

How research and consultation informed Instagram Teen Accounts: a new protected experience for teens, guided by parents



Intro

We're introducing Teen Accounts on Instagram. Teen Accounts have built-in protections that limit who can contact them and the content they see. These accounts also provide new ways for teens to explore their interests.

Starting September 17, we'll automatically place teens into Teen Accounts on Instagram, and teens under 16 need a parent's permission to change any of their account settings to be less strict. If parents want more oversight over their older teen's (16+) experiences, they simply have to set up parental supervision. These settings apply to teens already using Instagram and to teens signing up to the app. You can find a full overview of Teen Accounts in [our announcement](#).

We worked tirelessly and thoughtfully to build Teen Accounts. We're proud of our work to reimagine the app for teens, and we've made many important design decisions along the way. We want to be transparent about these decisions and explain how our research and consultation with experts informed them — so we're sharing a detailed overview of our efforts here.

Informing our approach with research and consultation

Our research and close consultation with academics, parents, teens, and other stakeholders continue to inform how we build safe, age-appropriate experiences for young people.

We are in regular consultation with Meta's Youth Advisors and [Safety Advisory Council](#), which include third-party experts and professionals in diverse fields, including online safety, privacy, media literacy, wellness, and social and emotional health. In developing Teen Accounts, we also consulted with stakeholders to understand their perspectives and to inform our approach.

Further, since 2018, Trust, Transparency and Control Labs has consulted with more than 600 stakeholders, 300 teens and 270 parents from more than 35¹ countries to inform a number of the safety and privacy features of Meta technologies. These consultations help us develop age-appropriate experiences for teens that preserve their access to online connection and community.

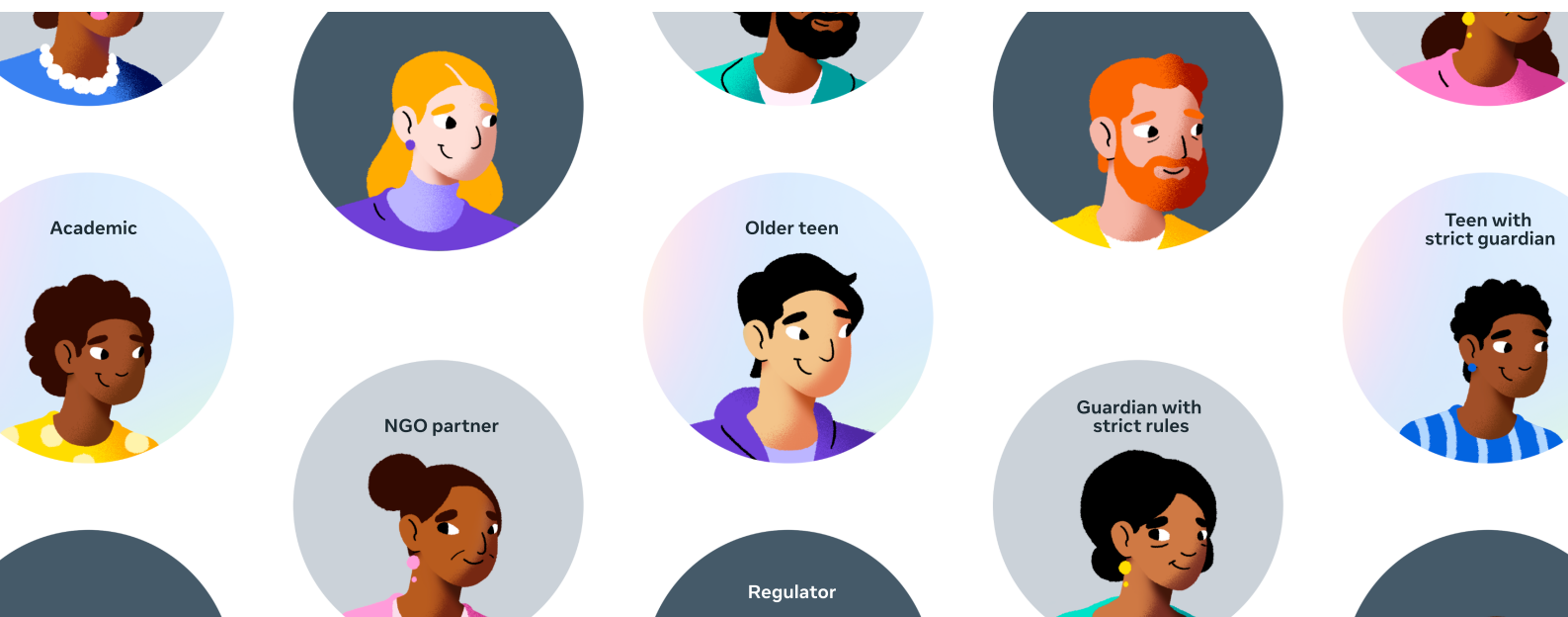


¹ Countries that TTC Labs has conducted research and consultation on age-appropriate design include the US, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, the UK, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Czech Republic, Sweden, the Netherlands, Turkey, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, South Africa, India, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines.

We also evaluate external guidance from governmental bodies and children's rights groups as we determine the best ways to create digital experiences for young people. As we build our understanding of how to apply this guidance, we are committed to continuing research and consultation so that we can build positive experiences for the youngest people using our technologies.

“Our research has consistently shown that parents/guardians and more importantly teens themselves want a social media experience designed for teens. Ensuring that privacy and safety protections are set by default, and that quality content are prioritized for teens, helps to address this critical need. Our research also shows the value and positive impact of engaged adult supervision when teens are online. Involving trusted adults in a scaffolded social media experience can help facilitate crucial communication between teens and their parents/guardians about their social media use.”

