# UK government plans strict limits on children’s app use to combat doomscrolling



The UK government, led by Technology Secretary Peter Kyle, is contemplating a series of regulatory measures aimed at curbing the extensive use of mobile phone apps by children. Central to this initiative is a proposed limit restricting young users to a maximum of two hours on any single app at a time. This proposal comes amid growing concerns regarding 'doomscrolling', a term that refers to compulsively consuming an excessive amount of negative news or content online, which has been increasingly linked to detrimental effects on mental health.

Kyle has indicated that the measures may also include restrictions on social media access for children, specifically targeting platforms like TikTok and Snapchat during late-night hours and school times. In a statement to the Mirror, he asserted, "My approach will nail down some of the safety challenges that people face online, but also start to embrace those measures that deliver a much healthier life for children online." Although deliberations are ongoing, the specifics regarding which age groups these regulations will apply to remain undecided.

In addition to app usage limits, Kyle is also reviewing the age at which children can consent to the processing of their personal data online. Currently, this threshold stands at 13, but there are indications that the government might consider raising it to 16, following international trends aimed at enhancing child safety online. These discussions occur as various tech companies, including TikTok, have recently introduced measures intended to assist parents in managing their children’s screen time, yet it appears that efficacy remains to be fully assessed.

The societal conversation around smartphone usage is further amplified by voices from the education sector. Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the UK's largest education union, has called for a sweeping ban on smartphones in schools. He argues that such a move would alleviate pressure on both educators and parents while simultaneously protecting children from harmful content. Notably, this push aligns with findings from a study by the Children’s Commissioner, indicating that many schools already enforce varying degrees of phone restrictions, with a staggering 25% of children aged 9-16 reported to spend over four hours daily on devices outside of school.

The regulatory landscape is evolving rapidly, particularly with Ofcom's impending new codes of practice under the Online Safety Act aimed at better safeguarding children from harmful online material. This legislation mandates strict age verification and prioritises the removal of content that promotes self-harm or violence, which aligns with the broader call for accountability among tech companies. Melanie Dawes, chief executive of Ofcom, has emphasised the need for effective age checks and rapid content moderation to create a safer online environment for children, making this sector a focal point for regulatory scrutiny.

However, while these initiatives aim to address pressing concerns, experts warn that a simplistic approach may not suffice to tackle the complexities of social media impact on youth behaviours. Iona Silverman, a legal expert, noted that a potential social media ban could be ineffective, likening it to "a drop in an ocean-sized problem." The challenge lies not only in setting regulatory frameworks but also in fostering a broader cultural shift around technology use among younger populations.

