

The Jed Foundation

# A TOOLKIT ADDRESSING THE PRESSURE TO BE PERFECT

## A PARENT'S GUIDE TO INSTAGRAM

03 Introduction

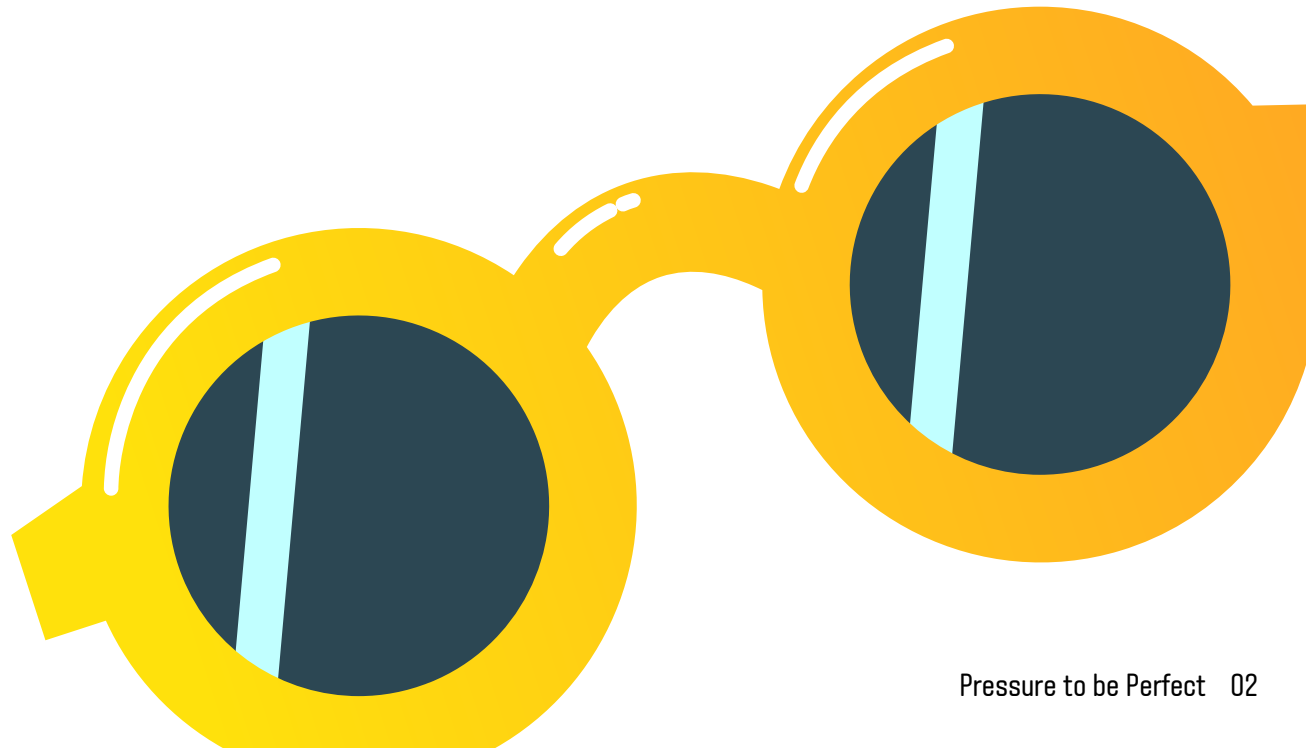
05 Getting the Most out of Instagram

08 It's Personal: Tips on making Instagram work for young people.

14 Creating a Positive Self-Image

20 Balancing Act

24 Support for Adults



## Pressure to be Perfect is a collaboration between Instagram and The Jed Foundation (JED)

It is intended to help adults—primarily parents but teachers and others with young people in their lives as well—navigate conversations about Instagram usage, with the goal of ensuring that the time young people spend on Instagram is positive, inspiring, and intentional. There is a [companion toolkit](#) for teens; we suggest you download that and read it as well, and share it with the young people in your life who use Instagram.

