The Social Media Ban

South Australian Young People: Shaping the Conversation on the Social Media Ban

Commissioner for CHILDREN & YOUNG People

Acknowledgement of Country

The Commissioner for Children and Young People acknowledges the Kaurna People as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work. We further acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the many Countries across South Australia that are home to the children and young people we represent, their families and supporters. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' continuing connection to land, waters and community, and pay our deep respects to Elders past and present.

We also acknowledge the children and young people in these communities, for whom Culture, connection and wellbeing are inseparable.

For more than 60,000 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures have understood something that modern systems are still learning: that children are not simply learning about the world; they are helping adults to understand it better. Children are centred in decision making and are active contributors to community life in ways that are understood to have inherent value.

As we explore more meaningful ways to engage, empower and elevate children and young people in the big conversations, we acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing offer guidance grounded in reciprocity, accountability and connection.

Language in this report

The Commissioner	Refers to the Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia.
The ban/The social media ban	Refers to the social media minimum age requirements introduced by the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024. The language of "the ban" has been used to reflect the language that young people use when talking about the Act.
The first survey/ initial survey	The online survey of South Australian 13-15 year olds conducted by the Commissioner to capture initial thoughts and feelings about the ban. The survey was open from 4 December 2025 to 25 January 2026.
The survey/The second survey	The second online survey conducted by the Commissioner of 13-15 year olds to understand how they had been affected by the social media ban over the first 3 months. The survey was open from 31 March 2026 to 9 May 2026.
Focus group	In person engagement with fourteen year 7 and year 8 students at Whyalla Secondary College and the Commissioner. The focus group took place in April 2026 and was focussed on how students were feeling about the Ban.
Never had	Refers to young people who responded to the Commissioner's second survey who never had access to social media before the ban implementation.
Retained access	Refers to young people who responded to the Commissioner's second survey who used social media before the ban implementation and still had access to all of their accounts.
Lost access	Refers to young people who responded to the Commissioner's second survey who used social media before the ban implementation and lost access to one or more of their accounts.

Suggested Citation

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Foreword

Australia's social media minimum age legislation was introduced to protect children and young people from online harm. However, even though they are the people most directly affected by it, children and young people were not meaningfully involved in designing the legislation.

Unlike previous generations, many of today's children and young people have grown up in an environment where digital communication forms an important part of everyday life. Digital life is not experienced as separate from "real" life but as an extension of it.

Children and young people have a right to be heard in decisions that affect their lives. Listening to them also leads to better policies and legislative change. Young people can tell us what is working, identify unintended consequences and offer practical ideas that adults may not have considered.

This is why we asked South Australian young people about their experiences of the social media ban, with a particular focus on engaging those aged 13-15 who are most likely to be directly impacted.

We first heard from 133 young people around the time the ban came into effect, when there was considerable uncertainty about what it would mean. We then spoke directly with students in Whyalla and conducted a second survey, which received 437 responses from young people aged 11-17 across South Australia.

I sincerely thank every young person who shared their experiences, concerns and ideas with us. I also thank the schools, families and other adults who supported them to take part.

Other research has examined the effectiveness of the legislation and levels of compliance by platforms. This report adds something different: it explores how young people themselves have experienced the changes, including impacts on their wellbeing, relationships, sense of connection and daily lives.

What we heard was not a simple story of the ban being either good or bad. Most young people reported little or no change to their daily lives, and most did not report a negative impact on their wellbeing. However, experiences varied considerably depending on whether young people had used social media before the ban and whether they retained or lost access to their accounts.

Young people who lost access were more likely to report negative effects on their wellbeing and to feel less connected than those who retained access. Social media was particularly important for connection among neurodivergent young people and young people with disability. These findings matter because online and offline life are not separate for young people. Digital platforms can expose them to harm, but the online world can also provide connection, information, support and a sense of community.

Young people understand that social media can be harmful. They want safer online environments and better protection from bullying, predatory behaviour, harmful content and pressures on their mental health. But they also want adults to understand how they use social media and to work with them on solutions.

As we go forward, we need to refine our approach to social media and other technological advances, such as AI use, to ensure that the positive elements of these tools can be harnessed whilst minimising the harm.

The ban draws an important line in the sand about the harms children and young people can experience online, but it cannot be the only response. Creating safer online environments requires governments, regulators, platforms, parents and young people to work together. Change must be shaped with young people, not simply done to them.

The young people who contributed to this work offered thoughtful and practical ideas about online safety, education, platform design, age restrictions and the support they need. They also made it clear that they want safe spaces online to connect as well as more accessible places to meet in person where young people are welcomed and can belong. Their valuable contributions will not end with this report.

As Commissioner, I will continue to bring their experiences and ideas to decision-makers and advocate for children and young people to be included as the legislation is evaluated and developed, and in future support mechanisms aiming to reduce the time spent by children and young people online.

Children and young people are citizens now. Their voices should be at the forefront of decisions shaping their lives.

Dr Kylie Heneker
Commissioner for Children and Young People

The Social Media Ban

We heard from **584** young people

133 young people participated in our first survey

437 young people completed the second survey

14 young people participated in a Whyalla focus group

Implementation of the ban has been **experienced differently.**

Of young people surveyed who used social media before the ban:

49% retained access to all accounts

41% lost access to some or all accounts

10% found workarounds to maintain access

Losing access impacted feelings of wellbeing and connectedness.

