

Updates:

Meta faces backlash for lowering WhatsApp age limit to 13

Meta has been urged to reverse a decision to lower the minimum age for WhatsApp from 16 to 13 after it was accused of taking a "highly irresponsible" approach to child safety. Vicky Ford, a Conservative member of the education select committee, said: "Social media can be very damaging for young people. WhatsApp, because it's end-to-end encrypted, is potentially even more dangerous, as illegal content cannot be easily removed. So for Meta to unilaterally decide to reduce the age recommendation for WhatsApp, without listening to affected parents, seems to me to be highly irresponsible." Mike Baxter, principal of the City of London Academy in Southwark, south London, said he had seen pupils invite other children to WhatsApp groups and subject them to a "barrage of abuse" before removing them. "That's happening at one in the morning," he said. "That's not conducive for any 12 or 13-year-old to sleep well." Dr Kaitlyn Regehr, associate professor at University College London's Department of Information Studies, said school leaders believed "the consumption of harmful content online is moving offline and into school yards".

[The Daily Telegraph](#) [The Times](#)

Ministers to address concerns about the impact of phones on young people.

The government is to launch a consultation this month to address growing concerns about the impact of phones on young people. Proposals will include whether children who want to buy smartphones would have to prove their age in an effort to stop under-16s having the devices. The plans could be coupled with ensuring the device sold is child-friendly, a measure that recently received support from Dame Rachel de Souza, the children's commissioner for England. The consultation will also look at empowering parents more so they can monitor and control children's use of social media. Although social media apps have parental controls, few parents use them, despite their concerns, and ministers want to understand this apparent disconnect better. The proposals would build on the Online Safety Act, which is being implemented by Ofcom, that will force tech companies to take down illegal content and restrict children from seeing harmful material.

[The Times](#)

Father calls for cyber-bullying to be made a specific crime

The father of Mia Janin, a 14-year-old girl who took her own life, is calling for cyber-bullying to be made a specific crime to protect children. Mariano Janin believes new laws are needed to tackle the issue globally. Mia was found dead at her family home in London after being bullied by a group of male students on social media and in person. Her father emphasises the importance of legal boundaries for social media. He also supports the new Online Safety Bill as a potential first step towards real change. The father expresses concerns about the handling of the bullying investigation by the **Jewish Free School** (JFS). The coroner for North London has issued a report urging the school to take further action on bullying. Mariano Janin calls for schools to take their responsibilities towards children more seriously and demands a change in the culture of wilful ignorance.

[BBC News](#) [Daily Mirror](#) [The Daily Telegraph](#) [The Guardian](#) [The Times](#)

Children downloading AI apps to create nudes, warns government report

A new government report has warned that schoolchildren are downloading AI apps specifically designed to create nudes. The report from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) was authored by the UK Council for Internet Safety, which includes tech giants, charities, government departments and regulators to advise teachers on how to deal with the issue of pupils sharing nudes or semi-nudes. The document was recently updated to include AI-generated images, deepfakes and the topic of "sextortion" and education workers are told to deal with AI-made images in the same way as normal nudes, which includes not looking at them, not deleting them, calling the police, and not immediately informing parents. There are now calls for Ofcom, the regulator of the Online Safety Act 2023, to be more "proactive and comprehensive" in cracking down on AI nudes. The Government is also being encouraged to change the law so that it is illegal to make an AI nude or deepfake porn.

[The Daily Telegraph](#)

Teenagers are turning to online sources to learn about sex

A new survey has found that almost a fifth (22%) of teenagers say the internet is their main source for information about sexual health and healthy relationships, while 15% said they turned to pornography itself as their main source of information on the topic. The poll of 1,001 students aged 16 and 17 in England, by the Sex Education Forum charity, suggests that 30% of young people turned to social media as their main source of information about sexual orientation and gender identity, ahead of school (25%). The poll suggests nearly half of students learned nothing at all or not enough at school on power imbalances in relationships (49%), porn (49%) and how to access local sexual health services (46%). Over two in five reported learning nothing at all or not enough at school on attitudes and behaviour of boys and men towards girls and women (44%) and on gender identity (44%). The charity's report on relationships and sex education (RSE) said: "It is clear that schools feel under-confident about delivering on some areas of the curriculum that are statutory, but are particularly taboo and politicised. The problem is that these gaps leave young people vulnerable to misinformation as they seek out knowledge from online sources like social media, or have no access to advice at all."

