

A young man with dark hair, wearing a black and white striped t-shirt and dark pants, is walking and looking at a smartphone. He has a grey backpack on his back. The background is a solid orange color with a large, white, hand-drawn circle in the upper left corner. The bottom of the image has a dark teal background with a white vertical stripe.

SOCIAL MEDIA TRANSITION PARENT GUIDE



SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH THE SOCIAL MEDIA DELAY FOR UNDER 16'S

As Australia prepares for the social media restrictions for young people, parents and carers may experience uncertainty about how to best support their children. Alongside information about the delay, preparation steps, included platforms, enforcement, mental health services and reporting pathways, the following guidance is designed to help families navigate this transition with confidence and compassion.

Preparing for the Social Media Delay

From December 10th 2025, new laws in Australia will make it illegal for children under the age of 16 to have or create accounts on most social media platforms.

Social media platforms won't be allowed to let people under 16 create or keep an account. Under 16s will still be able to see publicly available social media content that doesn't require logging into an account. There are no penalties for under 16s who access an account on an age-restricted social media platform, or for their parents or carers. This will encourage platforms to take greater responsibility for the safety of children and they face penalties of up to \$49.5 million if they don't take reasonable steps to implement the changes.

We recommend that your child download any data they want to save, including connections, posts, chats, photos and videos from their social media accounts before the 10th of December 2025.

Some platforms may allow under 16s to deactivate their accounts, so they can reactivate them with their existing data when they turn 16 but young people should not rely on this option.

Why is this happening?

This change is about protecting young people from online harms by delaying access until they are older and more mature.

According to Childlight's 'Into the light' report, over 300 million children under the age of 18 are victims of online child exploitation and abuse each year. Online sexual exploitation is global public crisis affecting children in every country.

Also, research shows that spending long periods of time on social media and being exposed to harmful content can increase stress, impact sleep, affect self esteem and make it harder to focus. This delay gives children time to build things like digital literacy, critical thinking, impulse control and resilience.

Can a parent give permission for their child to stay on social media?

No - Even with a parents consent children won't be able to use most social media platforms if they are under 16.

What platforms are included?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Kick
- Reddit
- Snapchat
- Threads
- TikTok
- Twitch
- X (formerly Twitter)
- YouTube

Platforms currently under review by the Government include;

- Discord
- Roblox
- Whatsapp
- GitHub
- Steam

Additional platforms are under assessment and could be added.

Will Children still be able to see content online?

Yes - Young people will still be able to view public posts and videos that don't require you to log in like some YouTube videos or Facebook pages. Children won't be able to have an account or interact (like, comment or post).

How will this be enforced?

Social media platforms will be required to use age verification tools like facial analysis, behavioural data, or ID checks to confirm a user's age before they can sign up. They will also have to find and deactivate existing under 16's accounts.

Platforms can no longer rely on a user providing a birthdate at account sign up. Social networking services are expected to stop users faking their age using false identities, AI or deepfakes. They are also expected to prevent under-16s from using VPNs to pretend to be outside Australia.

Platforms can use location-based signals which help determine if an account holder lives in Australia and is trying to use a VPN.





HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE?

Many young people will experience anxiety, withdrawal and genuine distress when social media access changes, because:

- They've been using these platforms for many years
- The platforms were deliberately designed to be habit-forming
- Their friendships, identity and coping strategies are often tied to these spaces
- Fear of missing out (FOMO) can feel overwhelming
- Some children have used social media to regulate emotions or escape from stress
- Parents need clear, compassionate guidance that normalises these reactions without minimising them.

Supporting Young People Experiencing Anxiety or Withdrawal

It's normal for children and teenagers to feel anxious, irritable or stressed during the social media transition. These platforms were intentionally designed to keep users coming back, especially young people whose brains are still developing.

This means some children may experience reactions that look similar to withdrawal when access changes. These feelings are real, valid and very common. As a parent or carer, you can play an essential role in supporting your child through this adjustment.

Supporting Young People Emotionally

Children and teenagers may feel confused, frustrated or worried about losing access to platforms that play a large part in their social lives. Your calm, steady reassurance is essential.

Age-Specific Tips

Under 12

Keep explanations simple and positive.
Focus on safety, wellbeing and routine.
Offer clear, consistent boundaries.