You'll see that **Pressure to be Perfect** talks openly about how time online impacts our emotional well-being. When young people gain self-awareness, they can make informed decisions about how they use Instagram. Taking some of the quizzes in the toolkit along with your teen and then discussing the results can open up a vital channel of communication.

## The toolkit also surfaces many Instagram features that you and your teen may not be aware of.

Things like being able to limit the audience on certain pieces of content to a small group of close friends, or knowing how to turn off comments provide the ability to be very intentional about who sees what, are among the tools on offer that we want teens to be able to take full advantage of. We've provided a suite of tips for optimizing their experience, and strategies for limiting the amount of time they spend online if that is something they want to do. There's also a section on how to help others, so that teens who sense a friend is in need of emotional support know the best way to respond.

Our hope is that this toolkit helps you to better understand the emotional space that your teen is operating in, and sets you up for productive conversations around using Instagram. This intentionally open framework allows you to determine what works best for you and your family.



# Getting the Most out of Instagram

As an adult, parent, or guardian, it may be hard to understand how you can best support young people in regards to their Instagram usage. Our research has identified three key skills that can be beneficial: knowing what to share and when, maintaining a healthy attitude toward online life, and understanding how to help others in distress.

The youth version of **Pressure to be Perfect** has a quiz relating to each of these skills. You may want to take the quizzes together and use the outcomes as the basis for discussion about how your teen uses Instagram. Having an open conversation about these topics can allow you to check in with your teen about their online decision-making and their emotions surrounding Instagram, and to work together to establish positive use guidelines.

## 1. Sharing with sensitivity

It's important for young people (and anyone!) to know where and when to share sensitive topics or feelings. Sharing too much information about one's life or feelings can have negative consequences, especially for young people who do not have a lot of experience in knowing what is and is not safe to share online. It can be helpful for them to hear you talk about **Pressure to be Perfect** by sharing your perspectives on what kinds of feelings and information are appropriate to share where, and to be reminded that anything posted in public is potentially out there forever. This conversation could be an opportunity to note that decisions have consequences, and that we make better decisions when we've taken a step back to think first.

[Sharing with Sensitivity Quiz](#)

## 2. Maintaining perspective

While social comparison is something that happens both on- and off-line, young people compare themselves with others more than almost any other age group, often with negative consequences. How their posts are received, for example, can significantly affect their mood. It is helpful to be aware of this sensitivity and to pay attention to whether online comparisons are affecting overall well-being. If you notice a great deal of emphasis on being liked online, check in. You might want to demystify perfection by noting that no image tells **Pressure to be Perfect**. You can also have a conversation about all the work that goes into what looks like a "perfect" life online and about the positive things that exist in the other parts of their life.

[Maintaining Perspective Quiz](#)

### 3. Responding with kindness

Instagram is a kind and supportive community, and people often open up about difficult subjects in order to create awareness or find support. For the most part, these conversations are positive and productive. However, at times, a community member may be in real distress. We've created a tool in the app so that anyone can anonymously report concerning behavior, including bullying. You may want to share the tool with your teen so that they are aware, and use that opportunity to talk about what to do when someone seems to be struggling with emotional balance. There is more detailed information about this in [the Support section](#) of the toolkit.

To report content about self-injury, tap “...” above the post, then tap Report. Select “It’s Inappropriate > Self Injury.”

[Responding with Kindness Quiz](#)



# It's Personal: Tips on making Instagram work for young people.

Instagram provides a number of tools that allow users to control their privacy levels and customize their experience. For young people, these tools can be especially helpful for creating a safe space to connect with others. A discussion of the toolkit could be a good jumping-off point to talk about the emotional impact of time online—you can then use the tools, as well as the tips below, to fine-tune their settings.

Be sure to read the explanation of these tools in the [teen version](#) of **Pressure to be Perfect** as well.



## 1. Manage privacy

We encourage parents to discuss whether it's best for an account to be public or private. If the account is private, they approve the people who follow them, and can remove followers at any time. Private accounts mean content can't be seen by anyone who hasn't been approved. If an account is public, anyone can see the content posted on Stories, Feed, or Live, and can follow without needing approval.