[Daily Express](#) [Daily Mirror](#) [London Evening Standard](#) [The Independent UK](#)

Record number of children living in poverty

The Government has released data which shows a record 4.3m children are currently living in poverty, with an additional 100,000 children being pushed into hardship just last year alone. In the year leading up to March 2023, 30% of all UK children were living in relative poverty. Furthermore, the number of individuals living in absolute poverty has reached a 30-year high, with an additional 600,000 people, including 300,000 children, falling into that category. Additionally, the data shows a significant rise in food insecurity, with 7.2m people struggling to access an adequate food supply, compared to 4.7m in the previous year.

Financial Times Daily Mail Mirror.co.uk The Guardian

Parents call for ban on smartphones for under-16s

More than four in five parents believe smartphones are 'harmful' to young people, according to a survey by Parentkind. The charity is calling on political parties to include a ban on smartphones for children in their manifestos. The survey found that 58% of parents believe the government should introduce a ban on smartphones for under-16s. Concerns about online bullying and access to harmful content were cited as reasons for the ban. Parents of primary school children were more likely to support the ban, with 77% in favor. The majority of parents also felt that limiting children's access to smartphones would make their lives as parents easier. Jason Elsom, CEO of Parentkind, urged political parties to include a smartphone ban in their manifestos to protect children from the harms of excessive smartphone use.

Daily Express Daily Mirror Mirror.co.uk The Daily Telegraph The Independent UK The Times

Teenager's plot to attack music festival not reported by teachers

The Telegraph reports that a teenage terrorist who planned to attack the Isle of Wight music festival was not reported to the authorities by teaching staff, despite alarming signs. The 15-year-old schoolboy, who converted to Islam, had a picture of Osama bin Laden as his phone background. Staff at his school noticed his extremist views and expressed concerns about his online activities but decided against referring him to the de-radicalisation programme Prevent. The teenager was convicted of terrorism-related charges and sentenced to seven years in detention. His plans were foiled when FBI agents monitoring a messaging app alerted UK counter-terror police.

Daily Telegraph

A British teenager who planned a terrorist attack on the Isle of Wight music festival was sentenced to seven years' detention on Monday.

The 16-year-old had converted to Islam and developed what the sentencing judge, Maura McGowan, described as "a corrupted form" of the religion, believing it was justified to kill those he felt insulted his faith. The teenager, who cannot be identified because of his age, pleaded not guilty but was convicted in February of the charge of preparing a terrorist act.

He was also found guilty of the offences of disseminating terrorist publications and possession of a bladed article after a trial at Kingston-upon-Thames Crown Court in London. Jurors were told the teenager had researched recent major militant attacks ahead of the June 2022 festival on the Isle of Wight, which lies off the south coast of England.

Prosecutors said the teenager later changed his plans to focus on a potential knife attack before he was arrested in July 2022. Detective Chief Superintendent Olly Wright, Head of Counter Terrorism Policing South East, said in a statement: "We know that terrorist groups use their toxic rhetoric to try exploit vulnerable people. This case was particularly concerning because a teenager had gone so far as taking active steps to prepare for an attack. Thanks to a swift response we were able to stop him."

Reuters

New law could strip paedophiles of parental rights

Paedophiles convicted of serious sexual offences could lose parental rights over their children under a new law. Labour MP Harriet Harman has proposed an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill, which would automatically deprive paedophiles guilty of raping a child under 13 of their parental rights. The Lord Chancellor has agreed to the amendment. The proposed law change was inspired by the story of Bethan, who spent £30,000 in legal fees to prevent her paedophile ex-husband from accessing their daughter. Bethan's ex-husband was eventually barred from contact with all children except his own, but still retained rights over his daughter's education, health, and travel. The new legislation aims to protect children from the moment a parent is convicted

in a criminal court, eliminating the need for mothers like Bethan to pay exorbitant legal fees.

[BBC News](#) [Daily Telegraph](#) [Mirror.co.uk](#) [The Daily Telegraph](#)

Children as young as nine added to WhatsApp groups promoting self-harm and racism

Police have warned that children as young as nine are being added to WhatsApp groups promoting self-harm, sexual violence, and racism. Schools in Tyneside reported that pupils in years 5 and 6 (ages 9 to 11) had been added to these groups, some of which had 900 members and contained explicit images and pictures of mutilated bodies. Northumbria police has now sent a warning to schools across its area. It comes after WhatsApp recently reduced its age limit from 16 to 13, a decision that has faced criticism. The government is set to release a consultation this month on banning the sale of smartphones to under-16s and giving parents more power to control children's access to social media.

[BBC News](#) [The Times](#)