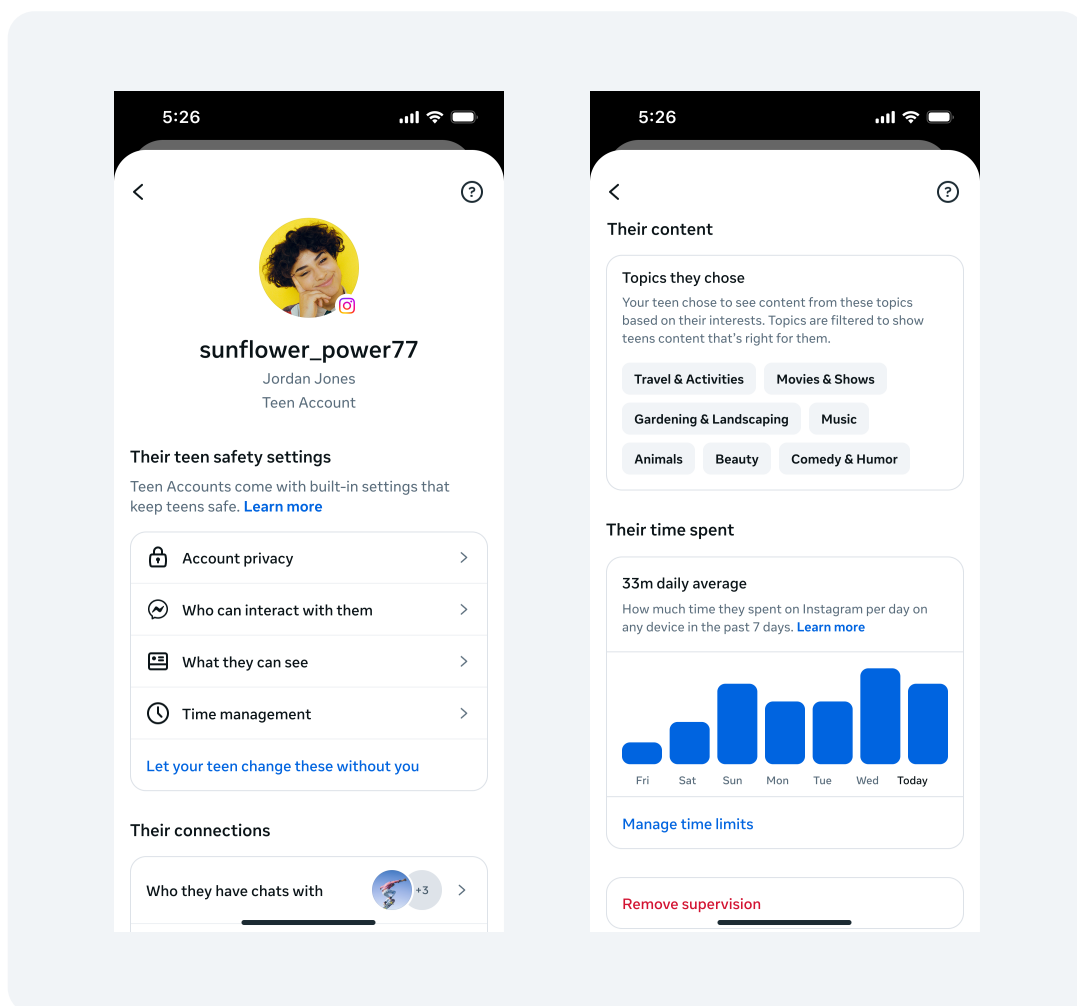
— Dr. Kara Brisson-Boivin,
Director of Research, MediaSmarts



Designing with parental support in mind

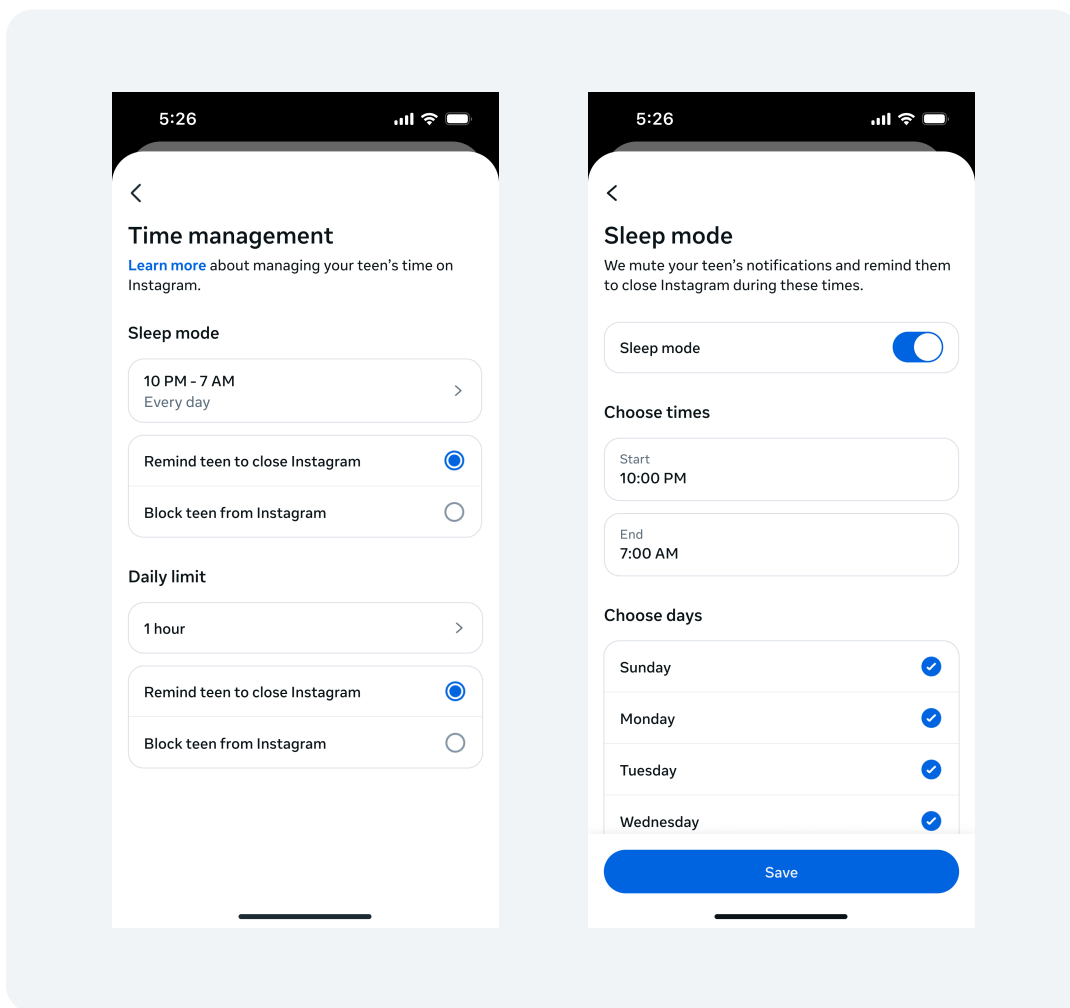
Simply put — being a parent is hard. Most parents worry about how their children are doing in the classroom, on the playground, and on the sports field, but today’s generation of parents is unique. They have a whole new world to navigate with their children: their online lives. Teen Accounts are designed to better support today’s parents, and give them peace of mind that their teens have the right protections in place.

