

SAFE and SMART

Keeping Children Safe Online

October 2024



1

WHAT IS

Doxxing?

2

HOW TO

Decide - dumb
phone or smart
phone?

3

SAFETY FEATURES

Instagram Teen
Accounts

What is Doxxing?

In today's world, where children spend so much time online learning, playing, connecting with friends and more, it's essential to be aware of the risks they might face. One issue you or your child may come across is called doxxing. In this section we'll take a look at what doxxing is, a couple of examples and give some guidance about how you can discuss this with your child.

What is Doxxing?

Doxxing is the act of sharing another person's personal or private information online without their permission. This private information could be a phone number, address, a person's real name if they use a nickname online, or even pictures and secrets. The goal of doxxing is often used to bully someone through embarrassing, scaring or hurting them.

Examples

1. Revealing Private Social Media Accounts: Many children have social media accounts that they try to keep private, sharing them only with their close friends. A child may decide to share

another person's private account details publicly, encouraging others to send mean messages or spread rumours. This can make the victim feel overwhelmed, exposed, and helpless.

2. Sharing Personal Photos and Secrets:

Let's say your child confides in a friend and shares a personal photo or a secret, maybe a picture they didn't want anyone else to see or a story they felt embarrassed about. If that friend later gets upset with them, they might post this private information online for everyone to see. This is not only humiliating for the victim but can also lead to further bullying by others who see the post.

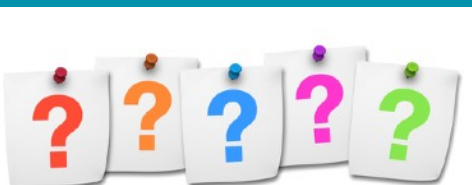
What Parents Need to Know

Doxxing can be very damaging, especially for children who are still learning how to handle social relationships and emotional challenges.

It's crucial that children understand that sharing someone else's private information without permission is not just mean—it can also have serious consequences, both for the person whose information is shared and for the person who does the sharing.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to some surveys approximately 1 in 5 people have been doxxed (children and adults). This includes names, addresses and even financial details that have been released onto the public web.



Doxxing is not a named crime in the UK or the majority of other countries, but it can be a violation under other laws, such as the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and the Communications Act 2003 (both UK laws).

Children might not always understand the potential risks involved, and what might start off as a joke or banter can quickly spiral out of control. This is why it's so important for parents to have open conversations with their children about doxxing and the importance of privacy.

Talking to Your Children About Doxxing

Here are some tips on how to talk to your children about doxxing, based on their age:

Primary School Aged Children:

Younger children are still developing their understanding of privacy and may not fully grasp the dangers of sharing information. Here's how to approach this topic:

- **Teach the Basics of Privacy:** Start by explaining that certain information, like where they live, their school, phone number, or even family details, should always be kept private. Use simple examples like, "Just like you wouldn't tell a stranger in the park where you live, you shouldn't share that information online either."
- **Talk About Online Behaviour:** Remind them that they should never share someone else's personal or private information, even if they think it's just for fun. Explain that this could make someone feel very upset and unsafe.
- **Set Up Guidelines:** Help them to understand what is and isn't okay to share online. Setting clear rules about what information is off-limits can help them navigate the online world more safely.



Secondary School Aged Children:

Older children are often much more active online, using social media, playing games, and chatting with friends. They may face more complicated situations, and it's important for them to understand the full consequences of their actions:

- **Encourage Critical Thinking:** Talk to them about why privacy is important and encourage them to think before they post anything online. Ask questions like, "Would you want this information shared about you?" or "How would you feel if someone else shared your personal details?" Encourage empathy and critical thinking.
- **Explain the Consequences:** Make sure they understand that doxxing can have very serious consequences. It can lead to people being

bullied and feeling unsafe or anxious. In extreme circumstances, doxxing can have legal consequences, and it might get them in serious trouble at school or even with the law.

- **Promote Safe Sharing Habits:** Teach them to respect other people's privacy and not to share anything about others without permission. Reinforce the importance of kindness and how, just because something is easy to do online, it doesn't mean it's right.

Doxxing is a serious issue that can deeply impact a child's sense of safety and well-being. By helping our children understand the importance of keeping information private and treating others with respect, we can work together to create a safer online environment for everyone.



How to: Decide Between a Smart Phone and a Dumb Phone

As parents, deciding whether to give your child a smartphone or a dumb phone can be challenging, there's no single answer that is correct for everyone. Each option comes with its own benefits and drawbacks and it's important to weigh these carefully before making a decision that best fits your family.

There is lots of discussion going on right now, from a smartphone free childhood, banning mobile phones for under 16's, schools and academies banning phones in schools and much more.

It isn't possible to go into great detail in an article, this is simply to explore some of the pros and cons, a few research insights, and the questions parents might ask before purchasing a mobile phone for their child.

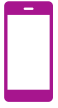
What's the Difference?



A smartphone is a versatile device that allows internet access, communication through social media, gaming, and countless other features beyond basic calling and texting.

