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Instagram Releases A New Parent's Guide, But Parents Are Still Worried

"It's this gigantic juggernaut that I'm not going to be able to avoid."



By Maija Kappler



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... told her that she wanted an Instagram account, the mother of three wasn't sure what to do.

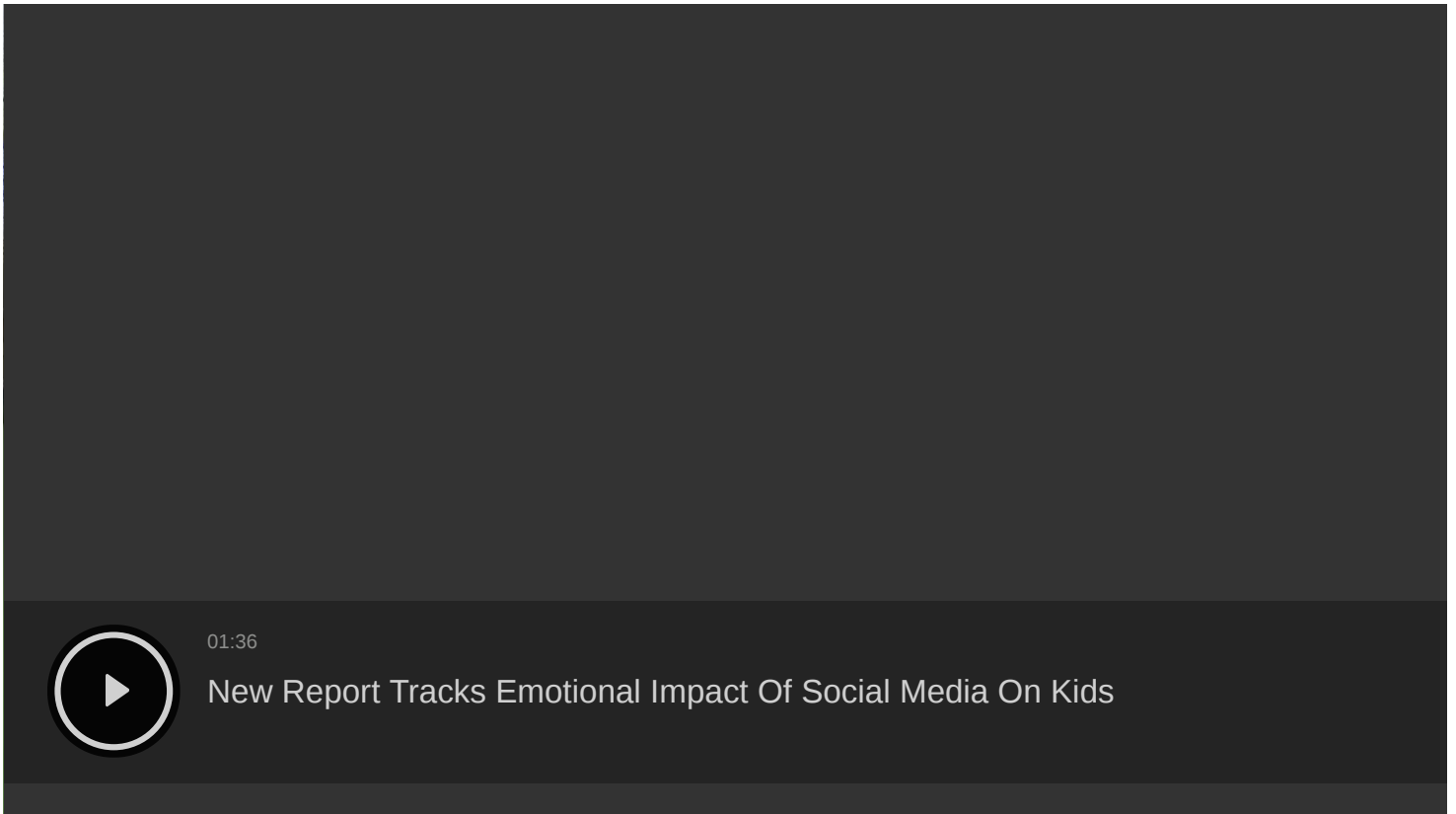


"It's not easy being a parent in the social media age," said Kelloway. "There are layers and layers and layers to this."

Instagram doesn't allow children under 13 to join the photo-sharing site due to a U.S. federal law called the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act.

But Kelloway did use the opportunity to talk to her eight-year-old about Instagram — a conversation that happened much sooner than she had anticipated.