We designed Teen Accounts to provide baseline protections for all teens so parents can feel assured that their teen’s experience on Instagram comes with automatically applied settings. However, research tells us that parents also want more helpful, customizable controls that allow them to see more information about their teens’ activity, like screen time stats and accounts their teen may have blocked or reported.



That’s why Teen Accounts are designed to give parents greater oversight of their teens’ experiences. Younger teens (under 16) attempting to change their new settings will need to request their parent or guardian’s permission to do so. If a teen already has a supervised account, their parents will be notified of the request and can approve or deny it.

Younger teens will need to set up parental supervision to make a request, and once supervision is established, parents can approve and deny these requests. We’re also updating our supervision tools to allow parents to change their teens’ settings directly to more protective settings. This design has the dual benefit of giving parents discretion over their younger teens’ settings, while encouraging greater use of our parental supervision tools.

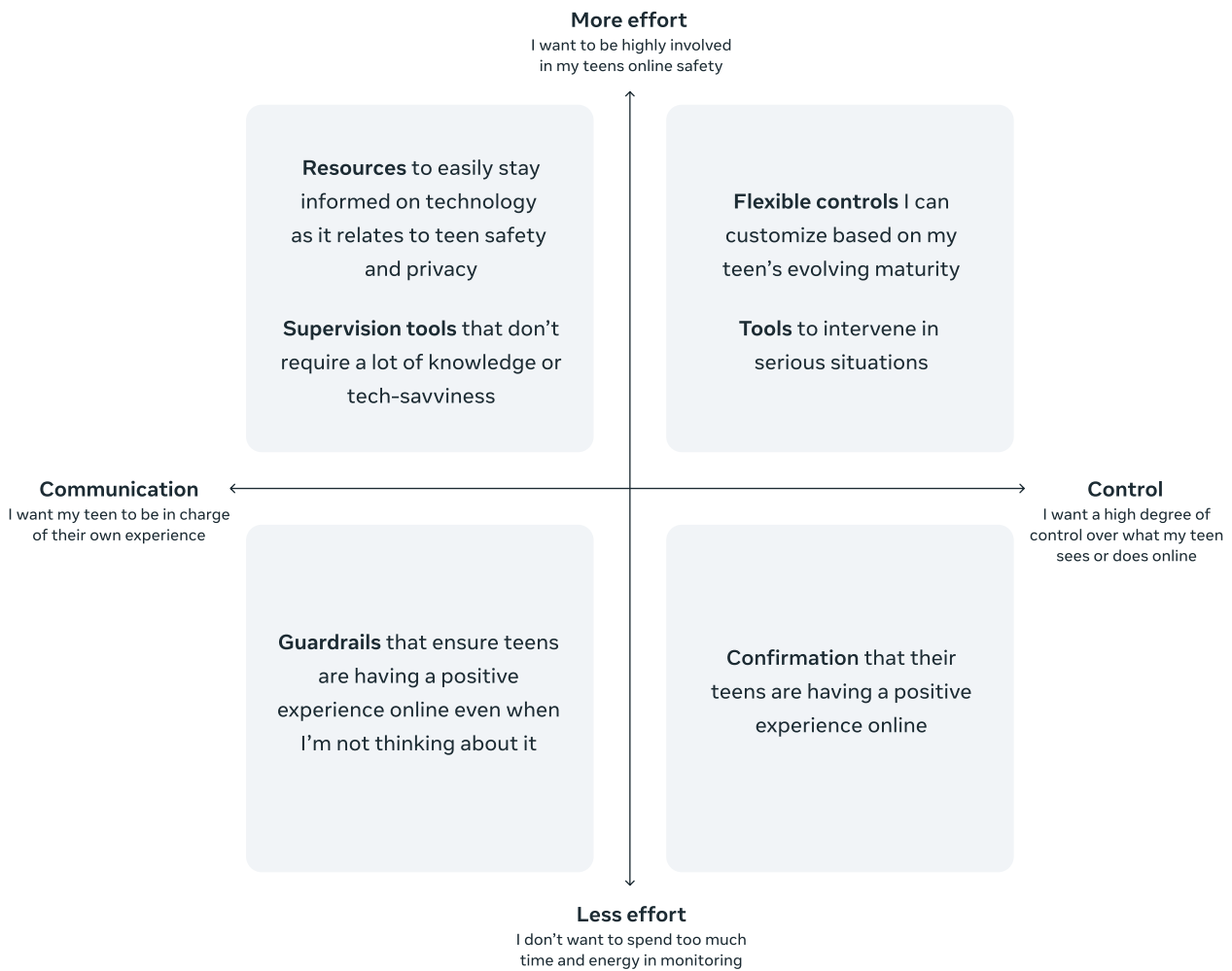


We’re also introducing new features for parents within our supervision tools. These include sleep mode — which replaces our existing quiet mode and night nudges features — which stops teens from receiving notifications between 10 PM and 7 AM, to help them focus on sleep. Parents can also choose to restrict their teens from using Instagram at night altogether within our parental supervision tools.