A dumb phone is more limited in functionality, primarily offering calling and texting without internet or app connectivity. It is often referred to as a "brick" phone.





Smartphone Pros

Staying Connected: Smartphones allow children to communicate with parents and friends through calls, texts, and apps such as messaging. This can be especially helpful for older children who need more independence and for families that want the security of GPS tracking.

Learning and Convenience: Smartphones offer educational apps and easy access to school resources, which can be useful for children, especially as they grow older and need tools for learning.

Social Engagement: Children often use smartphones to socialise with friends. Not allowing access could lead to feelings of exclusion or being left out.



Smartphone Cons

Distraction and Addiction: Smartphones can be highly addictive (although this is contested by some scientists) and reduce attention spans. Some research shows that excessive smartphone use can lead to issues like decreased focus, poor sleep, and difficulty managing time, particularly among teenagers. Other research shows little to no causation.

Exposure to Inappropriate Content: Smartphones provide unrestricted access to the internet, which can lead to exposure to harmful content or interactions with strangers. This poses a risk, particularly for younger children who may lack the skills to navigate these spaces safely.

Mental Health Concerns: Heavy smartphone use has been linked to anxiety, depression, and a decline in self-esteem. This is often attributed to the pressures of social media and the potential for cyberbullying.





Dumb Phone Pros

Minimized Risks: Many dumb phones do not have internet access or apps, significantly reducing the risk of exposure to harmful content and online interactions.

Focus on Communication: Dumb phones are great for safety and staying in touch without the distractions of social media or games. This helps children focus on school and physical activities without being glued to a screen.

Affordability and Simplicity: Dumb phones are more affordable and easier for younger children to use, making them an ideal first phone for safety reasons.



Dumb Phone Cons

Limited Features: Dumb phones lack the features that can be beneficial, such as educational apps or access to school resources, which may be important for older children.

Peer Pressure: Older children may feel excluded if they do not have a smartphone like their friends. This social exclusion can impact their relationships, especially as socialising becomes more digital.

What Does the Research Say?

Social Connectivity and Independence: Smartphones help children stay socially connected and provide a sense of independence, which is particularly important for teenagers. However, the risks, such as exposure to harmful content, are significant. Parents need to consider whether their child is mature enough to handle these challenges responsibly.

Dumb Phones as Safer Alternatives: Dumb phones can be seen as a safer option for younger children as they can provide essential communication without many of the risks associated with the internet. This can make them a good choice for children who are just starting to take on the responsibility of owning a device.

Age and Maturity Matter: The type of phone appropriate for a child depends largely on their age and maturity. Younger children in primary school may be better suited to a dumb phone, while older teenagers who socialise with their friends and need access to online learning tools might benefit more from a smartphone.

Why a Smartphone or a Dumb Phone May Be Suitable

Smartphone: A smartphone may be suitable for a child who has shown responsibility, is capable of navigating online spaces safely, and is at an age where social interaction through apps becomes important. For instance, teenagers needing access to school assignments or GPS tracking might benefit from a smartphone.

Dumb Phone: On the other hand, a dumb phone is ideal for younger children or those getting their first mobile device. It serves the primary purpose of safety—allowing them to call and text family members without exposing them to the risks of the online world.

Questions to Ask Before Choosing a Phone

Why Does My Child Need a Phone?

If it's primarily for safety and basic communication, a dumb phone may suffice (unless you want to use the GPS capabilities). If your child needs access to educational resources and to stay in touch with friends, a smartphone might be a better option.

Is My Child Ready for Online Access?

Assess whether your child has good judgment when navigating online spaces. Are they prepared to handle social media responsibly and use the internet for educational purposes?

What Safety Measures Can I Implement?

For smartphones, consider parental controls, restricting app usage, and setting limits on screen time. Make sure the phone is set up safely before giving it to your child. This includes if you are giving your child your old phone.

See this link for the parental features available on a large range of devices and apps:

<https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>

Conclusion

The decision whether to give your child a smartphone or a dumb phone ultimately depends on your family's needs, your child's level of maturity, and how you plan to ensure their safety. A dumb phone is a great way to introduce younger children to the responsibility of owning a device, while a smartphone can provide convenience and social connection for older kids, provided proper safety controls are in place.

Instagram Teen Accounts

Whilst not as popular as it once was, Instagram is still used by lots of children and young people and Meta has recently introduced new safety features specifically for teen accounts to provide a more secure environment for young users.

These features, which come into place 'within 60 days of 17th Sept 2024' according to Meta, are designed to help parents protect their children while allowing them to enjoy social media responsibly. Here's a closer look at these features, including some potential positives and downsides.

Key Features

- **Default Privacy Settings:**

When a new account is created by a teen under 16, it is automatically set to private. This means that only approved followers can see posts, stories, and reels. This default setting helps limit exposure to strangers and prevents unwanted interactions.

