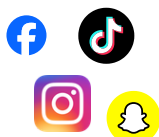


Online Safety News

SEPTEMBER 2026

Under-16 Social Media: Is a Ban Really Coming?



You may have seen headlines saying that social media is being “banned for under-16s”.

It is – but not yet.

The Government has announced plans to stop social media companies offering their services to children under 16, with the changes expected to come into force in **Spring 2027**.

Platforms expected to be covered include services such as **TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, X and YouTube**, although the exact scope and exemptions still need to be set out in regulations.

Messaging services such as **WhatsApp and Signal are not currently intended to be included**.

The changes are also expected to go further than social media. High-risk features including **livestreaming and communication with strangers** will be restricted for under-16s on other online services, including gaming.

What does this mean for parents now?

Nothing changes immediately.

Existing age restrictions and parental controls still apply, and children who currently use social media will not suddenly lose access to their accounts. More details are expected before the new rules come into force.

Don't wait for legislation to set your family boundaries.

Use this as an opportunity to talk about which apps, games and platforms your child uses now – and whether you are happy for them to be there.

AGE 16–17

Social media won't simply become unrestricted at 16.

The Government has announced additional default protections for 16 and 17-year-olds, including:

- social media overnight restrictions from midnight–6am
- push notifications muted overnight
- autoplay switched off
- personalised feeds switched off by default
- livestreaming and stranger communication switched off by default.

[Growing up in the online world: government response \(July 2026\) – GOV.UK](#)

What should parents do?

Don't wait until 2027.

Talk now about these changes being introduced and agree the boundaries that are right for your teenager today. Ask them how they feel about the changes.

The 2AM Problem: Where Does Your Teen's Phone Sleep?

It's not only **how long** teenagers spend on their phones that matters.

It's **when**.

Group chats don't stop because it's bedtime.

Neither do Snapchat notifications, TikTok, YouTube, gaming or the feeling that everyone else is still online.

The Government's newly announced plans for 16 and 17-year-olds include default restrictions on social media between **midnight and 6am**, alongside muted notifications overnight.

It's a useful prompt for every family — whatever your child's age.

Try a September reset

Agree together:

WHEN phones go away.

WHERE they charge overnight.

WHAT happens at weekends.

HOW your own phone habits fit into the agreement.

For younger teens, charging phones outside bedrooms can remove the temptation altogether.

For older teenagers, boundaries can gradually move towards helping them manage their own habits.

Don't just say:

"Get off your phone."

Try:

"Do you feel like you control your phone — or does it sometimes control you?"

Group Chats: When Everyone Joins In

Group chats are a huge part of teenage friendships.

They can be funny, supportive and a brilliant way to stay connected.

They can also turn very quickly.

One comment becomes ten.

A private screenshot is shared.

Someone gets deliberately left out.

An embarrassing photo becomes a meme.

Everyone piles onto the same person.

And teenagers don't always recognise their own behaviour as bullying because:

"I didn't start it."

"I only liked it."

"I only forwarded it."

"Everyone was doing it."

But every person who comments, reacts, shares or forwards something can increase its impact.

Before they SEND, SHARE or FORWARD ask them to think:

Would I say this if they were standing in front of me?

Would I want this shared if it were about me?

Do I have their permission to share it?

Am I making this situation better — or worse?

One important message for your teenager:

If a group chat turns nasty, **not joining in matters**.

Screenshot evidence if necessary, step away, block or report where appropriate and tell an adult if someone is being harmed or threatened.

And if your child tells you something has gone wrong online, try to **listen before reacting**.

Fear of immediately losing their phone is one of the quickest ways to make teenagers decide not to tell us next time.

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 out 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](#)