Another new feature allows parents to get insight into who their teens are chatting with. While parents can't read their teen's messages, now they will be able to see who their teen has messaged within the past seven days.



Parents attitudes and needs, from co-designing online supervision [report](#) (2022)



Parent attitudes and needs, from co-designing online supervision [report](#) (2022)

While we're developing tools to give parents greater oversight of their teens' experiences, we know there are multiple considerations for families when it comes to navigating the online world. Rules and context are key: Different ages, situations and scenarios influence parents to set certain rules and that's why parents need simple, efficient ways to oversee their teens' experiences. This includes features, settings and guidance that support different family structures and values, parenting approaches and the unique needs of teens. Many experts we've spoken to have said that supervision is not an on-off switch and it's important to meet young people and parents where they are.



How parents want guardrails that respect teen privacy, from co-designing online supervision [report](#) (2022)

Additionally, we know most parents don't have the time to monitor activity on each and every individual communication, social media, and entertainment or gaming apps that teens use. Given that there is no perfect solution, parents are often interested in a more comprehensive set of controls across the mobile app ecosystem to help them support their teens' online experiences, including app-level as well as device, operating system, or app store level solutions for verification and assurance.

How we design experiences for teens

Through research and consultation, we recognize that teenagehood is a transitional time when teens are learning how to express themselves and building community — whether online or offline — plays an important role in their development. Teens may use online spaces for connection and to discover new things, and we want to preserve these spaces for them when considering new, protected experiences.

We also know that, generally, teens want their online experiences to be positive. The teens we hear from say they tend to look for continued support from social media apps, including tools that would address situations where they perceive they are wasting time, come across unappealing content or come in contact with people who make them uncomfortable.

Teens are interested in ways that digital services might provide transparency and controls to help drive age-appropriate experiences. Teens also see value in their parents having more insights at their disposal. Teens view supervision tools as useful since their changing patterns of behavior can be used as evidence to show their parents or caregivers that they are ready to handle greater responsibility, choice and control over time.

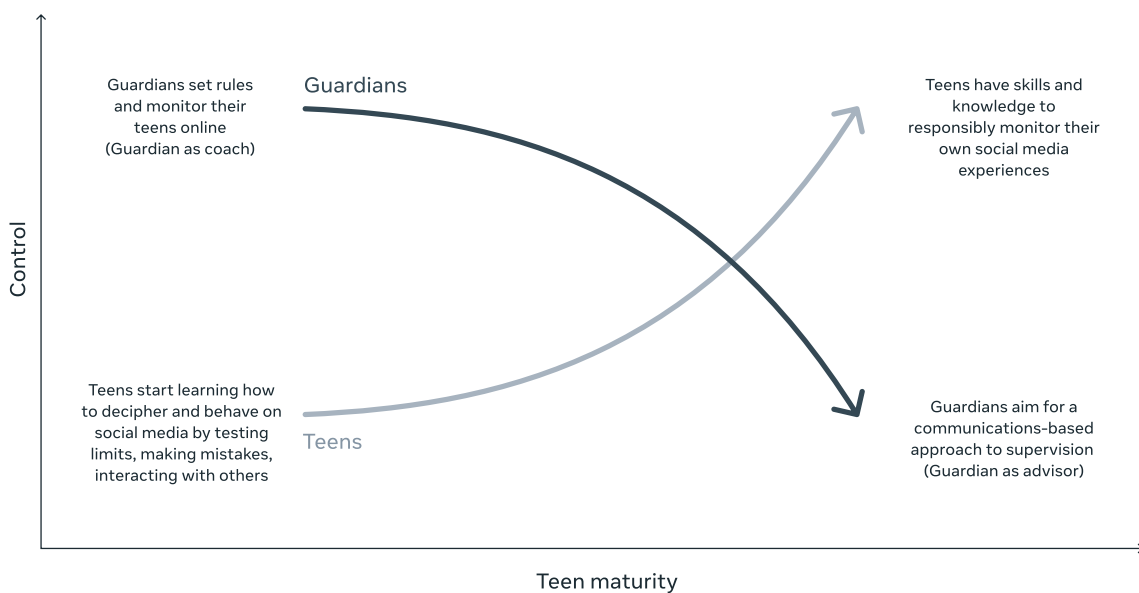
This feedback informed the development of Teen Accounts for teens of all ages, but we wanted to take a nuanced approach when it comes to how we apply these new settings to younger teens (under 16) and older teens.



Early and late teens: why we took a different approach

All teens will experience the same built-in protections when we place them in Teen Accounts. However, younger teens (under 16) will need parental permission to change their settings, while older teens will not. We designed Teen Accounts in this way because research shows that younger and older teens should have different online experiences based on their maturity and stage of development. Research suggests that the path to digital independence is not linear. There are many different family realities where teens are in a state of flux and parent rules change over time. Settings and tools should provide flexible solutions for parents and teens in any stage of development, with later teens graduating toward greater forms of self-supervision.