If your teen already has a public account, they can switch to private at any time; they can also go from private to public. They can remove followers, choose who can comment, and more. Your teen can also turn off "Show Activity Status," so friends can't see when they're online.

**HOW TO:** Choose a public or private account by selecting "Account Privacy" in settings.

## 2. Block unwanted interactions

Blocking is an immediate way to disengage from any negative interactions. This will block people from seeing and commenting on their posts. When you block an account, that person is not notified. You can unblock an account at any time.

**HOW TO:** Block an account by tapping "..." on their profile, then tapping "Block."

### 3. Manage comments

You can control who has the ability to comment on posts. In the “Comment Controls” section of the app settings, they can choose to: allow comments from everyone, people they follow and those people’s followers, just the people they follow, or their followers. They can also set up comment moderation so they can approve any comments before they are posted, or remove the ability to comment entirely.

**HOW TO:** In settings, select “Comment Controls.” Tap “Allow Comments From” to control who can comment. To block comments altogether, tap “Block Comments.”

### 4. Report bullying

Bullying is against Instagram’s community guidelines, and it’s against our policies to create an account, post photos, or make comments for the purpose of bullying or harassing someone else. Let your teen know that if they spot an account, photo, video, comment, message, or story that is intended to bully or harass someone, they can and should report it.

**HOW TO:** Tap “...” on the top right corner of a post or profile, swipe left on a comment, or tapping and holding a message, then tapping “Report.” Reporting is totally anonymous.

## 5. Block when necessary

Young people may keep following an account that is having a negative impact on them simply because they haven't stopped to check in with themselves and identify the issue. Encouraging an occasional edit of their follow list can help open up discussion and an opportunity to create some distance.

**HOW TO:** Click "Following." Scroll through and tap the "Following" button next to any name you want to unfollow. The button will turn blue. You can also go to someone's profile and tap "Unfollow."

## 6. Filter it out

Instagram has filters that automatically remove offensive words and phrases and bullying comments. Your teen can also create their own list of words or emojis they don't want to have appear in the comments section when they post by going to "Filters" in the Comment Controls section.

**HOW TO:** Tap "Manual Filter" and a field will appear where they can enter any words, phrases, or emojis that they never want to see on their posts.

## 7. Mute an account

There may be accounts that your teen isn't interested in interacting with but is hesitant to unfollow. Muting will keep posts from those accounts from showing up in their feed. The other person will not know they've been muted.

**HOW TO:** Tap the "... " menu in the corner of one of their posts. You can choose whether to mute feed posts, story posts, or both from an account. You can also mute someone by pressing and holding on a story.

## 8. Use "restrict" to control access

Restrict is a new way to reduce unwanted interactions. Comments from anyone on your "Restricted" will not appear publicly unless you approve them. Restricted people also won't be able to see when you're online or when you've read their messages. Young people may feel more comfortable using "Restrict" as an initial response, and then blocking or unfollowing if the problem persists.

**HOW TO:** Access Restrict by swiping left on a comment, through the Privacy tab in Settings, or directly on the profile of the account you intend to restrict. Tap "Restrict" to add the account to your restricted list.

## 9. Make connections, not comparisons

We want young people to be inspired on Instagram, and feel empowered to explore new things and make changes in their lives (or the world!). However, it's important to check in and make sure your teen isn't becoming discouraged by comparing themselves with others and feeling that they don't measure up to an unachievable ideal. Having conversations about how things like Instagram accounts, or people's lives on Instagram, can appear "perfect" when they actually aren't can be incredibly helpful, as can encouraging them to follow people who are just as inspiring but more relatable.

