

April 26, 2021

The Honorable Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator  
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress  
2052 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator  
706 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress  
United States House of Representatives  
2439 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators and Representatives,

Thank you for your letter regarding Instagram. The privacy, safety, and well-being of young people on our platform is essential, and it is our top priority as we consider developing a safe and age-appropriate Instagram experience for those under 13. We are still in the very early stages of thinking about developing this Instagram experience, but safety will be the foundation of it.

Young people are asking their parents if they can join apps that help them keep up with their friends, find new hobbies, and more. That's why we're working on experiences that give young people an age-appropriate alternative to our existing apps. Products for young people give parents more options and reduce the incentive for young people to lie about their age. They also allow young people to be introduced to experiences designed to be as safe as possible, with parental oversight.

As we develop this new product, we are committed to external collaboration and will work in close consultation with safety, privacy, and child development experts, as well as longstanding advisors like the Safety Advisory Board<sup>1</sup> and the Youth Advisors,<sup>2</sup> to ensure that we provide the best and safest age-appropriate experience possible. It is also important that we get feedback from young people and parents as well. We do not have a set timeline for the experience, but we expect development and consultation with experts to take many months.

While we are still very early in developing the product, we can assure you that we will not show ads in any Instagram experience we develop for people under the age of 13. Further, any experience we build will be designed to align with industry best practices and comply with legal requirements concerning the data of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/help/222332597793306>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/fbsafety/posts/1446426198728547>

children.

With that context in mind, we appreciate the opportunity to discuss Facebook's ongoing commitment to building safe, positive experiences for our youngest users and their parents.

## **Keeping Teens Safe on Instagram**

We require everyone to be at least 13 years of age to use our platforms and have asked new users to provide their age when they sign up for an account for some time. When we learn an underage user has created an account, we remove that user from our platforms. While many people are honest about their age, we know that young people can lie about their date of birth. We want to do more to stop this from happening, but verifying people's age online is complex and something many in our industry are grappling with. To address this challenge, we employ a variety of tools and methods to identify the age of users, and we're developing new artificial intelligence and machine learning technology to help us keep teens safer. These are iterative processes, and we continually refine these tools to get a clearer picture of who is on our platforms.

With respect to younger users who are permitted to use Instagram (i.e., users ages 13 through 17), we take expansive steps to protect their safety. We regularly release new features and resources as part of our ongoing efforts to keep our youngest community members safe, including, for example, a recent change to Instagram's direct messaging feature to prevent adults from sending messages to people under 18 who don't follow them. We're also exploring ways to make it more difficult for adults who have been exhibiting potentially suspicious behavior to find and follow teens.

In addition to preventing conversations between adults and teens who don't follow one another, we are starting to use prompts—or safety notices—to encourage teens to be cautious in conversations with adults they're already connected to. Safety notices in Direct Messages (DMs) will notify young people when an adult who has been exhibiting potentially suspicious behavior is interacting with them through DMs.

We've also recently added a new step when someone under 18 signs up for an Instagram account that gives them the option to choose between a public or private account. Our aim is to encourage young people to opt for a private account by equipping them with information on what the different settings mean. If a young person doesn't choose 'private' when signing up, we send them a notification later on highlighting the benefits of a private account and reminding them to check their settings. We're assessing additional measures we can take to protect young people on Instagram, including additional privacy settings.

## Facebook's Investment in Child Safety

Across our family of apps, we take a comprehensive approach to child safety that includes zero-tolerance policies prohibiting child exploitation; cutting-edge technology to prevent, detect, remove, and report policy violations; and victim resources and support. We also collaborate with industry child safety experts and civil society around the world to fight the online exploitation of children because our commitment to safeguarding children extends beyond our apps to the broader internet.

At Facebook, our work on child safety has spanned over a decade. Our industry-leading efforts to combat child exploitation follow a three-pronged approach: prevent this abhorrent harm in the first place; detect, remove, and report exploitative activity that escapes these efforts; and work with experts and authorities to keep children safe. We apply this approach across both the public spaces of our platform, like Pages, Groups, and Profiles, as well as on our private messaging services, like Messenger. In addition to zero-tolerance policies and cutting-edge safety technology, we make it easy for people to report potential harms, and we use technology to prioritize and swiftly respond to these reports. We have specially trained teams with backgrounds in law enforcement, online safety, analytics, and forensic investigations review potentially violating content and report findings to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

In addition to our efforts to protect teens on Instagram, we have thousands of content reviewers who prioritize reviewing and removing content that concerns the safety of children, and we've spent years training artificial intelligence to find content that exploits young people and children, such as proactively finding child exploitative imagery. Our latest Community Standards Enforcement Report shows this is working. In Q4 2020, our technology found 97.9% of content that violated our policies on child nudity and sexual exploitation of children on Instagram before anyone reported it.

