

Instagram for kids? Facebook explores creating a platform for users under 13

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Facebook is looking into creating an Instagram for kids.

The world's largest social media network told U.S. TODAY Thursday it is exploring the possibility of building a version of its popular video- and photo-sharing app for children younger than 13.

An Instagram for kids could be similar to Facebook's 2017 launch of Messenger Kids, a version of the popular texting app for children ages 6-12. The app drew scrutiny for a controversial design flaw where children could still chat with adults.

A Facebook spokesperson said in an email Thursday that an Instagram for kids is in its "very early stages."

"Increasingly kids are asking their parents if they can join apps that help them keep up with their friends. Right now there aren't many options for parents, so we're working on building additional products—like we did with Messenger Kids—that are suitable for kids, managed by parents," the spokesperson said. "We're exploring bringing a parent-controlled experience to Instagram to help kids keep up with their friends, discover new hobbies and interests, and more."

Instagram's current policy doesn't allow kids under 13 to use the platform, which touts more than 1 billion users. News of Facebook's plan to build a kids' version of Instagram comes two days after the tech giant announced that it's updating Instagram's safety tools and privacy settings for its users ages 13-17.

Those new features, as part of its updated parents' guide, include restricting the way adults contact teen users via direct messaging, especially if the youths don't already follow them on the app.

As plans for an Instagram for kids looks imminent, Titania Jordan, a chief parenting officer for Bark, an Atlanta-based tech watchdog group, believes it's not in Facebook's or kids' best interests.

Jordan said a [case study](#) conducted by Bark last year analyzed more than 2 billion messages across text, email, YouTube, and more than 30 apps and [social media platforms](#) (including Facebook and Instagram) found

that 45.5% of preteens and 66.3% of teens engaged in conversations about depression. Jordan said that the data is similar when the kids discussed self-harm and suicide.

The data is significantly higher regarding sexual content. Jordan said about 70% of preteens and 87.9% of teens experienced seeing nudity and sexual content on those platforms.

"None of this data points out that kids need to be on social media more, or an earlier age," Jordan said. "Adding more [screen time](#) or [social media](#) time to their plates is not necessarily the best plan of action."

In 2019, Facebook came under fire for its Messenger Kids app from two top U.S. lawmakers after the company admitted to the design flaw that saw kids bypassing the restrictions and chatting with adults. Facebook says the error affected group chats and was detected and resolved.

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