## 10. Use "close friends"

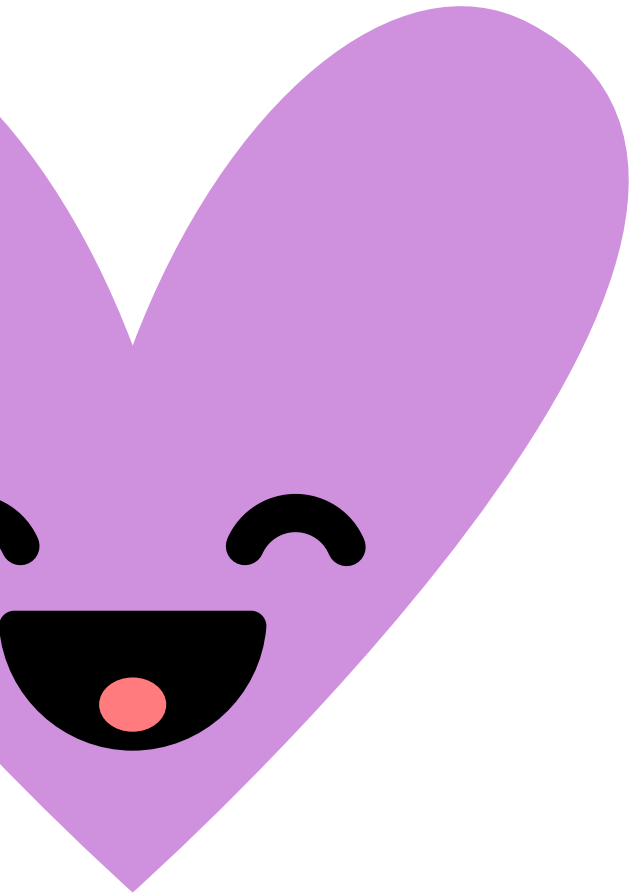
Even with have a private account, there are ways to post that are even more selective. The "Close Friends" setting on a story will prevent anyone who isn't on a "Close Friends" list from seeing the story. People who are unable to see the story won't know that they are missing something.

**HOW TO:** Create a "Close Friends" list by tapping "☰" on your home screen, then tapping "Close Friends." Then, after creating a story, choose "Close Friends" at the bottom of the screen instead of "Publish."

## 11. Send messages directly

Instagram Direct is the most private way to share on Instagram, so we suggest using it when sharing something very personal—after considering whether or not to share it at all.

**HOW TO:** To send a message (text, image, or video), click the "✈" icon at the top right of your Feed and choose who to share it with (up to 15 people). You can also message someone by clicking that same icon from their profile.



# Creating a Positive Self-Image

By Janis Whitlock

*Dr. Janis Whitlock is a developmental psychologist and the director of the Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery. She is the author of publications on nonsuicidal self-injury in adolescence and young adulthood, social media and mental health, and in youth connectedness to schools and communities.*

"As an adolescent and young adult psychologist (and as a parent!), I know how much adults caring for young people want them to thrive."

Exactly what that looks like in the modern age can be perplexing. Knowing how to help our young people balance the demands of daily life with their budding sense of autonomy and independence is a complicated task, especially when modern technology affords them the ability to seemingly and simultaneously do so much at one time! While most parents try to keep general tabs on where their children are, off-line and online, it can help to have a general understanding of areas in which you can expect to see signs of maturation.

In adolescents and young adults who are doing well, you are likely to see steady growth and positive experience in a number of areas. While a lot of this growth is subtle and slow going, there are areas in which progress is generally visible. In my work with parents, I suggest they periodically ask themselves if they notice positive progress in these four areas:

## 1. Independence

Being an adult requires multiple forms of independence in a number of areas. For example, being able to build and maintain positive relationships, manage emotions, and eventually to economically support oneself are areas in which you can expect to see maturation and change as young people move into adulthood.

### **A few things to look for:**

- Do they have areas in their life where they have the ability to autonomously make important decisions?
- If they make mistakes, are they able to recognize and learn from them?
- Do they have opportunities for trying out new skills in areas related to relationships, emotional maturity, or skill building (putting effort into school is definitely one sign of this, but there are other ways to build skills that set the stage for full independence, as well).

Young people benefit tremendously from positive social modeling (from you or others) and opportunities to take incrementally more challenging risks. It helps when the adults in their lives help them find and stick to positive challenges (which can be anything from posting a photo to trying out for a play). It also helps when adults model how to frame the positive and negative outcomes of risks taken—as meaningful events but not omniscient judgments on their worth as a person.



