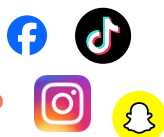


Online Safety News

SEPTEMBER 2026

Social Media Under 16: What's Actually Changing?



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.

[Fact sheet: New rules to protect children online - GOV.UK](#)

The September Digital Reset

New school year, new routines — and often new apps, games, devices and group chats. September is a great time for a quick check-in with your child's digital world.

Try these 5 checks:

1. APPS

Has anything new appeared over the summer? Check what it does and its age requirement.

2. CONTACT

Who can message, follow or contact your child? Don't forget gaming — children can communicate with people they don't know through many online games.

3. PRIVACY

Check whether accounts are private and review who can see posts, profiles and location information.

4. SPENDING

Are payment details saved to their device or gaming account? Check whether purchases require your approval.

5. BEDTIME

Where does their device sleep? Getting devices out of bedrooms overnight is one of the simplest boundaries you can introduce.

Try this instead of checking in secret:

“Show me your three favourite things to do online at the moment.”

Let them be the expert. Understanding what your child actually enjoys online makes conversations about safety much easier when something does go wrong.

NSPCC similarly recommends making online safety an ongoing conversation that develops as children's apps, interests and independence change.



YouTube: It's Not Just Watching Videos

For many primary-aged children, YouTube is a huge part of their digital world.

Ofcom's latest research found that YouTube was the service 8–14-year-olds spent the most time on, averaging 49 minutes every day.

[Children's Online experiences research report](#)

And watching one video can quickly become ten.

YouTube uses recommendations and autoplay to keep suggesting more content based on what a child has already watched. YouTube Shorts also offers an endless stream of short-form videos which children can rapidly scroll through.

That means a child may start by searching for Minecraft, football or crafts but have very little control over what is recommended next.

Things to check

- ✓ Look at their **watch and search history** together.
- ✓ Turn **autoplay off**.
- ✓ Talk about recommendations: *"Why do you think YouTube showed you that?"*
- ✓ For younger children, consider whether **YouTube Kids** or a more restricted experience is more appropriate.
- ✓ Don't rely on parental controls alone – occasionally watch with them.

Ask your child:

"Who is your favourite YouTuber at the moment – and why?"

Their answer can tell you far more about their online world than checking a list of apps ever will

Online Friends: Who Are They Really Talking To?

Children don't need social media to talk to people online.

Gaming, messaging, chat and community features can allow children to communicate with people they've never met offline.

And that's one reason the Government's new proposals don't stop at social media: plans also include restricting under-16s from communicating with strangers through other services, including gaming.

[Growing up in the online world: progress statement \(June 2026\) - GOV.UK](#)

Most interactions won't lead to harm, and online gaming can be a fantastic way for children to play and socialise.

But children need to understand one very important rule:

Being friendly online doesn't make someone a friend.



Help your child know:

- ✓ Don't share their full name, school, location or personal information.
- ✓ Keep conversations within the game or platform.
- ✓ Never move a conversation onto another app because someone online asks them to.
- ✓ Know how to **block, mute and report** another user.
- ✓ Tell an adult if anyone makes them uncomfortable – **even if they've already replied or shared something.**

Ask:

"Who do you talk to when you're gaming?"

Not:

"You're not talking to strangers, are you?"

One invites a conversation. The other invites a one-word answer.