

Children and parents to pilot social media bans, time limits and curfews at home, as government tests next steps to give UK kids their childhood back

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Government pilots social media bans, time limits and digital curfews in 300 teenage homes to inform national consultation on children's online safety.

- Government launches pilots with hundreds of UK families on social media bans, curfews, and apps time limits
- Pilots to assess impact of restrictions on children, including on sleep, family life, and schoolwork
- Comes as nearly 30,000 parents and children respond to ongoing consultation on children's digital wellbeing, as public urged to share their views by 26 May 2026

Social media bans, digital curfews, and time limits on apps will be piloted in the homes of 300 teenagers in a first of its kind trial by the UK government.

Running alongside the digital wellbeing consultation, which is closing on 26 May 2026 and has already received nearly 30,000 responses from parents and children, the pilots will last 6 weeks and test how different restrictions affect young people's day-to-day lives.

Participants across all 4 nations of the UK will be assigned to one of 4 interventions being considered as part of our national consultation:

- One group of the parents will be instructed on how to use parental controls to remove or entirely disable access to selected social media apps, practically mimicking the enforcement of a social media ban at home
- The second group will implement a one-hour-per-day cap on the most popular social media apps for teenagers, including Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat
- The third set of parents will block social media for their children between 9pm to 7am, leaving them access to the apps before and after school hours
- A final group will be recruited to continue to give children the same access to social media they already have, to provide a control group

Both the children and the parents taking part will be interviewed at the beginning and end of the pilots to understand the impact limiting social media has had on their family life, sleep and schoolwork.

The participants will also be asked about the practical challenges they have faced, for example the ability to set-up parental controls or the workarounds that the teenagers may find to bypass them.

Data from the pilots will be assessed by government officials and a panel of academics alongside the public's responses to the consultation responses.

The data gathered will help ensure the government's next steps to give children a healthier digital upbringing are based on the latest evidence.

Technology Secretary Liz Kendall said:

We are determined to give young people the childhood they deserve and to prepare them for the future.

This is why we are listening to parents, children and experts with our consultation, as well as testing different options in the real world. These pilots will give us the evidence we need to take the next steps, informed by the experiences of families themselves.

Alongside the short-term government pilots assessing how potential restrictions would work in practice, the UK is also now home to the world's first major scientific trial looking at the effects of reducing social media use among adolescents, such as changes in anxiety and sleep quality, as well as time spent with friends and family, wellbeing, body image, social comparison, school absences and bullying.

This independent study, funded by the Wellcome Trust, is set to begin later this year and is co-led by the Bradford Institute for Health Research and University of Cambridge psychologist Professor Amy Orben.

The team will recruit from ten Bradford secondary schools, and involve around 4,000 students across the academic years 8, 9 and 10, covering ages 12-15.

Professor Amy Orben said:

We currently lack critical insights about how different types of social media policies might work in practice.

Large randomised controlled trials, like the one in Bradford, will allow us to both better understand the impact of social media and select interventions that work for young people as well as their families.

Later this week, the government will publish new practical advice on screens for under 5s to help busy parents navigate challenges of raising children in the digital world.

The guidance has been developed with parents, the Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza and leading experts to offer evidence-backed advice that people can trust.

As the government gathers views from experts and the public on the next steps, it also launched the 'You Won't Know until You Ask' campaign, providing families with immediate practical support to have a conversation with their children about the content they see online.

Backed by behavioural research and academic insights, the campaign gives guidance to parents on safety settings, conversation prompts, and age-appropriate advice for tackling misinformation and harmful content - including ragebait and misogynistic content.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/children-and-parents-to-pilot-social-media-bans-time-limits-and-curfews-at-home-as-government-tests-next-steps-to-give-uk-kids-their-childhood-back>