The ideal trajectory

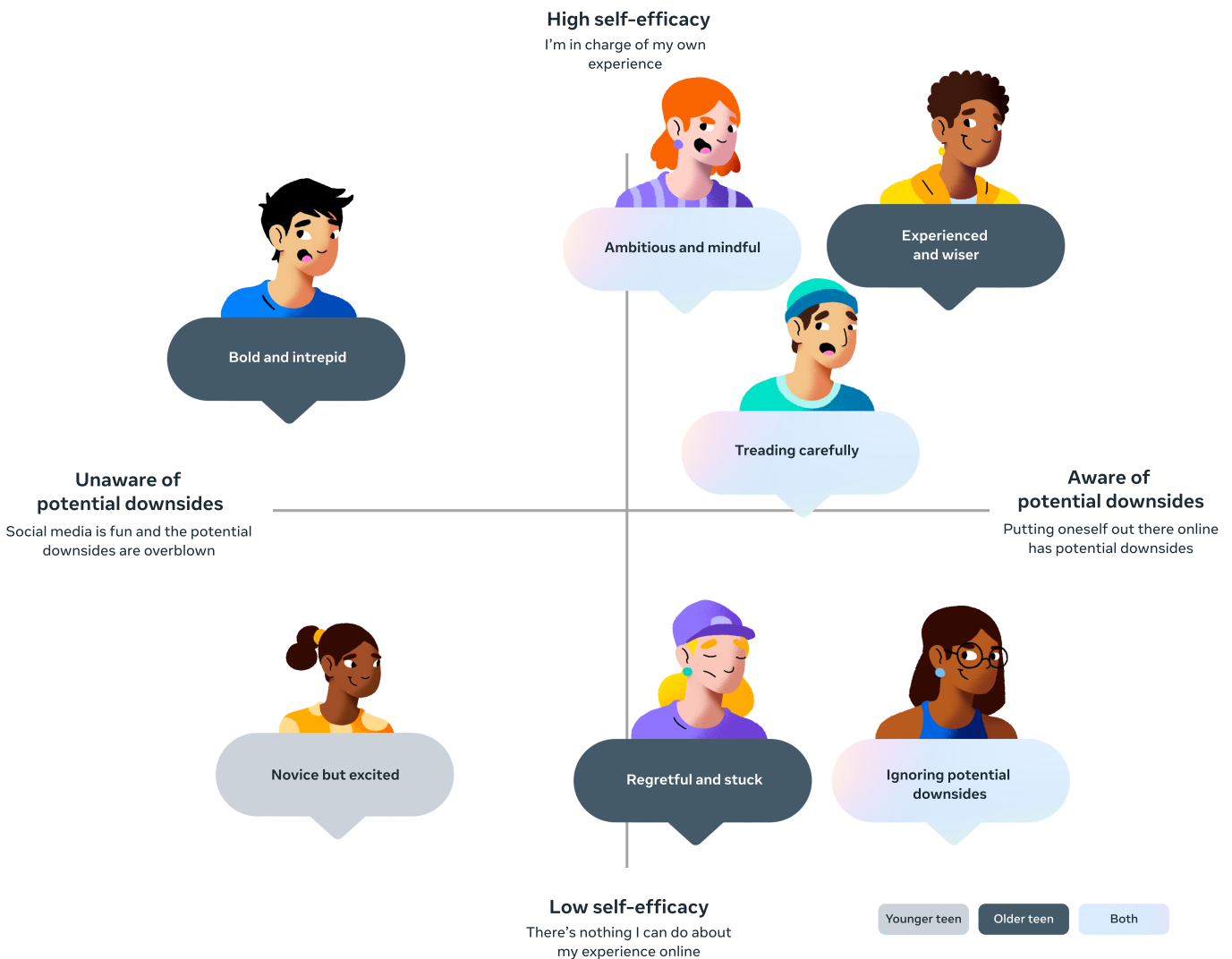


Ideal framework for parental control and teen maturity, from co-designing online supervision [report](#) (2022)

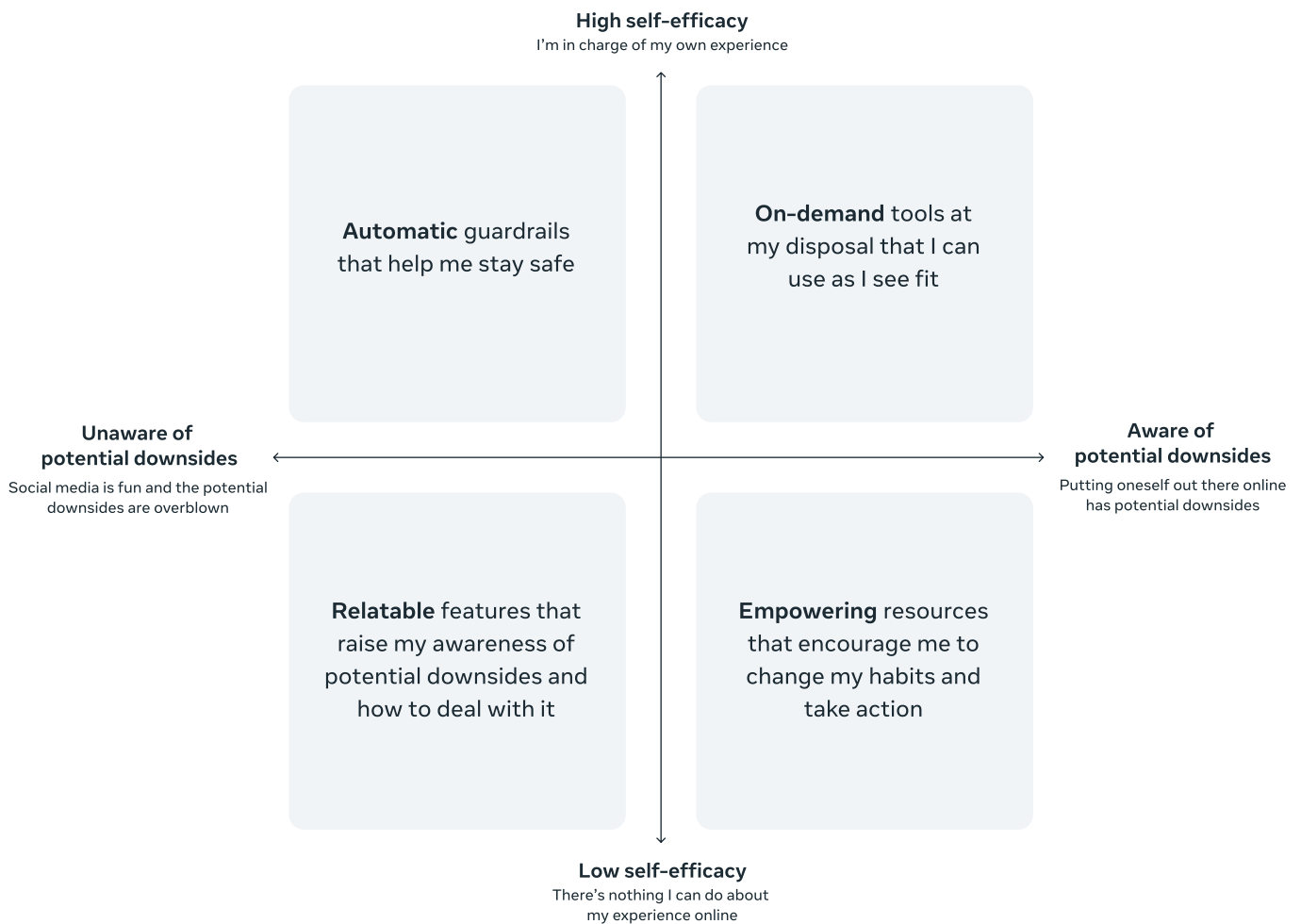
The parents and stakeholders we've spoken to generally are supportive of the distinction between younger and older teens and the value in providing parents with more options to receive insights or notifications for younger teens. Research generally reveals the following key differences:

