

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS &amp; CARERS

# How to prepare your child for a social media ban

Calm conversations. Strong connections. A practical plan.

Created by **Dr Amanda Gummer** for the **Good Play Guide**

For parents and carers of children up to 16. Find the advice for your child's age, try one conversation and build a plan together.

**Start with what matters to your child.**

Social media can mean friendship, creativity, humour, information, identity or a chance to switch off. Understanding what your child values makes it easier to prepare for a change in access.

## Only have five minutes?

- **Ask:** "If this app was not available, what would you most miss?"
- **Protect:** choose one friendship, interest or routine to support.
- **Plan:** agree one small next step and a time to check in.

## Find what you need

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You do not have to solve everything in one conversation. Start small, stay curious and keep talking.

## 01 / GET CLEAR ON THE RULES

# Know what is changing

Separate confirmed information from headlines before you talk in detail.

**UK policy snapshot · checked 2 October 2026**

The government says restrictions on certain social media services for under-16s are expected in spring 2027, with regulations due before the end of 2026. An April start date is not confirmed. Messaging services such as WhatsApp and Signal are not intended to be included. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds are expected to retain access with additional default protections.

Further details are still to come. The government says families do not need to act now. Use this guide for calm preparation, and recheck the official guidance before planning around a date, platform list or age-check process. [Read the government fact sheet.](#)

**Explain where each rule comes from**

- **Law or regulation:** what the government or regulator requires.
- **Platform rules:** the service's own age limits, age checks and account options.
- **Family rules:** your household choices about devices, routines and safety.

**“This part is the law. This part is the app’s rule. This part is our family’s decision. You can have feelings and opinions about all of it, and we still need to follow the parts that apply.”**

**Prepare early, without a dramatic countdown**

Give your child time to talk, protect contact, save appropriate work and practise new routines. Do not promise that an account will be kept, deleted, paused or transferred until the platform or regulator confirms it.

**Already outside an app’s age rules?** Correct that calmly now, with support. A preparation plan is not a reason to continue indefinitely.

Outside the UK? Check your local rules. Dates, affected services and age requirements vary by country.

## 02 / START THE CONVERSATION

# Listen first. Plan together.

Choose a calm moment. One open question can be enough to begin.

## 1. Listen for the need behind the app

**“If this app was not available, what would you most miss?”**

“Everyone is there” may mean fear of exclusion. “I post my edits there” may mean creativity and an audience. Scrolling may offer downtime; an online community may offer belonging. Let your child answer before you offer solutions.

## 2. Acknowledge feelings and keep the boundary

- “I can see why this feels unfair. We still need to prepare for the rule.”
- “You are allowed to be upset. I will help you work out what happens next.”
- “I am not saying the friendships are unimportant. We need another way to protect them.”

Avoid labels such as “addicted”, “lazy” or “dramatic”. Describe the difficulty instead: “Stopping has become hard at bedtime.” You can disagree about the policy and still make a plan.

## 3. Turn the argument into a practical plan

**Reflect:** “The hardest part sounds like missing the group chat.”

**Clarify:** “Who do you most need to stay in touch with?”

**Plan:** “Let’s choose two ways to keep that contact going.”

**Rehearse:** “Let’s test one evening and see what needs fixing.”

**Review:** “We’ll talk again on Sunday and adjust the plan.”

## 4. Show what you will change too

Name your own phone habits: “I’m putting my phone away while we talk.” Explain work use, ask before posting their photo, and own mistakes: “I got pulled into scrolling too. I’m going to reset.”

If the conversation heats up: “We do not have to solve it now. We will come back to it, because your views matter.”



03 / AGE GUIDE

## 8 and under

Keep it short, concrete and reassuring.

Most children this age should not be managing social media accounts independently. They may still see clips on an adult's phone, copy siblings or appear in family posts. Explain what will change in daily life, without introducing frightening details.

**“Some apps are for older people. If rules change, the grown-ups will help. You can still make things, talk to people we know and ask us when something feels confusing.”**

### If they do not use social media

- Practise asking before opening a new app.
- Ask before taking or sharing someone's photo.
- Tell a trusted adult if something online feels confusing, scary or unkind.
- Explain simply that some apps are for older children or adults.