"She was inquisitive about the entire concept," the Toronto-based mom told HuffPost Canada. "She wanted to know what people share, why they share it, who are the followers."



Last week, [Instagram launched a parent's guide](#) aimed at helping parents understand what the social media platform is about, and how they can keep their kids safe while using it. The guide highlights features such as private profiles, blocking or reporting abusive comments or accounts, and setting time limits for daily use.

"We know that as a parent it might be hard to understand what your teen is doing online," Instagram said in a statement. "We also know it can be hard to have an open conversation with teens and keep them safe while

we're learning to navigate the landscape ourselves."

The guide also includes a video of parents who work for the company talking about their own kids' activities on Instagram.



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For Melissa Marazzi, that kind of open conversation was necessary before her daughter got anywhere near Instagram. Her daughter, now 13, approached her over a year ago saying that her friends were on Instagram and she wanted an account as well.

After they chatted about about the social media tool, the Toronto mom imposed strict rules on her daughter's account: it had to be private, and for the first few months, she had to run all of her posts by her mother. Once Marazzi felt confident that her daughter could make those judgment calls herself, she relaxed that rule.

"She now posts freely," Marazzi said. "I'm on Instagram, so I see the posts. There's been maybe one or two we've had a discussion about."

"With a daughter, [there's a fear] of creepy men trying to follow her. Even though it's private, you never really know."

—Melissa Marazzi, parent of a 13-year-old

Both Kelloway and Marazzi said they see the benefits of Instagram for kids. Kelloway said her daughter Viiva loves taking pictures, and she wants her children to pursue their interests and hone their talents.

"Maybe she's a future photographer," said Kelloway.

Marazzi said not allowing her daughter on Instagram would be tantamount to social isolation.

"Her friends who don't have it say to their parents: 'We don't know what anyone's talking about because we're the only people who aren't on Instagram,'" Marazzi said. "Everybody's going: 'Did you see that post, did you see this post?' They feel so removed from everyone."



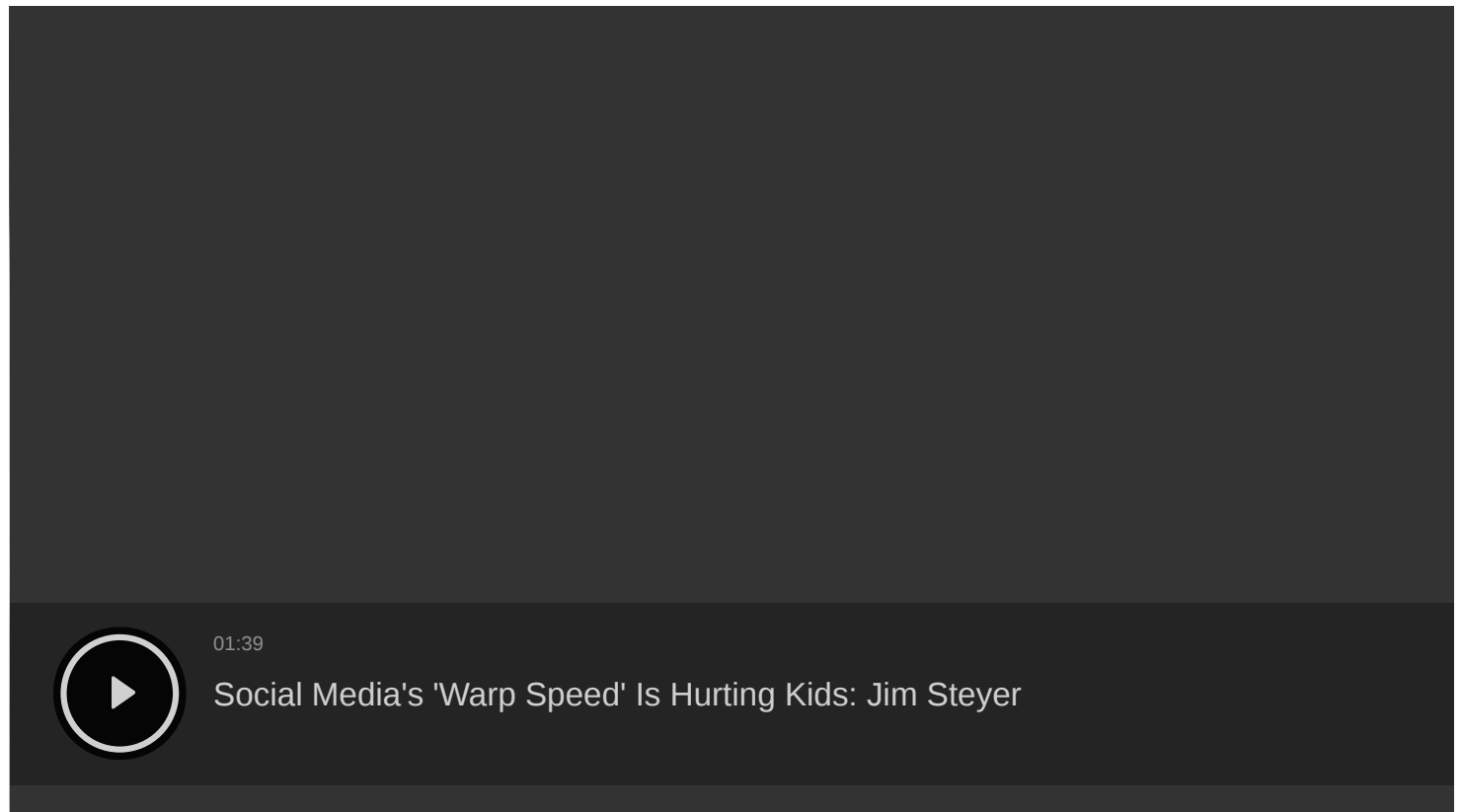
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However, Kelloway and Marazzi are hyper-aware of the platform's downsides