## 2. Confidence

All people want to experience what it's like to be really good at at least one thing. Children will often work tirelessly on various projects just to start learning and practicing the skills they will need later. Confidence comes from discovering and developing natural talents and from working on skills that come less naturally.

### **A few things to look for:**

- Do they have and take up opportunities to develop a sense of mastery or skill in one or more areas (e.g., music, art, academics, athletics, social relationships) ?
- Are they willing to try new things?
- Do they recognize and appreciate their achievements?

Teens gain confidence when they are willing to fail or not perform well when learning something and when they stop comparing themselves with others and learn to stay focused on their own life and identity. The cool thing is that developing confidence in one area can ignite the desire to have that feeling in other areas! The more challenging they perceive to be what they are learning, the more confident they are likely to feel once they master it. That's why it's important to encourage them to stretch themselves.

### 3. Connectedness

Connectedness is feeling cared for and caring for others. We often talk about this as having a sense of belonging or warmth and affection between oneself and at least one other. People can be connected to individuals and to groups of people or places, like a school. Indeed, healthy youth will often experience a sense of connectedness in several life domains—to a family or particular family members, one or more friends, school, clubs, even their borough, town, or city. No matter what it seems like from the outside, people with low connectedness rarely thrive.

#### **A few things to look for:**

- Do they have friends (at least one) or groups they interact with and authentically enjoy being with?
- Do they have at least one confidant—someone they feel like they can be themselves with?
- Do the relationships with primary friends generally leave your teen feeling at least neutral if not upbeat? (Feeling or seeming chronically depressed or down after seeing one or more specific friends is generally a red flag.)

The desire to socially connect is one of the earliest impulses humans have. Young people, who are preparing for adulthood alongside their peers, will generally be quite focused on establishing peer relationships. Keep in mind that many youths experience loneliness even if they appear to be socially active. Many teens also worry that their support system is precarious and could go away at any time. Teens who obsess over follower counts or online likes may be signaling a lack of the kind of relationships that foster a true sense of connectedness—in the absence of quality, they are focusing on quantity. Suggesting a private account where they can be more open with a trusted group could lead to stronger bonds, but it's critical to develop off-line sources of affection and support as well.

## 4. Usefulness

Usefulness is the experience of oneself making a contribution to something in the world one values (people, groups, or causes). This can be as seemingly small as helping a friend with something important to her/him/them or as large as being part of a group where one has regular tasks and responsibilities. Experiencing oneself as useful can strengthen a sense of connectedness, confidence, and oftentimes, independence.

### **A few things to look for:**

- Do they have opportunities to support and assist others (people, plants, animals, anything that leads to feeling like one is contributing to something in a meaningful way)?
- Do they enjoy (or at least not grumble too much about!) contributing to others/groups they are connected to?

A healthy identity includes a sense of belonging and knowing that one has a role to play that matters in the world. Teens who lack a feeling of social utility might appear passive—making decisions based on what others say, failing to set goals, and avoiding situations where they would be the focus of attention. Recognizing and validating the positive things a young person is contributing to their school, family, or community is a good way to build up this quality and encourage them to value it in themselves. If they do not have opportunities to feel of use, help them find them—even helping out around the house in ways that make a real difference to everyone’s quality of life can help (some complaining is common during this process 😊).

# Balancing Act

Read the teen version of this page [here](#).

As part of paying attention to **Pressure to be Perfect**, you may want to check in on how much time your teen is spending on Instagram. There's no magic formula for determining the right amount—instead, we encourage young people to track how much time they spend online, to check in with how they feel about that time, and to make adjustments based on those insights.



## Launching a conversation about time spent online can spark defensiveness in a young person especially if it is an adult who initiates it.

Try starting with “respectful curiosity”—asking questions in an open way that helps you understand their experience and the role social media plays in their overall well-being and life. These may be helpful questions to ask: Do you feel more withdrawn or lonely after you’ve been on a particular app for a long time? Do you find yourself more irritable or anxious? Once emotions have been explored, you can mutually decide on parameters for usage.

Instagram has a set of tools that can help with those parameters. Below, an explanation of the tools and some tips on balancing screen time with off-line.