Ages 12–14

Expect some resistance or anxiety about social loss.
Listen to their concerns without judgement.
Emphasise independence and problem-solving while maintaining safety boundaries.

Ages 15+ (if affected by phased changes)

Use collaborative language and involve them in decisions.
Acknowledge the importance of their friendships and online identity.
Discuss healthy ways to stay connected.

Helpful Conversation Starters

Some children find it difficult to express their feelings about the change. These phrases may help open safe, supportive conversations:

“I know this change could feel unfair or confusing. I’m here to listen.”

“Let’s talk about what you think you might lose, and how we can support that.”

“My job is to keep you safe, and we can work through this together.”

“What are you most worried or frustrated about?”

Encouraging open dialogue helps young people feel heard, respected and included.

1. Validate Their Feelings

Young people often fear that adults won’t understand.

Recognise that for young people, social media often feels like their world.

Validate their emotions: ‘I understand you feel left out because you can’t see what your friends are posting.

Avoid dismissing feelings with phrases like ‘It’s not a big deal.’ Validation builds trust.

Reassurance goes a long way

You might say:

“I can see this is really hard for you.”

“Your feelings make sense; this is a big change.”

“Lots of young people feel anxious about this. You’re not alone.”

Validation reduces panic and opens the door to problem-solving.

2. Explain Why They Feel This Way (in a gentle, non-blaming way)

Children often feel relieved when they understand that their anxiety has a cause — it’s not because they’re “weak” or “overreacting.”

You could explain:

“These apps were designed to make people want to keep checking them, even adults struggle.”

“Your brain got used to having lots of fast, exciting information.”

“It takes time for your brain and body to adjust, but it does get easier.”

Normalising this reduces shame and helps them feel safe.

3. Create a Supportive Daily Structure

A predictable routine helps reduce anxiety.

Include:

Regular sleep and wake times

Offline social time

Breaks from screens

Physical activity

Calming activities (reading, music, drawing, time outside)

Structure gives children a sense of control when things feel uncertain.

4. Replace the “Instant Rewards” of Social Media

Social media provides rapid likes, messages and updates. When that stops, children may feel a sudden emptiness or boredom.

You can help by offering offline activities that still provide:

Connection (friends, siblings, cousins)

Achievement (sports, crafts, learning something new)

Creativity (art, stories, cooking, music)

Pleasure (pets, games, nature)

These alternatives help rebalance the brain’s reward system.

5. Provide Consistent Reassurance

Some children will repeatedly ask the same questions because they feel unsettled.

Calm consistency helps them feel grounded.

You might say:

“We will get through this together.”

“It’s okay to be upset, you are safe.”

“I’ll help you find new ways to stay connected and enjoy your time.”

6. Encourage Healthy Peer Connection

Losing contact with friends is one of the biggest fears children have.

Parents can:

Help organise in-person catch ups

Use allowed communication platforms

Talk to other parents to coordinate group activities

Speak with school staff if friendship issues arise

When young people stay connected, their anxiety usually decreases.

7. Watch for Red Flags Where Extra Support May Be Needed

A short period of irritability or sadness is normal.

But consider seeking professional support if you notice:

Panic attacks or prolonged anxiety

Significant changes in appetite or sleep

Withdrawal from friends entirely

Self-harm talk or behaviours

Refusal to go to school

Constant distress about being offline

Your GP, school wellbeing team or the services listed in this guide can help.



8. Remember: Their Worry Is Not a Sign of Failure - It's a Sign of Impact

Parents may feel guilt about allowing social media use earlier in life.

It's important to reassure them:

Social media has been normalised for over a decade

Platforms were intentionally engineered to be compelling and addictive

Parents were not given the tools or information they deserved

No one could foresee the scale of impact on young people

What matters is the support they provide now

This helps reduce parent shame, which in turn improves communication with their child.

9. Offer Hope: The Adjustment Takes Time, but It Does Happen

Children often imagine they'll "never" feel normal without social media.

You can reassure them:

Most young people settle within weeks

Anxiety reduces as new routines form

Offline interests re-emerge

Sleep and concentration often improve

Friendships adapt

Life becomes calmer and less pressured

Hope is powerful, especially for anxious children.

