



[Department for  
Science, Innovation  
& Technology](#)

## Guidance

# Fact sheet: New rules to protect children online

Updated 19 June 2026

### Contents

1. [Why are these changes being made?](#)
2. [What is changing and what's banned?](#)
3. [When is this changing?](#)
4. [Who will it affect?](#)
5. [How will children be impacted?](#)
6. [What do I need to do now?](#)
7. [Will all adults need to prove their age to access the social media services that become age-restricted?](#)
8. [How will age verification work?](#)
9. [What about educational content on sites like YouTube - will this be covered by a ban?](#)
10. [Won't children just use VPNs or their parents' accounts to get around this - isn't this unenforceable?](#)
11. [What will children do with the time they currently spend on social media?](#)

The UK government will ban social media for under 16s. Alongside this, certain harmful features on other online services like livestreaming and strangers contacting children will be restricted for under 18s.

# **1. Why are these changes being made?**

The government ran a national consultation from March to May 2026, one of the largest engagement exercises undertaken by this government.

The results showed overwhelming public demand for action, with 9 in 10 parents backing a social media ban for under-16s, and two-thirds of young people agreeing under-16s should not be allowed to use at least some social media platforms.

These changes reset the rules so that children are protected from the platforms and online features that create the most harm.

# **2. What is changing and what's banned?**

We plan to use the same model for a social media ban as Australia. Their model included platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook and X.

We do not intend for messaging services like WhatsApp and Signal to be included in the social media ban.

High-risk features including livestreaming and strangers being able to contact children will also be restricted for under-16s on other online services like gaming.

This will be backed up by stronger requirements for age checks on platforms.

# **3. When is this changing?**

The first set of Regulations will be laid before the end of the year, and the changes should be implemented in Spring 2027.

# **4. Who will it affect?**

Children and young people under 16. Crucially they will still be able to access the online world safely for learning, news, games and staying in touch with known friends and family on messaging services.

16 and 17 year olds will still be able to access social media, but live streaming, and stranger communication including in gaming, will be switched off by default for these ages.

## **5. How will children be impacted?**

From Spring 2027, under-16s will no longer be able to use certain social media.

Children will still be able to go online safely, for learning, news, games and staying in touch with friends and family.

This is about reducing harm, improving wellbeing and giving young people more time for a healthier childhood.

## **6. What do I need to do now?**

Parents and children do not need to do anything right now.

We will provide further detail to families and children ahead of the changes in 2027.

## **7. Will all adults need to prove their age to access the social media services that become age-restricted?**

Many adults won't need to do checks because they've already got an account that:

- has been open more than 16 years
- has a credit card connected to it

- or is linked to an email address that's age-verified in other ways

Some adults will have already done age verification checks under the existing Online Safety Act, so wouldn't need to do them again. And if not, it could be as simple as a facial recognition check for over-18s.

## **8. How will age verification work?**

We know that having a range of methods to prove age is important to ensure online spaces are accessible.

Ofcom will set out in the coming months different options for effective forms of age assurance for proving whether someone is over 16 that are accurate, robust, reliable, and fair.

## **9. What about educational content on sites like YouTube - will this be covered by a ban?**

The internet plays a huge role in children's education, and we are clear that has to continue. We're not looking to bring dedicated educational platforms, which support schoolwork and learning, under these new rules.

Our focus is on protecting children from harmful content and features on social media services used by under-16s. At the same time, platforms have a clear opportunity to create spaces designed for children that prioritise safe, educational content without those risks.

## **10. Won't children just use VPNs or their parents' accounts to get around this - isn't this unenforceable?**

We are aware of concerns that children may attempt to circumvent age checks, including through the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs).

That is why we have commissioned research to better understand how children are using VPNs and the risks involved.

We want to assess this evidence to ensure any decisions we take are proportionate and evidence-based, recognising both the need to protect children and the legitimate uses of VPNs, such as for privacy or freedom of speech purposes. We will provide an update on this in July.

## **11. What will children do with the time they currently spend on social media?**

We're working across government to make sure children have access to safe, offline spaces where they can make friends, connect with people who share their interests, and take time to study and grow.

That includes major investment - with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport launching a £500 million strategy to expand access to enrichment activities like sport, the arts and youth services. Alongside this, the Department for Education has introduced a £132.5 million enrichment package, with new guidance to help schools and colleges offer a wider range of enjoyable activities beyond the classroom - from sport and creative projects to nature and the arts.

We also know that a lot of young people feel socially isolated. Last year the Government carried out a 'State of the Nation' survey of more than 14,000 young people. We're currently investing over £3 billion in building or refurbishing up to 250 youth centres, school sport, building new and upgraded grassroots sport facilities across the country, and saving more than 1000 arts venues, museums, libraries and heritage buildings from closure.

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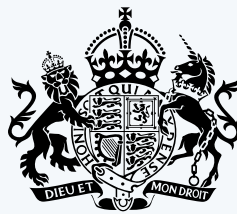
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