### If they want to join older siblings or friends

**“You want to join in. I understand. That app is not for you yet. Let's think of another way to do the part you like.”**

Match the idea to the need: record a dance privately, show something they made to a trusted relative, or arrange a call or playdate. Their wish for connection, creativity or fun still matters.

### If they already watch or use it

Avoid blaming a child for an arrangement adults allowed. Say: “We got used to this together. Now we need to change it together.” Check the current age rules and correct access calmly where needed.

### Your practical checklist

- Decide where adult phones go during meals, bedtime and family time.
- Give permitted screen activities a clear ending: “After this episode, we'll have a snack.”
- Prepare a predictable next step and tell siblings what not to show or share.

**Keep useful tools available.** Communication aids, accessibility tools and educational technology have a different purpose.

## 03 / AGE GUIDE

# 9-12 years

Start with belonging. Then explain the boundary.

A restriction may feel like a friendship problem before it feels like a safety rule. Jokes, invitations, group chats and changes of plan can all matter.

**“I know this may affect how you feel included. Let’s work out who and what you most need to stay connected to.”**

## Map the social impact

- Which friends or groups would you worry about losing touch with?
- How do you hear about homework, clubs, fixtures, parties or changes of plan?
- Which chats are for fun, and which carry important information?
- Which adults or organisations need to offer another route?

Use first names or initials in your contact plan. Ask schools, clubs and organisers for email, website, school-app, text or parent-channel alternatives for essential information.

## When your child says...

**“Everyone else will still be on it.”** “Who are you most worried about missing? Let’s find another way to reach them.”

**“It’s unfair.”** “You can think it’s unfair. What would make it easier to live with?”

**“You don’t understand.”** “Show me the part I need to understand, without showing anyone’s private messages.”

**Nothing at all.** “We can come back to this. I want the plan to include your views.”

## Give real choices within the boundary

Let them choose which friendship to protect first, which trusted adult could help with contact or transport, and whether to practise on a weekday evening or weekend morning. Agree what to review after a week.

**Before access changes:** check app ages and account status; test contact routes; save appropriate work using official tools; and agree what to do if friends suggest bypassing the rules.

## 03 / AGE GUIDE

# 13-16 years

Respect independence, privacy and the connections that matter.

Teenagers may be worried about losing friendships, creative work, support networks, fandoms, learning communities or spaces where they feel understood. Treat those concerns seriously.

**“I know this affects real friendships, interests and parts of your identity. We need to work out what can continue safely and legally, and what has to change.”**

## Ask questions that give them a voice

- What would you most like adults to understand about how you use social media?
- Which connections matter to your wellbeing? Which are more casual?
- What have you created that you would be upset to lose?
- Which groups or topics would you need help finding permitted support for?
- What would make age checks or account changes less stressful?

They can question the policy, follow debate and disagree while preparing for the rules that apply. Agree what you will and will not monitor. Avoid inspecting every private conversation without a safety reason.

## Preserve what matters

- Use official tools to save their own appropriate creative work.
- Keep account names or contact details where safe, with consent.
- Move school, work, volunteering, club and project information to permitted routes.
- Check official appeal options for an incorrect age check.

Pause before saving other people's images, messages or sensitive information. Do not encourage false ages, adult-account sharing or technical workarounds. Practise a short break and review the emotional as well as practical impact.

## If they are close to 16

Frame the change as a possible pause until they meet the age requirement, rather than a judgement about trust. Plan future accounts, privacy settings, sleep and schoolwork boundaries, and responses to pressure, unwanted contact and misinformation.

**Already 16?** The announced UK under-16 restriction does not apply in the same way. Check the latest protections and platform rules for 16- and 17-year-olds.

## 04 / PROTECT WHAT MATTERS

# Replace the missing benefit

Use Balanced Play to widen the options around your child's needs.

A new activity works best when it supports something your child actually values. A group chat needs another contact route; a creative platform needs a place for their work; downtime needs a realistic way to unwind.

