

A Safer Digital Future: What Parents Need to Know About Australia's New Social Media Age Laws

By Dr Justin Coulson

From December 10 this year, Australia will lead the world in a major change to online safety. New legislation will restrict children **under the age of 16** from creating or maintaining social media accounts — including popular platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter). (Other platforms such as Roblox and Discord have not been identified as “in” or “out” at time of publication.)

It's a huge - and positive - step. And for many families, it will mean big changes to how kids connect, communicate, and spend their time online.

Why the Change?

The decision comes after years of accumulating evidence giving more and more indications that social media — while fun, engaging, and sometimes even educational — can also be **deeply dangerous for children and teens**. These platforms are [deliberately designed](#) to capture attention, keep users scrolling, and reward comparison. They elevate extremism and outrage. They expose children to violent and explicit content, cyberbullying, unrealistic ideals, and a steady stream of social pressure that can erode wellbeing.

As **Australia's eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant** explained when she joined me on [the Happy Families podcast](#), “Parents shouldn't have to fight billion-dollar companies to keep their kids safe online — the responsibility belongs with the platforms.”

How it Works

That's what this law does. It shifts the onus off parents and onto tech companies, requiring them to take “reasonable steps” to stop under-16s from having accounts or being algorithmically targeted. This means parents won't face penalties. The responsibility — and the fines, which can reach nearly \$50 million — will fall to social media companies that fail to comply.

To be compliant (and keep under 16s off the various platforms), big tech companies who are on the “banned” list will use a combination of **age assurance tools** — think AI-based content analysis, behavioural signals, and layered safety checks. Regular identification can be used, but if people are uncomfortable with that, the platforms will supply other methodologies for age verification.

Messaging apps like **WhatsApp** or **Facebook Messenger** won't be affected, but it's likely that some online games and creative platforms (such as Roblox) could fall under review as rules evolve.

The law won't solve every problem. Kids will still find ways to connect, and not every unsafe corner of the internet will disappear. But this new baseline gives parents a powerful ally — and a clear message that childhood deserves protection.

What Parents Can Do

These next few months are a chance to help your children make a healthy digital transition. Here are seven simple, practical steps to start now:

1. **Start the conversation.** Talk with your child about what's changing, why it matters, and how it's designed to protect them — not punish them. Keep it calm, curious, and compassionate.
2. **Highlight the risks.** Explain how social media can fuel anxiety, comparison, or exposure to harmful content, and why limits help everyone breathe easier.
3. **Review and guide.** Look at what your child is currently using. Help them save special memories, photos, or messages before their accounts change — and brainstorm other ways to connect with friends offline.
4. **Stay informed.** Visit esafety.gov.au for up-to-date resources, checklists, and webinars explaining how the legislation will work.
5. **Watch for changes.** Expect some frustration or FOMO (fear of missing out) when these changes arrive. Listen first. Reassure them that they're not alone — no one under 16 will be able to use these platforms.
6. **Know the exceptions.** Messaging apps and most online games are currently exempt, so your child might migrate to those spaces. Keep guiding conversations about what's safe and what's not.
7. **Understand the scope.** The rules apply only to platforms with “social media” features — spaces designed for sharing and following others. New apps will continue to appear, so stay curious and connected.

Perhaps most importantly, create community. Build relationships. Find ways to encourage your children and their friends to be able to connect, communicate, and enjoy a play-based, rather than a screen-based, childhood. This takes effort on our part. But the effort is worth it.

Get to know your child's friend's parents. Arrange for phone number swaps. Organise playdates and hangouts. Create the space your child needs to spend real-world time in real-world activities with friends and family.



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Beyond the Legislation

Even with these changes, some parenting principles never change. [Keep devices out of bedrooms](#). Set clear limits on screen time, especially before bed. Encourage real-world play, social time, and rest. And when you can, [model healthy tech use yourself](#) — that's what your kids will notice most.

As Commissioner Inman Grant put it, “We expect car makers to install airbags and seatbelts — but we still teach our kids to drive safely.” The same applies online. The government can help make the internet safer, but it's still up to families to model good habits, build trust, and keep the conversation going.

If you'd like to understand the new Social Media Minimum Age legislation in detail, visit esafety.gov.au for guides, FAQs, and upcoming webinars for parents.

Let's help our kids grow up in a world where being connected doesn't mean being consumed.



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