What Parents & Educators Need to Know about
THREADS

AGE RESTRICTION

12+

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

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Developed by Meta – the company behind Instagram and Facebook – Threads is a clear rival of X (formerly known as Twitter) in that it's a text-based conversation platform with a character limit and the option to include links, photos and short videos. Threads is connected to a user's Instagram account, and their followers and favourite creators are imported to the platform.

DIFFERING OPINIONS

So far there has been relatively little negativity on Threads. Meta claims they will encourage friendly, positive engagements, but haven't yet specified how they plan to moderate this. As we have already seen on the likes of Twitter and Facebook, any app where users can talk freely about topics meaningful to them also contains the possibility of offence being caused or hatred being spread.

AIMLESS 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, in search of that feeling of connectedness.

STUCK WITH AN ACCOUNT

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 users of Instagram, having spent considerable time building up a bank of followers and posts, will 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 the ActivityPub feature, which will allow users to connect and share content more easily across different apps. Therefore, if your Threads account is set to 'public', your posts will be accessible from other linked apps when this feature is activated. What's more, people using these compatible apps will be able to interact with Threads users without needing an account of their own.

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 health and fitness, financial information, browsing history, usage data, purchases, location, and contacts. This can paint a very vivid picture of a user's life, and Meta does not explain why it needs all this information.

THE USER IS THE PRODUCT

Threads' tracking of every interaction, engagement and activity can make the platform feel like a sophisticated data-collection tool. There are no adverts at the moment, 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 & Educators

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 you to look through Threads' policy and see if you agree with this level of data collection being applied to a child's account. Think critically about why Meta needs all that personal information, where it goes and what could be 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 counter on their own posts and others. While posts will no longer display an exact number of likes, they'll still show the names of users who did leave a like.

MAKE USE OF FILTERS

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 think are suitable for children. Furthermore, due to the connection between Instagram and Threads, words that you select to screen out on one will also be hidden on the other.

GO PRIVATE, AND STAY ALERT

Even if a child's Instagram account is already set to private, they'll need to select this option again in Threads. In fact, it's one of the first things the app asks at sign up. Users can also choose who is allowed to mention them by name in comments. As Threads' number of features increases, so will opportunities for potentially harmful content to slip through the net – so keep an eye out for any such material.

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.

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