ComputerLeap

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Free digital literacy and cybersafety resources for every family

FREE RESOURCE

Teen Social Media Privacy Guide

Platform-by-platform privacy settings for Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, and more - for teens and parents.

KEY IMPORTANT: Social media platforms change their settings frequently. After making these changes, set a calendar reminder to review them again in 3 months.

PRIVACY PRINCIPLES THAT APPLY TO ALL PLATFORMS

- Private by default: ALL teen accounts should be set to Private - your posts should only be visible to approved followers.
- Minimum information: Remove your school name, phone number, and home address from all public bios immediately.
- Location off: Social media apps do not need your location to function. Disable location access for all of them.
- No strangers: Only accept follow/friend requests from people you know in real life.
- Review periodically: Privacy settings get reset by app updates. Check every 3 months.

INSTAGRAM

Make account Private: Settings (gear icon) > Account > Account Privacy > Toggle 'Private Account' ON.

Who can send messages: Settings > Privacy > Messages > Set 'Others on Instagram' to 'Don't Receive Requests'.

Who can tag you: Settings > Privacy > Tags > Manually Approve Tags: ON. Also set 'Allow Tags from' to 'People You Follow'.

Activity status: Settings > Privacy > Activity Status > Toggle 'Show Activity Status' OFF (stops others seeing when you were last online).

Story sharing: Settings > Privacy > Story > Hide Story From > add anyone you don't want seeing your stories even if they follow you.

Location: On your phone: Settings > Instagram > Location > Never.

Supervision (ages 13-17): Settings > Supervision > parents can monitor time spent, followers, and content. Highly recommended.

- [ ] Instagram account set to Private
- [ ] Message requests from strangers blocked
- [ ] Manual tag approval enabled
- [ ] Activity status hidden
- [ ] Location access removed

TIKTOK

Make account Private: Profile > three lines menu > Settings > Privacy > Toggle 'Private Account' ON.

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Direct Messages: Settings > Privacy > Direct Messages > Set to 'Friends' (people who follow each other). Prevents strangers from messaging.

Duet and Stitch: Settings > Privacy > Duet and Stitch > set both to 'Friends' or 'No One'.

Suggest account: Settings > Privacy > Discoverability > turn OFF 'Suggest your account to others'.

Screen Time Management: Settings > Digital Wellbeing > Screen Time Management > set 1-2 hour daily limit with a passcode.

Location: Phone Settings > TikTok > Location > Never. TikTok does not need your location.

Family Pairing: Settings > Family Pairing > links parent and child accounts. Parent can control settings remotely.

- [ ] TikTok account set to Private
- [ ] DMs restricted to Friends only
- [ ] Account suggestions disabled
- [ ] Screen Time Management enabled
- [ ] Family Pairing connected (for teens)

SNAPCHAT

Who can contact me: Profile > gear icon > Privacy Controls > Who Can? > Contact Me: Set to 'My Friends'.

Who can view my story: Privacy Controls > Who Can? > View My Story: Set to 'My Friends' (not 'Everyone').

Snap Map (Location): Privacy Controls > See My Location > Enable Ghost Mode. This is critical - Ghost Mode hides your real-time location from everyone.

Who can see me in Quick Add: Privacy Controls > See Me in Quick Add > Toggle OFF.

Notifications: Notification settings > turn off 'Opened Snaps' notifications to reduce anxiety about read receipts.

- [ ] Contact requests restricted to Friends
- [ ] Story visibility set to My Friends
- [ ] Ghost Mode enabled on Snap Map
- [ ] Quick Add visibility disabled

YOUTUBE

Account Privacy: YouTube cannot be fully 'privated' like other platforms. Instead: Set all videos to 'Unlisted' (viewable by anyone with the link) or 'Private' (only you). Never use 'Public' for teen videos.

Comment privacy: On uploaded videos > Edit > Comments and Ratings > Disable or require approval for comments.

Subscription visibility: myaccount.google.com > Data & Privacy > YouTube > keep subscriptions private so strangers can't see what channels you watch.

Watch history: YouTube app > Library > History > Manage History > Pause watch history to stop YouTube from building a profile.

Location: Phone Settings > YouTube > Location > Never.

THREADS & TWITTER/X (General Guidance)

Threads: Profile > Edit Profile > Set account to Private. Note: Threads is tightly linked to Instagram - the same privacy concerns apply.

Twitter/X: Settings > Privacy and Safety > Protect Your Posts > Toggle ON (makes tweets private). Direct Messages > set 'Allow message requests from' to 'Verified users' or 'People you follow'.

NOTE: Twitter/X is generally not recommended for teens under 16 in its current state - content moderation has significantly decreased since 2022, and harassment is very common.

UNIVERSAL PRIVACY SETTINGS CHECKLIST

- [ ] All accounts set to Private (only followers can see content)
- [ ] School name, home address, and phone number removed from all bios
- [ ] Location access revoked for all social media apps in phone settings
- [ ] Direct messages restricted to friends/followers only
- [ ] Real-time location features disabled (Ghost Mode on Snapchat, etc.)
- [ ] Calendar reminder set to re-check these settings in 3 months