- **Restricted Messaging:**

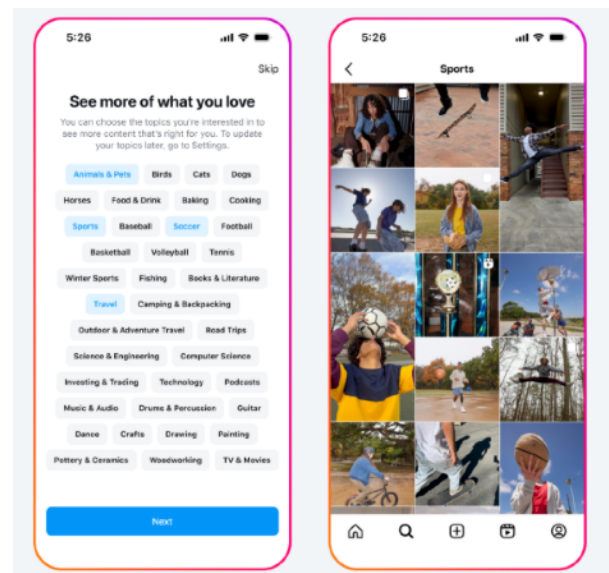
Teens can only receive direct messages from people they follow. This ensures that unknown users can't randomly message your child, reducing the risk of online harassment or exposure to inappropriate content.

- **Sensitive Content Filters:**

Instagram applies filters to limit the amount of sensitive or potentially harmful content teens may encounter. This includes reducing the appearance of certain types of content in their feed, search, and explore tabs.

- **Parental Supervision Tools:**

Parents can supervise their child's account by approving privacy changes, setting time limits



for app usage, and managing content settings. This ensures that teens are not bypassing safety settings without parental awareness.

- **Time Limit Reminders:**

The app encourages responsible screen time with reminders that help teens manage how long they're spending on the platform. Parents can also set limits, helping children maintain a healthy balance between online and offline activities.

Positives of These Features:

- **Increased Safety:**
Default privacy and restricted messaging add layers of safety that protect teens from strangers or malicious individuals trying to contact them.
- **Content Moderation:**
By filtering sensitive content, Instagram is making efforts to shield young users from potentially harmful material, promoting a safer browsing experience.
- **Parental Involvement:**
Parental supervision tools provide peace of mind for parents, allowing them to have an active role in ensuring their child's online safety without completely invading their privacy.
- **Balanced Screen Time:**
Time limit reminders are helpful in promoting balanced online habits, encouraging teens to take breaks and engage in offline activities.

Potential Negatives:

- **Privacy vs. Trust:**
While increased parental supervision is positive for safety, teens may feel a loss of independence, leading to conflicts or attempts to circumvent parental controls. Balancing guidance with trust is key to avoiding these issues.
- **False Sense of Security:**
Although these features improve safety, they do not eliminate all risks. Teens could still interact with harmful content or people if they accept friend requests from those with ill intentions. Education and open conversations are crucial to reinforcing these protections.
- **Complex Settings:**
Some of the parental tools and privacy settings may be difficult to navigate, especially for parents who aren't very familiar with technology. It's important to take time to understand the settings to make full use of them.

Conclusion:

Instagram's new teen account safety features are a step in the right direction to help young users on the platform. By ensuring accounts start as private, limiting unwanted contact, and encouraging moderation in usage we are, at last, starting to see better proactive steps.

However, one of the biggest failings with most social apps is their inability to prevent younger (under 13) children from joining the platform, or to prevent any user lying about their age which is often done to prevent these very restrictions in the first place.

Meta states that they are requiring users to verify their age if they try to alter their date of birth on an existing account, or if they create a new account. They are also building technology to proactively find accounts belonging to teens, even if the account lists an adult birthday. However, they won't start testing this until some time in 2025 and that testing will take place on U.S. account holders only.





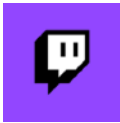


For more detailed information, you can visit:

<https://about.fb.com/news/2024/09/instagram-teen-accounts/>

Common Apps

This is not an exhaustive list, but tends to be the more popular apps used by children and young people.

Age requirements are set within the terms and conditions of the app provider, don't be confused by ratings in the app store which can sometimes be different.

App	Age	Comments
	13 and over	Discord - is a voice, video and text chat app that's used by tens of millions of people aged 13+ to tap and hang out with communities or their friends. Parental settings can be found HERE .
	13 and over	Instagram - is a photo and video sharing app where people can upload photos, videos and messages to share with others. Parental settings can be found HERE .
	13 and over	Snapchat - is a very popular app that lets users swop pictures and videos (Snaps) with others which are meant to disappear after they are viewed. There is also a messaging feature. Parental settings can be found HERE .
	13 and over	TikTok - is a social media app that allows users to create, watch and share short videos shot on mobile devices or webcams. Parental settings can be found HERE .
	13 and over	Twitch - is where people come together to chat and interact live. Think YouTube, but it is live rather than pre-recorded. Parental settings can be found HERE .
	13 and over	WhatsApp - is a messaging app which uses text, images, video and voice record features to connect with others. Parental settings can be found HERE
	18 and over	Reddit - is a network of communities (called subreddits) where people can share information, their interests and hobbies. Reddit is an 18+ app, there are no parental controls.