"It's a big, bad world," said Kelloway. "There's all kinds of weird, twisted things on Instagram."

She worries about her kids using the search function, innocently looking for something benign, and winding up with something disturbing. The "Discover" page, which curates either popular content or content related to past searches, is also full of potentially harmful photos.

"With a daughter, [there's a fear] of creepy men trying to follow her," Marazzi said. "Even though it's private, you never really know."



Another big problem on Instagram is bullying. A friend of Marazzi's daughter once posted something mean about her in an Instagram story, a temporary post that disappears after 24 hours. By then, her daughter was internet-savvy enough to educate her friend about the fact that even if a post disappears, screenshots can last forever.

One of the main problems many parents hope to shield from their children is the issue of comparison. A 2017 research survey found that [Instagram is the social media platform that's most damaging to young people's mental health](#).

"Seeing friends constantly on holiday or enjoying nights out can make young people feel like they're missing out while others enjoy life," [the report said](#). "These feelings can promote a 'compare and despair' attitude."

Secret 'finsta' accounts

Instagram's parents' guide doesn't go into detail about the platform's potential negative effects, or about secret "finsta" or "spam" accounts to evade their parents. A "[finsta](#)" is a second account created under a fake name, containing photos the user only wants their closest friends or a select group of people seeing, rather than their regular Instagram followers.



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Kelloway said she worries about what might happen if her kids see "a teenager killing it on Instagram, living some extraordinary life," she said. "Does that affect the child? I feel like it would."

She's taught her kids that there's often a "massive chasm, a disconnect" between the lives people live virtually and their real lives. Marazzi's 13-year-old follows several of the Kardashians on Instagram, and Marazzi said she works hard to make sure her daughter knows that she shouldn't compare herself to celebrities like Kim or Kylie.

"We talk about that constantly," she said. "That's Hollywood, it's not the norm. They spend every day working on what they look like, and that that's not necessarily something to strive for."

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- [Social Media Has Replaced Reading Books For Teens: Study](#)

- [Kids And Teenagers Tell Us About Their Social Media Habits](#)
- [BLOG: One Terrifying Day Your Tween Will Want To Join Social Media](#)

Both parents also try to govern how much time their kids spend online. Marazzi has strict rules that forbid her daughter from using her phone at meals, at bedtime, or when she has friends over. (She didn't give her daughter any electronic devices until after she turned 10, which was much later than many of her peers, Marazzi said.)

At Kelloway's house, the use of technology is always accompanied by a conversation about what it means and how it compares to real human interaction. She and her sister started a business called BooknBrunch that aims to specifically reconnect people with one another as a way of staving off technology's isolating effects.

"I'm concerned about the human connection," she said. She'll ask her kids: "Are you hugging people?"

She said she doesn't think there's any one foolproof way to keep kids safe online, although she knows these conversations will only get more necessary as her kids get older. Social media, she said, "is this gigantic juggernaut that I'm not going to be able to avoid."

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