If your child is worried, distressed or struggling, it doesn't mean you've done anything wrong, it means the platform had a strong influence on their developing brain. With reassurance, routine, and connection, young people adjust far better than they think. You are the most important protective factor in their life. Your calm presence, consistent boundaries and willingness to listen will help them move through this transition safely.





Keep Communication Open

Invite daily check-ins: ‘How are you feeling today about not being online?’

Create a safe space for expression of anger, sadness, or fear without judgment.

Share your own experiences with change or missing out, showing empathy.

Strengthen Offline Friendships

Encourage in-person meet-ups such as playdates, hangouts, or study groups. Help plan alternatives: movie nights, sports, arts, or joint hobbies.

Support safe non-social media digital communication (video calls, family group chats).

Build New Routines & Replace Gaps

Fill social media time with constructive activities: sports, music, volunteering, crafts. Encourage physical activity, which reduces anxiety and builds confidence.

Create tech-free family rituals: meals, board games, walks, or cooking together.

Teach Coping Skills for Anxiety

Practice breathing and grounding techniques (e.g., 5–4–3–2–1 sensory grounding).

Use mindfulness apps like Smiling Mind or Headspace for Kids.

Encourage journaling, drawing feelings, or positive self-talk: ‘It’s okay to miss out sometimes.’

Encourage Healthy Digital Alternatives

Promote closed, safe platforms (Messenger Kids, supervised group chats).

Encourage creative tech use: photography, coding, music, design.

Guide children to online spaces that teach skills or foster hobbies.

Be a Role Model

Show balanced tech use yourself, putting devices down at family times.

Demonstrate healthy boundaries: ‘I’m putting my phone down so we can have dinner together.’

Model resilience by sharing how you manage change and offline connections.

Recognising Signs of Distress

Some young people may struggle with the change, especially if they rely heavily on online communities. Watch for:

Sudden mood drops, anger or irritability

Sleep changes

Withdrawing from friends or family

Increased anxiety or panic about losing access

Obsessive attempts to get online

If these signs continue, consider reaching out to a GP, school wellbeing staff or one of the mental health services linked in this guide.

Stay Alert to Signs of Struggle

Watch for withdrawal, sleep issues, irritability, or declining school performance.

If anxiety escalates, link your child with professional support (Kids Helpline, headspace, GP).

Reassure them that asking for help is a sign of strength.

Key Messages for Kids

Your friendships are real, even without constant online contact.

You are not missing out, you’re making space for healthier connections. There are many ways to stay close to your friends safely.

How Parents Can Communicate This Message

Use Togetherness Language

“This isn’t just about you, it’s the same for all kids your age. None of your friends can use social media either, so you won’t be missing out on anything they’re doing online.”

“This social media delay is to help all kids stay safe and enjoy childhood without pressure from social media.”

Reassure Them About Friendships

“Your friendships are still really important. This is just about changing how you keep in touch, not whether you keep in touch.”

“Your friends are going through the same thing, so you can all figure out new ways to stay connected together.”

Offer Alternative Safe Ways to Connect

Parents can suggest and help set up:

Messaging through parent-approved apps (with strong privacy controls).

Phone calls and video calls - children often find these more personal than texting.

In-person meetups - encouraging regular playdates, outings, or group activities.

Shared hobbies - gaming on safe platforms, sports, music, or creative projects.

Shared family chat groups on encrypted platforms where only approved family/friends are invited.

Walkie-talkie style apps with parent-controlled contact lists.

School or Club-Based Platforms

Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams for Education – already widely used in schools, with communication limited to classmates/teachers.

Kid-specific community apps run by schools or extracurricular programs, where membership is restricted and moderated.

Gaming (in controlled ways) - Some multiplayer games allow “friends only” chat (e.g., Minecraft with parental controls enabled). This can be a safe way to interact if parent restrictions are applied.

Encourage local/LAN play (friends in the same household or connected via parent-approved servers), which avoids strangers.

Shared journals, scrapbooks, or letterboxes between classmates or siblings.

Key Safety Features to Look For:

Parent/guardian must approve all contacts.

No public profiles or searchable usernames.

No open chat rooms.

Ability for adults to monitor or review interactions if needed.

Encourage Agency

“Let’s brainstorm together: how would you like to keep in touch with your friends now?”

