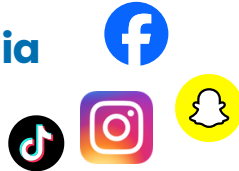


Online Safety News

JULY 2026

Under-16s Social Media Restrictions – What You Need to Know



The UK government has announced a ban on social media for under-16s, expected to come into force in Spring 2027. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and X will be legally required to verify a user's age before allowing access.

AI 'companion' chatbots designed for romantic or sexual roleplay will be banned for under-18s, and all AI chatbots will be restricted from offering sexually explicit features to children.

WhatsApp and Signal are not included in the restrictions.

- ✓ Parents will not be penalised if children find workarounds – enforcement sits with the platforms
- ✓ Livestreaming and strangers contacting children will also be restricted, including in some gaming spaces
- ✓ Educational tools and messaging services are excluded

Your child may already have accounts, friendships, communities and a whole social world built online. There may well be a variety of emotions and reactions both at home and amongst their peers.

What can you do now?

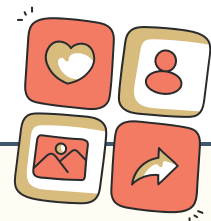
Talk with your child about this - how do they feel?

Open conversations about the incoming changes will help them feel more involved and encourage them to share their feelings, from worry, sadness, anger, relief they are all normal.





Making online safety a regular, normal topic at home, without judgment, is the most powerful thing parents and carers can do, whatever happens with the law.

If children and teens feel they can come to you without getting into trouble, they're far more likely to ask for help when something goes wrong.

[GOV.UK Fact Sheet – Full details](#)



What happens next?

-  **July 2026** – Government publishes full consultation response, including detail on overnight curfews and breaks in infinite scrolling for under-18s
-  **October 2026** – Ofcom sets out what "effective age checking" for 16-year-olds must look like
-  **End of 2026** – Regulations go before Parliament
-  **Spring 2027** – Protections come into force across Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and X

Could Your Child Sign Up to a Gambling Site Right Now?

Most of us assume there are proper barriers between our children and online gambling – age checks, ID verification, payment controls. And for regulated, licensed sites, those barriers do exist.

But a growing number of sites operate with none of that. No ID. No age check. No questions asked.

Research shows that black-market sites make gambling accessible to children – and that this doubles the chance of problem gambling later in life. That's worth sitting with for a moment.

Find our more: www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk

What Parents Need to Know

- Unregulated overseas gambling websites are allowing children to sign up with no identity checks whatsoever – these are known as "no KYC" platforms (KYC = Know Your Client)
- These sites can look completely professional – polished branding, live odds, easy sign-up – with no obvious red flag to a young person
- Many actively advertise the fact that they don't require ID
- Cryptocurrency is accepted, there are no deposit limits, no self-exclusion tools, and no real legal protection if something goes wrong

It Often Starts Earlier Than You Think

This isn't just a teenage issue. Many of the games children play today contain mechanics that mirror gambling almost exactly – FIFA packs, Roblox purchases, loot boxes where you pay real or in-game money for a randomised reward you can't see in advance.

- The excitement of not knowing what you'll get
- The thrill when it lands well

- The urge to try again when it wasn't what you hoped for

The worry is about the relationship with chance, reward, and risk that is being shaped during those formative years. This isn't about banning games – it's about knowing what's inside them.



AI Chatbots – What Teenagers Are Actually Using Them For

AI chatbots have quietly become part of everyday life for many young people.

Two thirds of children aged 9–17 have already used an AI chatbot, many of them daily. Nearly half use them for schoolwork, but a significant number are using them for advice and companionship.

For teenagers navigating friendships, identity, relationships and mental health, they can easily become a 'safe place'. These tools are designed to be warm, agreeable and endlessly available. They remember details. They check in. For some young people, that starts to feel like genuine connection.

Research with young people highlights two key concerns:

- Turning to AI for emotional support instead of trusted adults

- Trusting AI answers without questioning them – two in five young people have no concerns at all about following AI advice, rising to 50% among vulnerable young people [internetmatters](#)

- ✓ Ask your teenager which AI tools they use – without judgment. You might be surprised
- ✓ Talk about what's okay to share with AI – personal feelings, relationship issues and mental health struggles are not things an AI can safely hold
- ✓ Remind them that AI isn't a friend – it doesn't know them, worry about them, or have their best interests at heart. Use "it" not "they" – language matters
- ✓ Talk about fact-checking – AI gets things wrong, and teenagers need to know how to verify information from reliable sources

For more information about AI Chatbots: [Internet Matters – Me, Myself and AI Report](#)