## Connection

**“Who do you want to stay close to?”**

Arrange a permitted contact route, a call, a shared activity or time with a friend.

## Creativity & an audience

**“What do you love making or sharing?”**

Save appropriate work. Try a private project, a family screening or a trusted group to share with.

## Quiet recovery

**“What helps when you feel worn out?”**

Offer music, reading, drawing, a walk or quiet time. Let your child help choose what feels restful.

## Challenge & progress

**“What do you enjoy getting better at?”**

Try a game, sport, construction project, reading goal or skill that offers a sense of progress.

## Keep the options realistic

You do not need a perfect timetable or a full list of new clubs. Choose ideas that fit your child's interests, access needs, energy and your family's time and budget. Quiet recovery matters as much as activity.

**“What did that app give you, and what could help with that now?”**

Explore the Good Play Guide's [Balanced Play resources](#) for more ideas.

Online friendships and communities can be meaningful. Keep working on connection alongside any new activities.

## 05 / YOUR PREPARATION PLAN

# Four weeks, one step at a time

Use this flexibly before a confirmed change. Start sooner if helpful.

## Week 1 • Understand the impact

Have one calm conversation. Avoid opening with punishment, confiscation or a lecture.

- List the services your child uses or asks about. Check current age rules.
- Separate what is confirmed from what is still uncertain.
- Ask what will be hardest; choose one friendship, routine or interest to protect.

## Week 2 • Protect connection and information

Make sure practical communication can still reach your family.

- Agree alternative routes for key friends; save contact details with consent.
- Ask schools, clubs and group leaders for another communication route.
- Identify a trusted adult your child can speak to if they feel left out.

## Week 3 • Rehearse the transition

Agree a short break from the affected app or habit. Explain that you are looking for gaps in the plan.

- Choose a realistic time, away from the busiest social moment of the week.
- Agree how your child will reach someone during the break.
- Notice boredom, worry, missing jokes, anger, sleep or missed information.
- Adjust the plan. Difficulty is useful information, not failure.

## Week 4 • Review and prepare

Recheck official guidance. If the date or rules remain uncertain, keep preparing without a countdown.

- Confirm account, access and age-check arrangements where known.
- Save appropriate work using official tools and check the appeal route.
- Tell trusted adults if extra support may be needed.
- Set a review date for after access changes.

**Short on time?** Prioritise one important contact, one practical information route and one calm check-in. Build from there.

## 06 / BEFORE, DURING &amp; AFTER

# Keep the change manageable

Make the practical plan visible, and leave room for mixed feelings.

## Before access changes

Explain what you know and what remains uncertain. Avoid rumours or using the coming ban to settle every disagreement.

- Check the contact plan and school, club and invitation routes.
- Save appropriate creative work where permitted.
- Plan for difficult moments: after school, bedtime and weekends.
- Choose someone outside the immediate family your child can talk to.

## On the day

Keep things calm. A change in access is not a punishment or a parental victory.

**“Today the rule starts. It’s okay to miss it. We have our contact plan, and we’ll check what’s working tonight.”**

If an age check is wrong, use the official appeal route. Check unexpected verification messages through the service itself. Do not lend an adult account, enter a false age or teach your child to bypass restrictions.

## In the following weeks

Your child may feel sad, angry, bored, secretive or relieved. A setback is a reason to review the plan.

- Are they still connected to the people who matter?
- Are school, club and activity messages reaching your family?
- Has scrolling moved to another service?
- Have sleep, mood, attendance or family conflict changed?
- Do they know how to ask for help?

**If distress continues:** ask school, a GP or equivalent health professional, or a recognised child support service for individual support. See the support links at the end of this guide.



07 / WHEN IT GETS DIFFICULT

# Work on the problem together

You can keep a boundary and stay on your child's side.

## **"I'm the only one missing out."**

Ask what happened: a missed invitation, a joke, a group arrangement or a friendship worry? Solve that specific problem. If exclusion or bullying is involved, speak to school or the relevant safeguarding lead.

