for Young People

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Introduction

Teens and tweens frequently post photos online using their cell phones. One of the most popular mobile applications (apps) for photo sharing is called Instagram. This free, online photo sharing and social network application was launched in 2010 and was acquired by Facebook in 2012.

Instagram allows members to digitally edit, upload and share photos and short videos with other members through the Instagram website, email, and other social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare, Tumblr, and Flickr—all with a single click.



Instagram Dangers

Instagram states in its Terms of Use that it is not for children under the age of 13. However, the age requirement can be spoofed easily by a tenacious young person falsely posting an incorrect birth year when creating an account or even later producing a fraudulent ID when confronted for proof of age by the Instagram website.

The biggest danger for young people is that the photos and videos that they are posting on Instagram are accessible to countless unintended viewers as the Instagram member accounts are automatically defaulted to the “public” viewing setting, which means the images can be viewed by anyone in the world. To modify the public viewing feature, one must manually make changes to the Instagram default privacy settings.

Once one’s profile has been personalized to more private settings, anyone who wants to see the photos will need to be the user’s friend or be on Instagram’s approved “follower” first. To be approved, one must send the user a request and the user must approve the request.

Images that young people upload to Instagram not only default to a public viewing setting but are also “geotagged” by default. Geotagging is the process of adding geographical metadata to photos or videos. This metadata usually consists of latitude and longitude coordinates. With this imbedded data, child molesters, who are most often on the cutting edge of technology, can copy photos and can also generate Google map locations of where a young person spends most of his or her time.

Instagram recently launched “photo tagging,” which is one of the powerful social networking features that fueled Facebook’s early growth. This feature allows a user to “tag” or highlight any person in a photo, which then automatically appears in the “Photos Of You” section of one’s profile. Unfortunately, even if one is proactive and changes a young person’s Instagram settings to “private” and disables the geo-location feature, there are still dangers. For example, if a young person’s friends have not changed their profile default settings, the photos they upload and have tagged still have the same danger of a non-approved friend viewing them or mapping and tracking a young person’s activities.

One should also be aware that when a young person upgrades his or her phone’s operating system software, the settings that one previously set for privacy with the geo-location disabled will automatically revert back to the default public viewing and geo-location enabled.

Additionally, on December 17, 2012, Instagram updated its Terms of Service, granting itself the right to sell users’ photos to third parties without notification or compensation starting on January 16, 2013. An outpouring of criticism from privacy advocates prompted Instagram to issue a statement retracting the controversial terms. The issue caused Instagram to lose a portion of its user-base as former users switched to other photo sharing applications such as Flickr or Snapfish. Even though Instagram retracted the policy, the dangers of posting on Instagram or other social media sites were emphasized by the incident.

Conclusion

As technology continues to change rapidly, all of us charged with protecting children must continue our efforts to stay abreast of the many new programs and applications that may be used by child abusers to manipulate and exploit children.

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