



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on April 16, 2021

Zuckerberg Wants to Launch Instagram for Kids; Child Advocates Say No

Facebook, the world's largest social-media network, is exploring the possibility of building a version of Instagram — its popular video- and photo-sharing app — for children younger than 13.

The news about Instagram for kids was initially reported at [BuzzFeed](#). This source obtained an internal company post, revealing the company's plans:

We have identified youth work as a priority for Instagram and have added it to our H1 priority list. We will be building a new youth pillar within the Community Product Group to focus on two things: (a) accelerating our integrity and privacy work to ensure the safest possible experience for teens and (b) building a version of Instagram that allows people under the age of 13 to safely use Instagram for the first time.



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During congressional [testimony](#) on March 25, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg confirmed the platform's plans to create an Instagram for kids. "There is clearly a large number of people under the age of 13 who would want to use a service like Instagram," Zuckerberg said. He added that Instagram's current policy doesn't allow kids under 13 to use the platform. The Facebook CEO believes that "helping young people stay connected with friends and learn about different content online is broadly positive."

Child-advocacy groups and hundreds of experts worldwide, however, do not share Zuckerberg's vision. A coalition led by the Campaign for a Commercial-free Childhood and groups including the Center for Humane Technology, Common Sense Media, and the Center for Digital Democracy, along with dozens of researchers, sent a [letter](#) Thursday to Zuckerberg expressing their concerns that the platform could be harmful to young children.

According to the letter,

In the elementary and middle school years, children experience incredible growth in their social competencies, abstract thinking, and sense of self. Finding outlets for self-expression and connection with their peers become especially important. We are concerned that a proposed Instagram for kids would exploit these rapid developmental changes.



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A growing body of research demonstrates that excessive use of digital devices and social media is harmful to adolescents. Instagram, in particular, exploits young people's fear of missing out and desire for peer approval to encourage children and teens to constantly check their devices and share photos with their followers. The platform's relentless focus on appearance, self-presentation, and branding presents challenges to adolescents' privacy and well-being.

Child advocates point to the massive number of studies that link excessive screen- and social-media use with lowered physical, psychological, and mental well-being among adolescents, including obesity, decreased happiness, low quality of sleep, increased risk of depression, and increases in suicide. It is observed that 59 percent of U.S. teens have reported being bullied on social media, an experience that has been linked to increased risk of behaviors such as smoking and suicidal ideation. Adolescent girls report feeling pressure to post sexualized selfies as a means of gaining attention and social acceptance from their peers.

Screen addiction is also a real problem for growing children. According to a [report](#) by Common Sense Media, teens spend an average of seven hours and 22 minutes on their phones each day, and tweens — children ages eight to 12 — are not far behind, at four hours and 44 minutes a day. This amount of screen time does not include time spent on schoolwork, according to the report. When figuring in activities such as reading books and listening to music, the numbers jumped to nine hours and 49 minutes for teens and five hours and 54 minutes for tweens. At the same time, 32 percent of teens said they read for pleasure less than once a month, if at all. The report was released a year before the COVID-related school closures and the switch to virtual learning, so the current numbers are probably higher.

There are also numerous tech experts and IT specialists who can confirm that social-media platforms are designed to be addictive. "It's as if they're taking behavioral cocaine and just sprinkling it all over your interface and that's the thing that keeps you like coming back and back and back," [says](#) former Mozilla and Jawbone employee Aza Raskin. Sandy Parakilas, Facebook's former operations manager, says the goal behind Zuckerberg's company is to "addict" people at "an incredibly young age." He likened the popular social network to a slot machine.

Many medical experts have come to the same conclusion. Dr. Peter Whybrow, director of neuroscience at UCLA, [calls](#) screens "electronic cocaine," and Chinese researchers [call](#) them "digital heroin." Dr. Andrew Doan, the head of addiction research for the Pentagon and the U.S. Navy, [calls](#) video games and screen technologies "digital pharmakeia" (Greek for drugs). The most recent Pew Research Center [report](#) found that more than a third of adult Americans admit they are "almost constantly online." But any type of addiction is known to develop in children even faster than in adults. Shepherd's Hill academy [found](#) that 92 percent of teenagers go online everyday, 24 percent of teens are online "almost constantly," and 76 percent of teens engage in social media.

Lawmakers have expressed their concerns as well. A group of Democratic Senators and Representatives sent a [letter](#) to Zuckerberg demanding answers on the company's commitment to independent audits focusing on privacy, marketing, and harmful content regarding the proposed Instagram for kids. The politicians said if the tech giant fails to fully show how it will meet "the highest standards" of protecting users, "we would advise you to abandon your plans to launch this new platform."

Even if Facebook answers those questions to the congressmen's satisfaction, the key problem will



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remain: No matter how “clean” of ads and how well-protected the social-media for children would be, it can still turn children into junkies with low self-esteem and impaired memory and cognitive function, and cause them to be depressed, passive, and uninterested in learning.



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