## **You discover secret use**

**"Help me understand what you needed from that account. We still need to follow the rule, and we need a better plan for the need it was meeting."**

Check immediate safety first. Avoid humiliation or an unrelated blanket loss of contact. Look for what the plan missed while returning to the boundary.

## **An online community feels like a lifeline**

Take this seriously, especially if your child is isolated, disabled, neurodivergent, living rurally, exploring identity or finding support that is hard to access offline. Work together on permitted support and contact routes. Consider their wishes and safety before sharing their identity or private concerns with any group.

## **Different homes have different rules**

Agree a small shared core where possible: the legal requirements, key contact routes, what to do if something worrying happens and how adults will communicate. Do not ask your child to police the other household.

## **You are exhausted**

Choose one practical change. Start with the highest-stress or highest-risk moment: bedtime, school messages, a friendship group or the app your child most fears losing. A difficult week does not undo progress.

**Your next step can be small.** "What is one thing we could change this week to make this easier?"



WORKSHEET 1 / FOR PARENTS & CARERS

# Before you start talking

Take a few minutes to prepare for one calm conversation.

What do I know for certain about the rule?

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What is still uncertain?

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What might my child most fear losing?

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One sentence that acknowledges how they feel

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One practical question I can ask

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When will we review the plan?

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Start by listening. You do not need to have every answer ready.



WORKSHEET 2 / COMPLETE TOGETHER

# Keep the connections

Use first names or initials. Keep your completed plan somewhere private.

People I most want to stay in touch with

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Safe, permitted ways to contact each person

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School, club or activity information we need to receive

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Adults who can help if I feel left out

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What I will do if someone asks me to bypass a rule

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Check that the new contact routes work. Save other people's details only with their consent.



WORKSHEET 3 / COMPLETE TOGETHER

# Our transition plan

Use this in the month before a confirmed change.

App, account or habit affected

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What I would miss most

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What needs saving or moving, if appropriate

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The contact route that will replace it

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A difficult moment we will practise

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What the adult will do too

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Our review date

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Save appropriate work through official tools. Pause before saving other people's private information.



WORKSHEET 4 / OUR WORKING AGREEMENT

# A plan we can return to

Keep this short and flexible. It is here to help, not to catch anyone out.

The rule or platform change we are preparing for

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What we want to protect: friendship, creativity, support, sleep, schoolwork or something else

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What will change before the start date

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What will happen on the start date

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What parents or carers will do differently too

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Who we can ask for help

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When we will review the plan

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At the review, ask: What worked? What was hard? What should we change?



KEEP THIS PAGE HANDY

# More support, when you need it

You do not have to work through every question on your own.

## For children and young people

Childline offers support by phone and online. Call **0800 1111** or visit [childline.org.uk](https://childline.org.uk).

## For adults concerned about a child

The [NSPCC Helpline](https://www.nspcc.org.uk) offers advice about a child's safety or wellbeing. Call **0808 800 5000**; check the website for current opening hours. For ongoing distress, you can also speak with school or your child's GP.

### Continue the conversation with Dr Amanda Gummer

A Good Play Guide webinar will explore what to say at different ages, how to protect friendships and routines, how to handle resistance or anxiety, and how Balanced Play can help.

**Date to be confirmed.** Pre-registration is an expression of interest; the team will share the confirmed date and joining details when available.

## Sources & further reading

1. [UK government · New rules to protect children online](#)

Current policy, timings and planned scope.

2. [Good Play Guide · Balanced Play](#)

Ideas for a varied, realistic balance of activities.

3. [NSPCC · Talking to your child about online safety](#)

More help with everyday conversations.

4. [Australian eSafety Commissioner · Social media age restrictions](#)

Family guidance for Australia; local rules differ.

5. [Childline](#)

Support for children and young people.

6. [NSPCC Helpline](#)

Help for adults concerned about a child.

**Edition: 2 October 2026.** UK policy checked against the government fact sheet on this date. Rules can change: recheck the latest official guidance before making plans around a fixed start date.

Created by Dr Amanda Gummer for the Good Play Guide. Please share the current Good Play Guide edition.