

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

THREADS

It's leveling season, and I'm here to help you level up!
AGE RESTRICTION
12+

However, Threads' reliance on an Instagram login effectively makes it 13+

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Threads is currently the number one trending social media app. Developed by Meta, the company behind Instagram and Facebook, Threads is a clear rival of Twitter (now known as X) in that it's a text-based conversation platform which allows posts of up to 500 characters, with the option to include links, photos and short videos. Threads is connected to a user's existing Instagram account, which lets people get started on this new app straight away; their followers and favourite creators will be imported from Instagram to their freshly created Threads account.

DIFFERING OPINIONS

Meta claim they will encourage friendly, positive engagements but haven't specified how they plan to moderate this. As we have already seen on the likes of Twitter, Facebook and so forth, any app where users can talk freely about topics meaningful to them also contains the possibility of offence being caused or hatred being spread.

ENDLESS SCROLLING

Threads doesn't currently have the facility to search for content – only for other users. Someone's feed, therefore, is made up of either threads from people they follow or content that Meta's algorithms have recommended. This could result in users absent-mindedly scrolling for long periods of time through nothing of particular interest, simply in search of that feeling of connectedness.

ACCOUNT DELETION IS COMPLEX

As Threads is linked to a user's Instagram account, it's comparatively tricky for someone to completely remove their Threads profile without automatically deleting their Instagram as well. Most 'Insta' users, having spent considerable time building up a bank of posts and followers, will probably not want to lose them and could therefore feel pressured into keeping their Threads account active.

OPEN NETWORKING PROTOCOLS

Reportedly, Meta's plan is for Threads to be compatible with ActivityPub, which will allow users to connect and share content more easily across different apps. If your Threads account is set to 'public', therefore, your posts would be accessible from other linked apps. What's more, people using these compatible apps would be able to interact with Threads users without needing an account.

DATA COLLECTION

In Threads' privacy policy, Meta states that certain data about users will be collected and linked to that person's identity, including details relating to (among other things) health and fitness, financial information, browsing history, usage data, purchases, location and contacts. This can paint a very detailed picture of a person's life, and Meta does not explain why it needs all this information.

POTENTIAL FOR EXCESSIVE TRACKING

Its tracking of every interaction, engagement and activity gives the impression of Threads being a sophisticated data-collection tool. There are no adverts on the platform right now, but – given the sheer volume of information being gathered and Meta's history of selling data for advertising purposes – it may not be long before ads start appearing on young people's Threads feeds.

Advice for Parents & Carers

READ THE SMALL PRINT

Privacy policies for apps are usually long and probably the last thing young people read (if at all) when signing up for a trending new platform. However, we'd advise parents and carers to take time to look through Threads' policy and see if they agree with their child's data being collected. Think critically about why Meta needs all that personal information, where it goes and what's done with it.

HIDE THE LIKES COUNT

Research has shown that young users often feel anxiety over how many likes they receive for their social media posts – and question whether this reflects their real-world popularity. Through the settings menu, Threads allows users to hide the likes count on their (and others') posts. While your child's posts won't display an exact number of likes, they'll still be able to see who *did* like their post.

FILTER OUT OFFENSIVE WORDS

Like Instagram, Threads has an option to hide replies that contain offensive words, phrases or emojis. These are predetermined by Meta, but you can also customise the list with terms that you deem offensive or which you don't want your child to read. Usefully, there's a crossover between the two apps, so words that you select to screen out on Instagram will also be hidden on Threads.

GO PRIVATE, AND STAY ALERT

Even if your child's Instagram account is already set to private, they'll need to select this option again in Threads (it's one of the first things the app asks at sign up). You can also edit who can mention them in a comment. Try to keep a regular eye on your child's account: as Threads' popularity and number of features increases, so will opportunities for potentially harmful content to slip through the net.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jul/11/threads-app-privacy-user-data-meta-policy> | <https://time.com/6292586/privacy-concerns-threads-meta/> | <https://about.fb.com/news/2023/07/introducing-threads-new-app-text-sharing/>

NOS
National Online Safety
#WakeUpWednesday