



Social media ban for under-16s

In June the Government announced that children under 16 will be banned from social media platforms including TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and X. The rules are due to go before Parliament by the end of this year and to come into force in spring 2027.

What will change

Platforms, not families, will be responsible for checking ages and stopping under-16s from having accounts. Parents won't be penalised if a child gets round the rules.

Livestreaming and chatting with strangers will also be blocked for under-16s, including inside online games. Messaging apps such as WhatsApp are not part of the ban, and YouTube Kids will remain available.

What it means right now

Nothing has changed in law yet. Most of these apps already have a minimum age of 13, so for primary-age children the advice is the same as ever: they shouldn't have accounts.

In July, the Government added plans for a default midnight to 6am curfew and no endless scrolling for 16 and 17-year-olds, so the online world your child grows into will look quite different.

Year 6 families: your children will be the first to start secondary school under the new rules. Now is a good time to talk about phones and group chats.

Children online in 2026

35%

of 11 to 17-year-olds came across harmful content just by scrolling their feed. Only 1% had searched for it.

1 in 3

children aged 8 to 17 on social media or messaging apps feel pressure to be popular online most of the time.

4 in 10

parents say their child has talked to them about something harmful or worrying they saw online.

Sources: Ofcom, 2026; DSIT, 2026



On our radar this term



AI chatbots and "AI friends"

Children increasingly use chatbots for homework help, advice and company. They can be useful, but they get facts wrong, collect personal information, and some are designed to keep children chatting. The Government plans an 18+ age limit on "romantic companion" chatbots.

Ask which AI tools your child uses. Remind them it isn't a person, and never to share personal details with it.



Fake images and sextortion

Criminals are using AI "nudify" tools to turn ordinary photos, even fully clothed school or club pictures, into fake indecent images, then use them to blackmail children. Boys are targeted most often, and cases have been reported from children as young as 7 to 10.

Think before posting children's photos publicly. If it happens: don't pay, don't delete the evidence, and report it (see "Where to get help" overleaf).



Roblox and in-game chat

Roblox now sorts children into age-based accounts. Chat is off for under-9s, and an age check is needed before anyone can chat. It is safer than it was, but experts advise treating Roblox as a social platform rather than "just a game".

Link a parent account so you control chat, spending and daily time. Setup tips are overleaf.



WhatsApp for under-13s

WhatsApp is rolling out parent-managed accounts for under-13s. They're limited to messages and calls, and parents decide who can contact their child and which groups they join. Parents can't read the messages, so keep talking about what's being said.

Worth knowing if your child is getting their first phone before secondary school.



Online safety lessons at Fernwood

From Reception to Year 6, every class follows **ProjectEVOLVE**, a free online safety curriculum from SWGfL, part of the UK Safer Internet Centre. It is built on the national *Education for a Connected World* framework, with lessons that build year on year across eight areas of online life:

Self-image and identity	Online relationships	Online reputation	Online bullying
Managing online information	Health, wellbeing and lifestyle	Privacy and security	Copyright and ownership

Also in school

- **Phone-free days:** phones are switched off and away for the whole school day.
- **Filtering and monitoring** on every school device, constantly.
- **Our children's own eSafety guide** is on the e-safety page of our website: <http://www.fernwoodprimary.co.uk>



Tips for parents



Small, practical steps that make a real difference at home.



Screen time: quality counts

New Government guidance for 5 to 16-year-olds is due this autumn, and is expected to help families make choices rather than set one limit for all. Until then, these habits matter most:

- **Charge devices downstairs overnight.** Sleep is the first thing screens squeeze out.
- **No screens at mealtimes or in the hour before bed.**
- **Watch and play together sometimes,** and ask what they enjoy about it.
- **Agree a family plan** covering times, places and apps, and stick to it yourself too.
- **Notice what screens are replacing:** sleep, exercise, friends or homework.

Younger brothers and sisters? Official advice is no screens for under-2s except shared time together, and no more than one hour a day for 2 to 5-year-olds.



Why unsupervised internet is risky

Most harmful content children see isn't searched for: feeds and autoplay serve it up. A child alone with a device can see things, or meet people, you'd never know about. Build up layers:

- **Home broadband:** switch on your provider's free family filter. BT, Sky, Virgin Media and TalkTalk all offer one.
- **Phones and tablets:** use Apple Screen Time or Google Family Link to approve apps, set downtime and filter websites.
- **Search and video:** turn on SafeSearch, and use YouTube Kids for younger children.
- **Check age ratings:** PEGI ratings for games, store ratings for apps.
- **Keep devices in shared rooms,** and know your younger child's passwords.

No filter is perfect. The best protection is a child who knows they can tell you when something goes wrong.



Limiting game time on consoles

All three major consoles have free parental controls you can manage from your phone. Set up a child account first.

Xbox

Xbox Family Settings app (free)

- 1 Install the app and add your child to your Microsoft family group.
- 2 Tap your child, then **Screen time**, and set a schedule for each day of the week.
- 3 Use **Pause** to stop play instantly, for example at teatime.
- 4 Set a console passkey so settings can't be changed.

Tip: time counts down whenever they're signed in, so remind them to sign out.

PlayStation

PlayStation Family app (free)

- 1 Install the app and add your child in **Family Management**.
- 2 Set playtime for each day in 15-minute steps, and choose a warning or automatic log-out.
- 3 Set **Communication and User-Generated Content** to Restrict to control chat.
- 4 Change the console restriction passcode from 0000.

Tip: children can ask for extra time from the console, and you approve or decline on your phone.

Nintendo Switch

Nintendo Switch Parental Controls app (free)

- 1 Install the app and link it to the console using the registration code.
- 2 Set a daily play-time limit, or a different limit for each day.
- 3 Choose **Suspend Software** so the game stops when time's up, not just an alarm.
- 4 Restrict communication and posting with other players.

Tip: the app shows a daily summary of which games were played and for how long.

Roblox on any device: console chat settings don't cover Roblox, which has its own. Link your parent account in Roblox's Parental Controls to set a daily time limit, a spending limit and who your child can chat with.

Avoid the "just one more game" row: agree the limit before play starts and give a 10-minute warning. Many online matches can't be paused, so stopping mid-game feels unfair to children.



Talk little and often

"What's the best thing you've seen online this week?"

"Who shared this, and why do you think they did?"

"What would you do if someone you didn't know messaged you?"

"If something online upset you, who would you tell?"

Stay calm if they tell you something worrying. Children who fear losing their device stop telling you.



Signs to look out for

- Secretive about their device, or hiding the screen when you walk in
- Tired, withdrawn or anxious, especially after being online
- New online "friends" you don't know, or unexplained gifts or game credit
- Upset after reading a message, or leaving the room to take calls
- Very angry or distressed when screen time ends



Where to get help

CEOP

Report online grooming or sexual contact: ceop.police.uk

Report Remove (Childline and IWF)

Helps under-18s get nude images taken down: childline.org.uk/remove

Childline, for children

0800 1111

NSPCC helpline, for adults

0808 800 5000

Internet Matters

Step-by-step guides to parental controls: internetmatters.org

If a child is in immediate danger, call 999.

Any online worries? Email our safeguarding team at safeguarding@fernwoodprimary.co.uk or call the school office on **0115 915 5727**.

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