



Online Safety Newsletter

Social Media Restrictions for Under-16s and WhatsApp



The government has announced that, from next spring, social media platforms will no longer be permitted to offer services to children under the age of 16. This restriction will apply to platforms including Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and X.

Alongside this change, additional measures are being proposed to strengthen online safety. These include restrictions on live streaming and communication with strangers for all under-18s, as well as consideration of overnight curfews and limits on endless scrolling features.

Schools regularly receive reports of WhatsApp being used in ways that negatively impact young people. Examples include sharing images to embarrass others, sending unkind messages, spreading rumours, and excluding individuals from group chats. These behaviours can have a significant effect on children's wellbeing and relationships.

Parents and carers are encouraged to carefully consider whether WhatsApp is an appropriate platform for their child. In particular, it is important to think about whether your child has the maturity and critical thinking skills to recognise and respond appropriately to bullying, resist peer pressure, and avoid becoming involved in harmful online behaviour.

For more information, please see the Government's press release: [Social media to be banned for under-16s in landmark government move to give kids their childhood back - GOV.UK](#)

You can also find answers to frequently asked questions here: [Fact sheet: New rules to protect children online - GOV.UK](#)

Mobile Phones: Do you Know the Risks?

As more children gain access to smartphones and other devices, it is important for parents and carers to understand both the opportunities and the potential risks that come with being online. Children with access to smartphones may be exposed to a range of online risks, including:

- Viewing inappropriate or harmful content
- Excessive screen time, which can affect sleep, concentration and mental wellbeing
- Contact from strangers or inappropriate individuals
- Cyberbullying and online peer pressure
- Scams, phishing attempts and accidental spending through in-app purchases



What impact do phones have on children's mental health?

Research suggests that smartphones can have both positive and negative effects on young people's mental health. Their impact often depends on how they are used, how much time is spent on them, and the type of content being accessed.

Positive effects include helping young people stay connected with friends and family, reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation. Mobile phones also provide easy access to educational resources, mental health information, and support services, as well as offering convenience for communication and everyday activities.

However, there are also **potential risks**. Excessive phone use can contribute to screen addiction, which may affect sleep, increase anxiety, and negatively impact wellbeing. Social media can expose young people to cyberbullying, unrealistic comparisons with others, and the fear of missing out (FOMO), all of which can affect self-esteem and mental health. Spending too much time on devices may also reduce physical activity and face-to-face social interaction, both of which are important for healthy development.

Overall, mobile phones can be a valuable tool when used in a balanced and responsible way. Supporting children to develop healthy digital habits and encouraging regular offline activities can help maximise the benefits while reducing the risks.

EE Online Safety Hub

EE has published guidance to help families make informed decisions about smartphone use and support children's digital wellbeing. In summary, EE recommends:

- **Under 11s:** Use non-smart devices where possible.
- **Ages 11–13:** If a smartphone is introduced, enable parental controls and restrict access to social media.
- **Ages 13–16:** Continue using parental controls - age-appropriate restrictions to help promote safe and responsible use.

Read the full guidance here: [Online Safety for Kids | EE's Guide to Safe Phone & Internet Use](#)

Could You Delay Giving Your Child a Smartphone?

The **Smartphone Free Childhood** movement encourages groups of parents and carers to agree not to provide smartphones to their children until a shared age or school year. The aim is to reduce peer pressure and help children develop without the challenges that can come with early smartphone ownership. Find out more here: [Smartphone Free Childhood](#)

Choosing a First Phone

When you decide that your child is ready for their first mobile phone, selecting the right device can be challenging. Depending on your child's age and needs, you may wish to consider a basic mobile phone with limited internet access or a smartphone with appropriate parental controls.

Which? provides an overview of suitable first-phone options for children and young people: [Best dumb phones and simple phones 2026: easy-to-use mobile phones tested - Which?](#)



Omele: What Parents Need To Know

Omele is an online platform intended for adults only. However, users can gain access simply by entering a date of birth that indicates they are over 18, making it possible for young people to use the site despite the age restriction.

