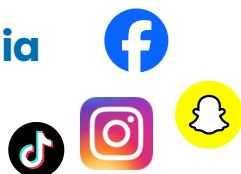


Online Safety News

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

What can you do now?

Keep talking!

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 feel they can come to you without getting into trouble, they're far more likely to ask for help when something goes wrong. For many young people, their friendships genuinely live online. We don't want children feeling like rule-breakers who can't speak up.

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.

For the full picture: [GOV.UK Fact Sheet](#)

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. Other platforms may be added before then.



The Year 5/6 Window



Ofcom's latest research identified the Year 5 to Year 6 period as the single most important window for families to have conversations about online life. Before secondary school, before the first smartphone, and before social media pressure kicks in.

Smartphone ownership rises sharply from 56% of 10-year-olds to 83% of 11-year-olds — meaning the transition to secondary school is the tipping point for most children getting their first device and more unsupervised access online.

If your child is in Year 5 or 6 right now, this is a great time to start talking. What they'll have access to, what they might see, and who they can come to if something feels wrong. [Ofcom Children's Online Experiences Report 2026](#)

✓ You don't need to have all the answers — just keep the conversations relaxed and open.

[Upcoming FREE webinar for Parents of Year 6: The Digital Jump](#)
6th July @7pm

Year 7 is a big step — both in school and online. This webinar will help you feel prepared and confident to guide your child through the digital changes ahead. [Register HERE](#)

AI Chatbots



AI chatbots have become a regular feature in many children's lives.

56% of children aged 8–17 in the UK have used AI tools (Ofcom Children's Online Experiences Report, 2026) from homework help to someone to "talk to" when they're feeling low.

Research with young people highlights three key concerns:

- Turning to AI for emotional support instead of trusted adults
- Trusting AI answers without questioning them
- Using AI as a shortcut in ways that affect their own thinking and learning

- ✓ Ask your child which AI tools they use — you might be surprised. Talk about what information is okay to share with AI chatbots and what isn't.
- ✓ Remind them AI isn't a friend — it doesn't know them, worry about them, or have their best interests at heart. Use language that identifies it as a tool. For example, avoid saying 'him/her/them' and instead use 'it'
- ✓ Explain that AI makes mistakes and we need to learn how to fact check the responses and find reliable sources (such as BBC Bitesize, Newsround)

These tools are designed to be warm, agreeable and responsive. For some children, that starts to feel like friendship.

[For more information on AI Chat bots: Internet Matters — Me, Myself and AI Report](#)