“Maybe you and your friends can make a list of fun ways to connect that don’t involve social media.”

Considerations for Neurodiverse Young People

Children with autism, ADHD or high anxiety may find transitions especially challenging. You can support them by:

Providing clear, predictable information about what will change and when

Introducing adjustments gradually where possible

Helping them maintain friendships through structured offline activities

Using visual schedules, planners or social stories

Checking in regularly and validating their feelings

Navigating Shared Care Arrangements

For families with shared custody or co-parenting arrangements:

Aim for consistent rules across both households to avoid confusion.

Discuss expectations early and respectfully.

If disagreements arise, a neutral service such as the Family Relationship Advice Line may help support communication.

Consistency helps children feel safe and secure.

For Families with Limited Tech Experience

Not all parents feel confident managing devices or settings. If you’re unsure how to prepare:

Start by checking your child’s device for installed apps.

Remove apps that will be restricted.

Enable parental controls or screen-time settings.

Ask a trusted friend, school tech support or community service for assistance if needed.

There is no shame in asking for help many families are learning as they go.





Helping Young People Manage Misinformation

Changes of this scale can lead to rumours or false claims. Young people may hear alarming or confusing information online or at school. You can help by:

Encouraging them to bring questions to you

Checking information together using trusted sources

Explaining that some people online may intentionally spread false or dramatic content

Reinforcing that you will stay updated and guide them safely

This reassures children and teenagers that they are not facing the transition alone.

A Note for Multicultural and Migrant Families

Many families use social media to stay connected with loved ones overseas. If your child regularly communicates with relatives in other countries:

Explore approved messaging options

Set up regular call times using permitted platforms

Encourage children to write emails, letters or voice notes

Validate any sadness or disappointment about reduced online contact

Maintaining these family relationships is important for identity, belonging and wellbeing.

Highlight the Positives

Less online pressure and comparison.

More meaningful, real-time connections.

More time for activities that make them feel good in the long run.

This transition may be challenging, but you are not expected to navigate it alone. Your presence, reassurance and open communication will make an enormous difference in helping your child adjust. If you feel unsure, overwhelmed or worried at any point, please reach out to one of the support services listed in this guide or contact the Carly Ryan Foundation for advice.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

eSafety Commissioner - Education and guidance, support for parents/carers, resources, supporting schools, community organisations and educators.
W: <https://www.esafety.gov.au>

This information will help you understand why, and how you can help your under-16 through the change.

W: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/social-media-age-restrictions>

We recommend following the tips in eSafety's get-ready guide and action plan for under-16s, this includes how to save their data and content.

W: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people/social-media-age-restrictions/get-ready-guide>

The Carly Ryan Foundation -

Education and awareness, resources for families, support and counselling, promoting alternatives and safer communication.

W: carlyryanfoundation.com

Kids Helpline - Ages 5-25 yrs. Free 24/7 confidential counselling via phone, web chat, email.

W: kidshelpline.com.au

P: 1800 551 800

Headspace - Ages 12-25 yrs.

Counselling, therapy, peer support, online and phone support.

W: headspace.org.au

P: 1800650890

Kids Hubs - For mild to moderate emotional, developmental relational or behavioural challenges.

P: 1800595212 for information on local kids hubs

Beyond Blue - Resources, counselling, information around anxiety and depression.

W: beyondblue.org.au

P: 1300224636

Lifeline - 24/7 phone support in crisis, emotional support.

W: lifeline.org.au

P: 13 11 14

Reach Out - Online resources, fact sheets, stories, peer support, forums.

W: au.reachout.com

13YARN - For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

W: 13yarn.org.au

P: 13 92 76

QLife - Visit online support or Chat (qlife.org.au) (for LGBTIQ+ people).

W: qlife.org.au

P: 1800 184 527

1800 Respect - Visit online support, call or Online Chat with 1800RESPECT | 1800RESPECT.

W: 1800respect.org.au

P: 1800 737 732

If you need to report online abuse or illegal or restricted content, you can contact:

eSafety Commissioner

W: www.esafety.gov.au/report/how-to-report-serious-online-abuse-illegal-restricted-content

National Office for Child Safety:

W: <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/make-report>

The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation - (ACCCE)

W: <https://www.accce.gov.au/report>



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