The platform randomly pairs users with strangers and uses artificial intelligence to compare and rate participants' appearances in what it calls a "**mog battle**." Because users can see and hear the person they are matched with, there are significant safeguarding concerns associated with the platform.

These risks include contact with unknown adults, exposure to inappropriate content, and unmoderated interactions with strangers. For these reasons, Omele is not considered a suitable platform for children and young people.



Emoji Meanings: More Than Meets the Eye



Did you know that some children and young people use emojis with meanings that may be very different from their original purpose?

While emojis are often used to add fun and expression to messages, they can sometimes be used as slang or coded language. For example, a particular emoji may be used to represent a specific idea, behaviour or phrase that is not immediately obvious to adults. These meanings can change over time and may vary between different online communities and age groups.

For this reason, it is helpful for parents and carers to stay informed about current emoji trends and to maintain open conversations with their children about how they communicate online. Understanding the context in which emojis are used can help adults recognise when messages may have a hidden meaning.

To learn more about commonly used emoji slang and how emoji meanings can evolve, visit: [Hidden Emoji Meanings Teens Use: 2026 Parent's Guide](#)

Keeping up to date with online trends is an important part of supporting children to stay safe and communicate responsibly in the digital world.

Moving to Secondary School

Is your child starting secondary school this year?

The move from primary to secondary school is an exciting milestone, but it also brings new opportunities and challenges, particularly in the online world. As children gain greater independence, they may spend more time online, use social media, communicate with new friendship groups, and access digital devices more frequently.

To help families navigate this transition safely and confidently, **Internet Matters** has created a range of practical resources and advice for parents and carers. These resources cover topics such as online safety, managing screen time, social media, gaming, and supporting children to make positive choices online.

Find out more here: [Back to school: Moving to secondary guide | Internet Matters](#)

We encourage all parents and carers of children moving to secondary school to explore these helpful resources and discuss online safety regularly with their child.

Screen Time Balance Over the Summer Holidays



With the summer holidays approaching, many children will have more free time and may spend increased periods online. While technology can provide opportunities for learning, creativity and keeping in touch with friends and family, it is important to help children maintain a healthy balance between screen time and offline activities.

Parents and carers can support children by encouraging a mix of activities throughout the day, setting appropriate boundaries around device use, and having regular conversations about staying safe online. The holiday period also provides a valuable opportunity to reinforce positive digital habits and discuss how to respond if something online makes them feel uncomfortable or worried.

Vodafone and SWGfL (South West Grid for Learning) have produced helpful guidance for families on managing digital wellbeing, understanding common online risks, and achieving a healthy balance between online and offline life:

- **Understanding digital risks for young people:** [30 digital risks to young people during the summer holidays](#)
- **Balancing screen time during the holidays – advice for parents and carers:** [Balancing screen time over the holidays – advice for parents and carers - UK Safer Internet Centre](#)

We hope you and your family have a safe, enjoyable and relaxing summer break. Stay safe online and make time for plenty of adventures away from the screen too!

Screen Time Guidance for Children Under 5

The Government now recommends limiting screen time for very young children to support their healthy development and wellbeing. Current guidance suggests:

- **Avoiding screen time for children under the age of two**, except for activities such as video calls with family and friends.
- **Limiting screen time to no more than one hour per day for children aged 2–5 years**, where possible.

While technology can offer educational and entertainment benefits, the type of content children access, how it is used, and the amount of time spent on screens can all have an impact on their development. Excessive screen use may affect sleep, physical activity, language development and opportunities for social interaction.

Best Start for Life has published a helpful guide for parents and carers that explores:

- The types of screen content that are most suitable for young children
- The influence of parents' and carers' own screen habits on children
- How screen time can affect a child's learning, development and wellbeing
- Practical tips for creating healthy digital habits from an early age

Find out more here: [Baby and toddler screen time guidance - Best Start in Life](#)

Developing a balanced approach to technology from a young age can help children build healthy habits that support their learning, development and overall wellbeing.