1. Younger teens benefit from guidance and supervision to stay safe online.

Younger teens tend to lack experience and awareness of online spaces, and their sometimes heightened curiosity may make this group less aware of potential downsides to putting their lives online. Younger teens may require automatic guardrails and family supervision tools to help them make good choices. This includes a broader range of privacy and safety settings and controls with stronger defaults initially. Younger teens tend to respect parents' judgment on what will keep them safe, and appreciate the value of automatic guardrails based on their age. Some parents might use firmer rule-setting and monitoring to create safer spaces for their younger teens alongside conversation and teaching tactics.



Teen attitudes and needs, from co-designing online supervision [report](#) (2022)



Teen attitudes and needs, from co-designing online supervision report (2022)

2. Older teens seek more autonomy and self-expression, but still benefit from support and guidance.

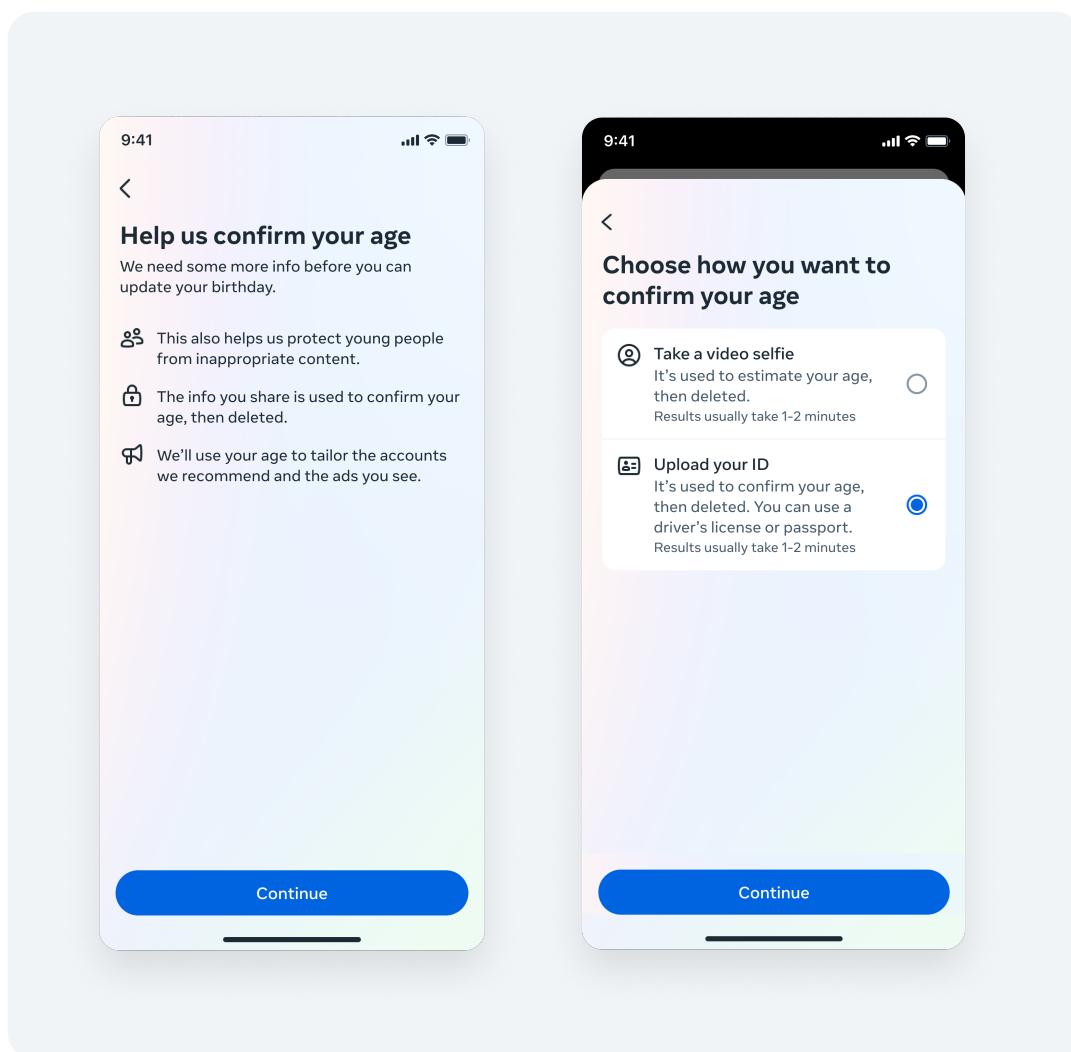
Older teens tend to become more self-sufficient as they develop their own identities and become more mature. They become more equipped to handle challenges independently, and the challenges they might experience online tend to decline. This process of maturation over time tends to correlate with a lower level of parental supervision. Supervision might reduce thoughtfully as self-efficacy and autonomy increase over time, although there may still be a need for more autonomous teens to receive support.

Older teens are still learning to navigate social media albeit relying less on their parents for guidance. Some teens in their older years benefit from being able to reflect on past experiences on social technology and learn from them. They may start to become more future-oriented and mindful of their own relationship with digital experiences and may be more likely to self-monitor their experience. Using tools to control their own experiences or self-monitoring is the ideal but teen's first instinct can sometimes be to handle situations on their own, or with a peer or sibling in the case of older teens.