In summary, the proposed measures reflect a growing recognition of the challenges posed by technology on mental health and social development among children. As the UK government evaluates the implications of these regulations, it faces the task of balancing safety with the benefits that modern digital communication can provide for young people.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14790093/Children-phone-app-social-media-anti-doomscrolling-measures.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/apr/24/ofcom-rules-protect-keep-children-safe-online)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14790093/Children-phone-app-social-media-anti-doomscrolling-measures.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/dcd25e50-73f6-458e-bb3a-bfad8dcd777b), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce9gpdrx829o)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/95851035-ab6d-4fca-9121-b4665da1f72e), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/22fdf5f1-a259-47df-8b47-3bc20c87ca48)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/dcd25e50-73f6-458e-bb3a-bfad8dcd777b)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce9gpdrx829o), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/22fdf5f1-a259-47df-8b47-3bc20c87ca48)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/dcd25e50-73f6-458e-bb3a-bfad8dcd777b), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/95851035-ab6d-4fca-9121-b4665da1f72e)
* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/22fdf5f1-a259-47df-8b47-3bc20c87ca48)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14790093/Children-phone-app-social-media-anti-doomscrolling-measures.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/dcd25e50-73f6-458e-bb3a-bfad8dcd777b> - Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the UK's largest education union, has called for a legal ban on smartphones in schools, citing their detrimental effects on children's mental health and social development. He emphasized that such a ban would help reduce pressures on educators and parents and highlighted concerns over children's exposure to harmful content such as pornography. Kebede urged the government to follow Australia’s example, where social media access is restricted for under-16s. While the Labour government prefers allowing headteachers to set their own policies, there is rising public support for stricter regulations on phone use in schools. A recent study by the Children’s Commissioner for England showed that most primary and secondary schools already have phone restrictions, with measures varying from limited classroom use to complete bans. The study also found that 25% of children aged 9-16 spend more than four hours daily on electronic devices outside of school. Despite the government's refusal to enforce a nationwide ban, Shadow Education Secretary Laura Trott advocated for a legal mandate as a protective measure. Children’s Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza supported empowering school leaders with choice while urging parents to set boundaries and maintain open discussions about online content.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/95851035-ab6d-4fca-9121-b4665da1f72e> - Ofcom, the UK’s media regulator, is set to implement new codes of practice under the Online Safety Act to better protect children from adult and harmful content on platforms like Meta, X, and TikTok. Companies will be required to remove or restrict access to content including pornography, posts promoting self-harm or eating disorders, and misogynistic or violent material. To enforce this, platforms must use strict age verification methods, such as credit card checks or AI-driven facial recognition, and create “clean” areas for underage users. The legislation mandates platforms to assess their services’ accessibility to children and mitigate potential risks by the end of July. Non-compliance could result in fines of up to £18 million or 10% of global revenue. Ofcom will also consult on additional measures, including using AI for illegal content detection and hash matching to block non-consensual intimate images and terrorist content. While tech companies like Meta, Snap, X, and TikTok are cooperating, concerns remain over potential US pressure to relax the act during trade negotiations. Digital rights campaigners insist child safety should remain a priority regardless of trade implications.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/apr/24/ofcom-rules-protect-keep-children-safe-online> - Under the measures, the “riskiest” services, which include big social media platforms, must use “highly effective” age checks to identify under-18 users; algorithms, which recommend content to users, must filter out harmful material; all sites and apps must have procedures for taking down dangerous content quickly; and children must have a “straightforward” way to report content. Melanie Dawes, Ofcom’s chief executive, said the changes were a “reset” for children online and that companies failing to act would face enforcement. “They will mean safer social media feeds with less harmful and dangerous content, protections from being contacted by strangers and effective age checks on adult content,” she said. The measures were published as the technology secretary, Peter Kyle, said he was considering a social media curfew for children after TikTok’s introduction of a feature that encourages under-16s to switch off the app after 10pm. Kyle told the Telegraph he was “watching very carefully” the impact of the wind-down feature.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce9gpdrx829o> - A possible ban on social media for under-16s in the UK is "on the table", the technology secretary Peter Kyle has told the BBC. Speaking on the Today programme, on BBC Radio 4, he said he would "do what it takes" to keep people and in particular children safe online. He also announced further research into the impact tech such as smartphones and social media was having on young people, claiming there was currently "no firm, peer-reviewed evidence". Kyle has spelt out his priorities in what he called a "letter of strategic intent" to the regulator Ofcom, which is assuming extra powers under the Online Safety Act (OSA). Campaign group the Molly Rose Foundation welcomed what it called an "important marker for Ofcom to be bolder" but said that should not obscure the fact that the OSA needed to be strengthened. "Our research is clear. The public and parents back an updated Act that embeds an overarching duty of care on tech firms, and the Prime Minister must act quickly and decisively to deliver this unfinished job," it said in a post on X. Iona Silverman, from law firm Freeths, described a potential social media ban as "a drop in an ocean-sized problem", saying teenagers would just find new ways to access problematic material online. "The government needs to think bigger: this is a problem that requires a cultural shift, and also requires legislation to be one step ahead of, rather than behind, technology," she said.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/22fdf5f1-a259-47df-8b47-3bc20c87ca48> - UK technology secretary Peter Kyle has announced that there are no plans to prohibit children under 16 from using social media. This decision marks a shift from earlier considerations following Australia's legislation to restrict social media use for young teenagers. Kyle highlighted the educational and communicative benefits of social media for young people and emphasized its value for vulnerable children seeking support. While acknowledging the negative aspects of social media, such as addictiveness and distressing content, Kyle stressed the importance of cautious regulation. The UK's Online Safety Act, effective this year, aims to mitigate harmful content exposure for children. This legislation mandates clear content moderation policies and imposes stringent penalties on tech companies. The impact of Australia's upcoming legislation will be scrutinized by other governments, including Norway, which is contemplating raising the minimum social media usage age to 15.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_Safety_Act_2023> - The Online Safety Act 2023 (c. 50) is an act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom to regulate online content. Designed to protect children and adults online, it passed on 26 October 2023 and gives the relevant Secretary of State the power, subject to parliamentary approval, to designate and suppress or record a wide range of online content that is illegal or deemed "harmful" to children. The act creates a new duty of care for online platforms, requiring them to take action against illegal content, or legal content that could be "harmful" to children where children are likely to access it. The idea of a duty of care for Internet intermediaries was first proposed in Thompson (2016) and made popular in the UK by the work of Woods and Perrin (2019).