We recently announced new tools we're testing to keep people from sharing content that victimizes children and improvements we've made to our detection and reporting tools. To understand how and why people share child exploitative content on Facebook and Instagram, we conducted an in-depth analysis of the illegal child exploitative content we reported to the NCMEC in October and November of 2020. Based on our findings, we are developing targeted solutions, including new tools and policies to reduce the sharing of this type of content. We've started by testing new tools including one aimed at the potentially malicious searching for this content: a pop-up that is shown to people who search for terms on our apps associated with child exploitation. The pop-up offers ways to get help from offender diversion organizations and shares information about the consequences of viewing illegal content. We've also expanded our work to detect and remove networks that violate our child exploitation policies, similar to our efforts against coordinated inauthentic behavior and dangerous organizations.

In addition, we've updated our child safety policies<sup>3</sup> to clarify that we will remove Facebook profiles, Pages, groups, and Instagram accounts that are dedicated to sharing otherwise innocent images of children with captions, hashtags, or comments containing inappropriate signs of affection or commentary about the children depicted in the image. We've always removed content that explicitly sexualizes children, but content that isn't explicit and doesn't depict child nudity is harder to define. Under this new policy, while the images alone may not break our rules, the accompanying text can help us better determine whether the content is sexualizing children and if the associated profile, Page, group, or account should be removed.

After consultations with child safety experts and organizations, we've made it easier to report content for violating our child exploitation policies. To do this, we added the option to choose "involves a child" under the "Nudity & Sexual Activity" category of reporting in more places on Facebook and Instagram. These reports will be prioritized for review. We also started using Google's Content Safety API<sup>4</sup> to help us better prioritize content that may contain child exploitation for our content reviewers to assess.

Our team also consults regularly with experts to ensure that our policies properly account for the presence of 13- to 17-year-olds on our platform. This work has resulted in additional age-gating of certain content and the development of educational features tailored to teen users. For example, to prevent harm, we've designed many of our features, noted above, to remind minors who they're sharing with and to limit interactions with strangers. Our safety policy team works across all internal teams at Facebook to ensure we are taking a comprehensive approach to the protection of minors and building the best policies, tools, programs, and resources to ensure their safety on our platform.

We also believe it is important to provide parents with the information, resources, and tools they need to have conversations with their children about online technologies and to help them develop healthy and safe online habits. For example, in the US, we've collaborated with The Child Mind Institute and ConnectSafely to publish a new Parents Guide.<sup>5</sup> It includes the latest safety tools and privacy settings and a list of tips and conversation starters to help parents navigate discussions with their teens about their online presence. We also have a safety center for young people to learn about how to use the in-app tools we've built to manage the time they spend on Instagram and their interactions.<sup>6</sup>

And as part of our Safety Center, we have a Parent Portal<sup>7</sup> and a Youth

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/child\\_nudity\\_sexual\\_exploitation](https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/child_nudity_sexual_exploitation).

<sup>4</sup> <https://protectingchildren.google/intl/en/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://about.instagram.com/community/parents>

<sup>6</sup> <https://about.instagram.com/community/safety>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/safety/parents>.

Portal,<sup>8</sup> which are both focused on fostering conversations around online safety, security, and well-being. These portals give parents and young people access to the information and resources they need to make informed decisions about their use of online technologies.

In 2020, we launched Get Digital,<sup>9</sup> our free digital literacy program, developed with experts, for teachers, students, and parents. It includes lesson plans, conversation starters, activities, videos, and other tools to help young people develop skills needed to navigate and thrive in today's digital world. For educators, Get Digital provides ready-to-use lessons for teaching young people about digital citizenship and maintaining health and well-being while using technology. For students, there are various activities that reinforce and expand on the digital skills they're learning in school and at home. And parents and caregivers can use this program to start conversations with kids about how to stay safe online. We remain dedicated to examining our own practices and the resources we make available for the safety and security of people who use our services.

### **Investing in a Safer Internet**

Above all, we are committed to working with parents and families, as well as experts in child development, online safety, and children's health and media, to ensure we are building better products for families. That is why we're investing in continued research and building tools that promote meaningful interactions and help people manage their time on our platform.

We work with leading academics at Carnegie Mellon, UC Riverside, and the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, and we have partnered closely with mental health clinicians and organizations focused on well-being. We have also pledged \$1 million towards research to better understand the relationship between media technologies, youth development, and well-being. Facebook is teaming up with experts in the field to look at the impact of mobile technology and social media on children and teens, as well as how to better support them as they transition through different stages of life.

Of course, the impact of media technologies on children and teens is not just a Facebook issue, it is an internet issue. In order to build the best digital tools for younger users, further investment in research must be made, both financially and collaboratively, with other researchers. We, along with others in the industry, recently supported the launch of the Digital Wellness Lab at Boston Children's Hospital, a first-of-its-kind research and innovation incubator bringing together science-based solutions and information about the effects of digital technology on our brains, bodies, and behaviors. That is why Facebook supported the bipartisan, bicameral Children and Media Research Advancement (CAMRA) Act, which would have provided funding for the National Institutes of Health to study the impact of

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/safety/youth>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/fbgetdigital>.

technology and media on the cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional development of children and adolescents. And we participated in the bipartisan roundtable hosted by Senator Markey with Senator Blunt on this topic in February 2019.

We welcome the opportunity to work together with Congress and others in the industry to facilitate research that can benefit people, especially young people, across the internet.

Sincerely,

FACEBOOK, INC.