Preventing evasion of Teen Accounts

Teens may try to circumvent these new protections. That's why we're requiring teens to verify their age in new ways. For example, if they attempt to log into a new account with an adult birthday, we will require them to verify their age. We're also building technology to find teens who have lied about their age to automatically place them in protected settings.

Since 2022, we've required teens to prove their age through a video selfie or ID check if they attempt to change their birthday from under the age of 18 to over 18, and if a teen attempts to update their birthday from a younger age to an older age, we require them to prove their age with an ID check.



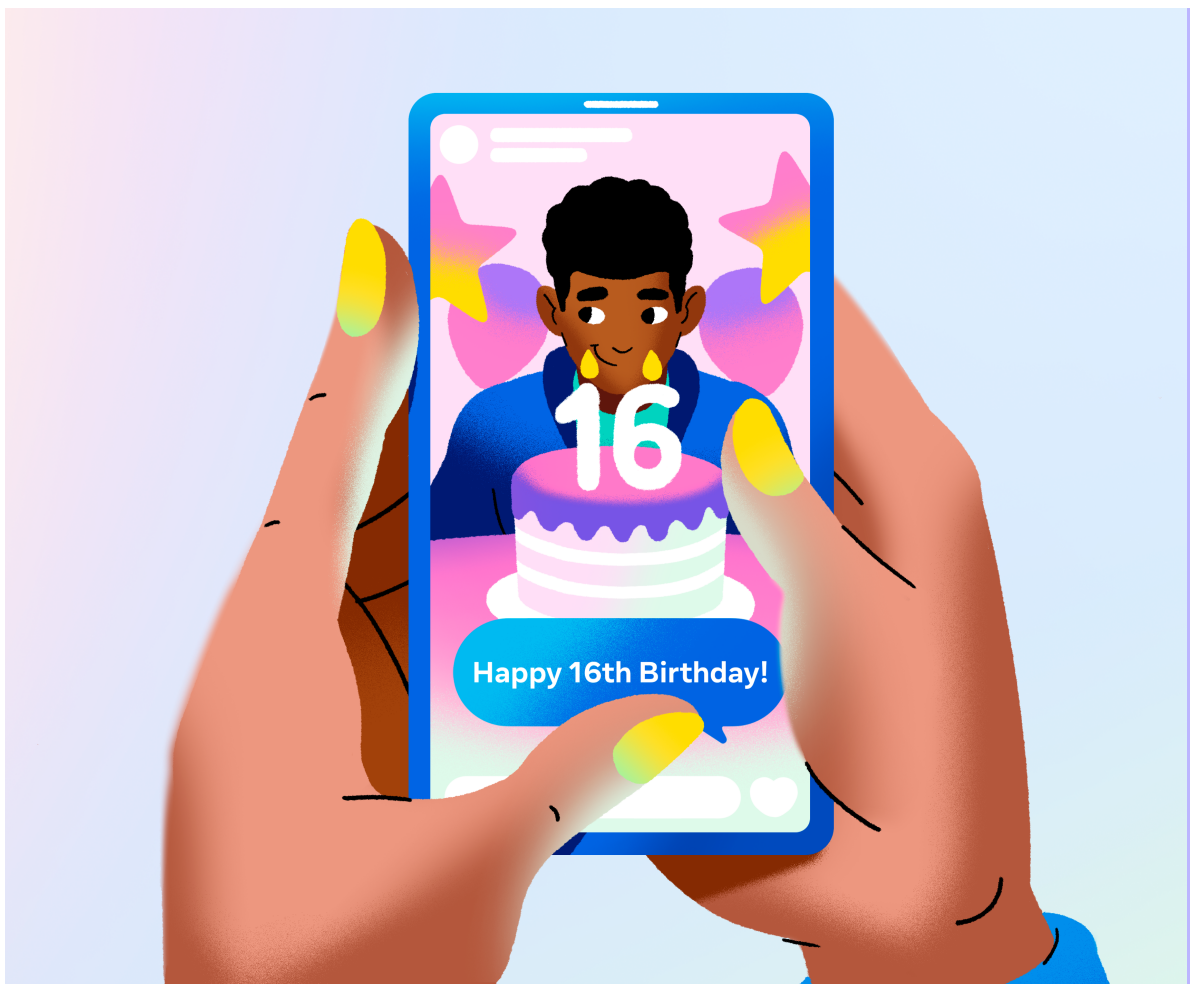
We're taking new steps to further restrict teens from attempting to set up or use accounts with inaccurate age information. This includes, for example, using information about a teen's original account to prevent them from using a new account with an adult age, or preventing teens from linking their accounts to accounts with adult ages. We're not sharing information about all of the measures we're putting in place, because we don't want to give teens an instruction manual on how to get around our efforts.

We're working to minimize people from setting up supervision relationships improperly. Parental supervision on Instagram is opt-in, and requires both a teen and a parent or guardian to agree to the experience. We take a number of steps to confirm that someone is eligible to supervise a teen's account. These steps include making sure an account that is being supervised cannot supervise another account and limiting the number of accounts that a parent or guardian can supervise. If we determine a parent or guardian is not eligible, they are blocked from the supervision experience.

Given the complexity of this work, we recognize that we may get this wrong sometimes, or that people may incorrectly find themselves in Teen Accounts when they shouldn't be. That's why we're giving people the option to appeal any errors by verifying their age.

Using technology to place teens in age-appropriate settings

These measures were designed to address evasion attempts by accounts that we know belong to teens, specifically accounts where a teen has submitted their correct birthday. However, teens may misrepresent their age online so we want to do more to proactively find accounts belonging to teens, even if the account lists an adult birthday. We're building technology to proactively find these teens and place them in the same protections offered by Teen Account settings.



We'll use artificial intelligence technology to predict if someone is over or under the age of 18. We train this technology with signals like profile information, when a person's account was created and interactions with other profiles and content. From those signals, we can begin to make calculations about the likelihood of whether someone is an adult or a teen, even if a teen has listed an adult birthday on their account.