## The Tools

- 1. TRACKING TIME:** The Activity Dashboard shows how much time has been spent on Instagram for the past day and week, as well as average daily time on the app. Tap and hold the blue bars to see how much time has been spent on Instagram on a certain day. Using the tracking tool can open a discussion about time spent online and whether you might want to reduce it.
- 2. SETTLING LIMITS:** The daily reminder can be used to set a limit on the amount of time spent on Instagram. Talk with your teen about how they feel while using the app. Is there a point when they don't get as much out of it? Setting the daily reminder together can be a good way to talk about how Instagram is being used throughout the day.
- 3. MAKING PEACE:** The "Mute Push Notifications" feature can be used to silence Instagram notifications for a period of time. When the preset time is up, notifications will return to their normal settings without your having to reset them. With notifications off, it may be easier to focus on other things without interruption. Notifications can also be fine-tuned so that messages from a study group come through, but not party posts, for example.
- 4. HITTING PAUSE:** Young people can feel pressure to see and interact with all of their friends' posts. When they scroll through every post on their feed since they last logged on, they'll see a message that says "You're All Caught Up." This way, they'll know that they're up to date on everything their friends and communities are up to. "You're All Caught Up" is automatically enabled.

## The Tips

**1. MODEL THE HABITS YOU'D LIKE YOUR TEEN TO ADOPT:** Living a life with intentional screen time is an important part of **Pressure to be Perfect** and is good for you and for those around you. Come up with guidelines that work for you, and work with young people in your life to do the same. And be transparent if you struggle—if they know it's hard for you, they won't beat themselves up if it's hard for them.

**2. CHANGE OVER TIME:** When younger teens first join Instagram, you can explore the app together and discuss who to follow and set parameters that you revisit from time to time. With older teens, it's important to understand that they need autonomous spaces where they can explore and interact with others. What's key for them is to be self-aware enough to make healthy decisions or to ask for help when they need it.

**3. ENCOURAGE PHONE-FREE ACTIVITIES:** Quality time off-line helps keep what happens online in perspective. You might want to start some weekly traditions that bring the family together to interact with one another, like board games, sports, or a movie night with phones in the other room.



# Support for Adults

It may never happen, but it's important for young people to know how to act if they are concerned for someone's emotional well-being on Instagram. You may have already had discussions about mental health. If not, try broaching the topic of skills for helping others with kindness and without judgment. Instagram provides a number of tools for reporting concerning behavior, which are explained below. We've also included [signs of distress](#) for you to look out for. Be sure to also read the [teen version](#) of **Pressure to be Perfect** to see the tips there.



## 1. In an emergency, contact authorities

If someone is in immediate physical danger, please contact 911 or local law emergency services for help.

## 2. Know the signs to watch for in others

[Seize the Awkward](#), a campaign by JED, the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention (AFSP), and the Ad Council, suggests looking out for things like this:

- They're not acting like themselves
- They are taking more risks than usual
- They talk about feeling hopeless
- They're taking more drugs or drinking more
- They are harming themselves
- They don't feel like hanging out as much
- Their mind seems to be somewhere else
- They are so anxious they can't relax

If someone is exhibiting any of the above behaviors, we suggest reaching out, as well as using the Instagram reporting tool.

### 3. Reaching out

Helping someone can be as simple as sending a quick DM or text. Just letting them know that they aren't alone and that you care about them is a kind thing to do. Try a casual check-in like, "I've noticed you posting a lot of sad memes lately. Are you OK?"

Asking questions like, "Have you talked to anyone else about this?" can be a way to see if they have support in the other parts of their life. #SeizeTheAwkward has [some good guidelines](#) for this, or share resources like the [Crisis Text Line](#).

### 4. Reporting

We encourage young people who are worried that someone may be thinking about hurting themselves to let us know so we can help connect them to information and resources. There are teams all over the world working 24 hours a day, seven days a week to review these reports. The poster will not know who made the report, but they will get help the next time they open the app.

**HOW TO:** Tap "..." above the post, then tap Report. Select "It's Inappropriate > Self Injury."

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