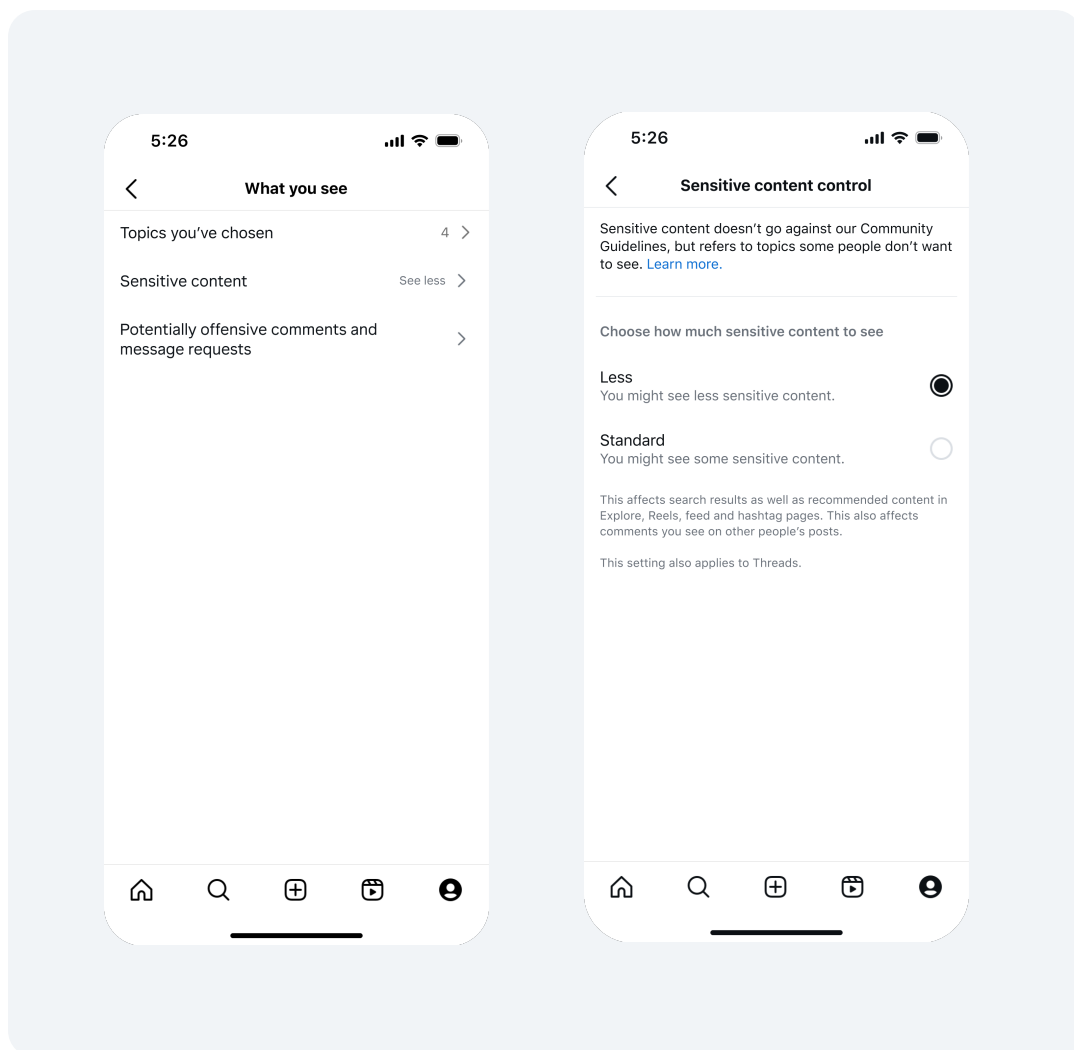
Using this technology in this way is a big change, and a first for our industry. While we're working diligently to ensure our AI models are accurate, we may make mistakes along the way, so we want to take a proportionate approach to the settings we apply. That's why we'll give people we predict to be teens the option to change these settings. We'll start testing this change in the US in early 2025.

While we're making these changes to help place teens into the right settings on Instagram, ultimately understanding someone's age online is a complex, industry-wide challenge. In the absence of comprehensive industry standards or harmonized regulation on how to effectively verify age online, it is important that companies work together as well as with governments and other experts to explore the merits of a more comprehensive set of controls across the mobile app ecosystem. We have advocated for an approach that includes an operating system or app store level technical solution for age verification as the simplest, most effective and most privacy protective way to verify age.



Our approach to showing teens age-appropriate content

To help teens have safe and age-appropriate experiences we've developed policies that determine the types of content they can see on our technologies. Our [Community Standards](#) and [Community Guidelines](#) outline what we don't allow on Facebook and Instagram respectively, and are designed to protect our whole community — including teens — from harmful content. When we become aware of content that breaks these rules, we remove it completely. Some of these rules are specifically designed to keep young people safe, such as our [child exploitation policy](#) and our [bullying and harassment policy](#), which includes additional protections for teens.



When content doesn't break these rules but may still be sensitive, we avoid recommending it to people in places like Explore and Reels. This is because we think there should be stricter standards when showing people content from accounts they haven't chosen to follow. With Instagram Teen Accounts, teens are defaulted into the strictest setting of our sensitive content control so that they're even less likely to be recommended sensitive content – and teens under 16 can't change this setting without a parent's permission.

As well as removing this content from teens' recommendations, we also work to hide certain types of sensitive content altogether from teens, even if it's shared by people they follow. This includes content that may be sexually suggestive or that discusses experiences with self-harm, which experts advise may be too mature for teens. We announced our plans to do this in January 2024, and since then we've been both rolling out these changes and building on them, to hide even more types of content. These content restrictions cannot be turned off, and are designed to complement the new changes we're making with Teen Accounts.



Conclusion

We want young people to have safe, age-appropriate experiences online and have spent a decade developing numerous tools, features and resources designed to protect them. We're committed to continuing our work in this critical space to bring reassurance to parents, while preserving the benefits of online experiences for teens.