Impacts on wellbeing and connection

Of young people who lost access:

36% reported negative feelings about the ban

Retained access (14%); Never had access (12%)

44% reported low levels of connection

Retained access (20%); Never had access (28%)

37% reported a negative impact on their wellbeing

Retained access (11%); Never had access (16%)

Young people who never had access reported higher negative impacts on their wellbeing (16%) than those who retained access (11%), despite not being directly impacted by the ban.

What changed?

Overall, **69% of all young people** reported little or no change to their daily routine. However, **those who lost access were more likely to report:**

Substantial changes to routines

32%

Retained access (7%); Never had access (16%)

Communicating less with friends

24%

Retained access (6%); Never had access (6%)

Young people who lost access were the most likely group to report doing more non-digital activities, however, relatively few reported this change, representing just 6% of responses from those who lost access.

What young people want next

01.

Ensure the ban is effective and fair.

It is difficult for young people when some of their friends have access to social media and some don't..

02.

Ensure we can still communicate with our friends.

Young people need support to make sure they have alternative ways to keep in touch with their friends.

03.

Share the ownership of social media change.

Suggestions included giving parents more control, having conversations about online safety with trusted adults, time limitations, and incremental access to features with age.

04.

Make platforms safer for us.

Young people feel as though the more addictive and harmful aspects of platforms should be removed, rather than access to the platform itself.

05.

Provide more education about online safety and mental health.

Banning platforms until you're 16 just shifts the harm to a higher age group rather than addressing it.

06.

Provide free in-person alternatives for social interaction.

Young people want to hang with their friends; if not online, then they need other spaces.

The summary: What young people told us

Australia's Social Media Minimum Age legislation was introduced to protect children from online harms. Much of the public discussion since implementation has focused on whether young people are still able to access social media and whether platforms are complying with the new requirements. While these questions are important, they tell only part of the story.

The findings provide a unique perspective on the experiences of young people following the ban, with a particular focus on those who were social media users before the reforms and have since lost some or all access. Their experiences are compared with those of social media users who have retained access, as well as young people who have never used social media. This approach aligns with eSafety's planned evaluation methodology, which will examine outcomes across different groups of young people in future research on the ban. As such, this report provides an early snapshot of the types of findings that may emerge from future evaluations, drawing on a sample size comparable to eSafety's most recent three-month snapshot report.

There is no single young person's view of the social media ban. Young people's experiences are not uniform, and attitudes towards the reforms are strongly influenced by whether they have never used social media, used social media prior to implementation and whether they retained or lost access following the ban.

Young people who lost access to their accounts came through strongly as having different experiences than other young people. They were more likely to report lower wellbeing, lower feelings of connection, greater disruption to their daily lives and more negative feelings about the ban than both young people who retained access and those who did not use social media before the ban.

Prior to the ban, advocates and those who worked with children and young people expressed concerns that young people who might already face barriers to belonging and participation might feel the impacts of the ban more strongly than some other young people. Findings from both surveys also reflected that respondents who were neurodiverse, had a disability, or identified as LGBTQIA+ were more likely to report negative wellbeing impacts such as feeling disconnected. This further highlights the need to consider how these reforms affect different groups of young people, and ensure intersectionality, diversity and identity are considered in conversations around young people's belonging, and sense of community.

The interconnected nature of young people's lives was also thematic throughout the report. Young people affected by the ban have grown up with digital spaces being an extension of their physical ones, an experience vastly different from adult decision makers. Comments about the ban were frequently linked by young people to broader issues, including mental health, loneliness, social isolation, affordability and the availability of safe physical spaces for young people to connect. These findings suggest that online safety reforms cannot be understood in isolation from the wider wellbeing challenges facing children and young people.

The findings also suggest that the debate is about more than online harm. **While young people recognised the risks associated with social media, they frequently described digital platforms as important spaces for maintaining friendships, exploring interests, accessing information, participating in communities and finding support.** For many young people, concerns about the ban centred less on losing entertainment and more on losing connection, belonging and opportunities to participate.

Young people share adults' concerns about the safety of digital platforms. **Young people's comments across the surveys and focus group demonstrate that they do not dismiss online harms or oppose efforts to improve online safety. Many identified concerns about cyberbullying, predatory behaviour, harmful content and addictive platform design.** However, they often favoured solutions focused on safer platforms, stronger regulation of technology companies, age-appropriate safeguards, digital literacy, and parental involvement rather than exclusion alone.

Perhaps most significantly, young people consistently expressed a desire to be part of the solution.

Throughout the surveys and focus group, young people demonstrated thoughtful and nuanced perspectives on both the benefits and risks of social media. **Many questioned why young people were not more actively involved in shaping legislation that directly affects them and called for greater opportunities to contribute to future discussions about online safety.**

As implementation of the Social Media Minimum Age reform continues and evaluation efforts expand nationally, these findings highlight the importance of understanding not only whether the reforms are working, but how they are being experienced by the young people whose lives they are intended to improve. **As the state that first championed these reforms, South Australia has a unique opportunity to ensure that the voices of young people help inform their ongoing implementation and evaluation across the country. Young people have been clear that they want safer online environments, but they have been equally clear that they want their voices heard.** The opportunity now is to move beyond making decisions about young people and towards making decisions with them.

Analysis: What children and young people said about the ban

This report brings together the experiences of 584 South Australian young people aged 11–17 across two surveys and a focus group. It focuses primarily on the second survey, which received 437 responses from young people across 62 South Australian postcode areas.

Respondents to the second survey came from a range of metropolitan and regional communities and included young people with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

The survey was not designed to produce a representative sample of all South Australian children and young people. The second survey's findings therefore reflect the experiences and perspectives of those who chose to participate.

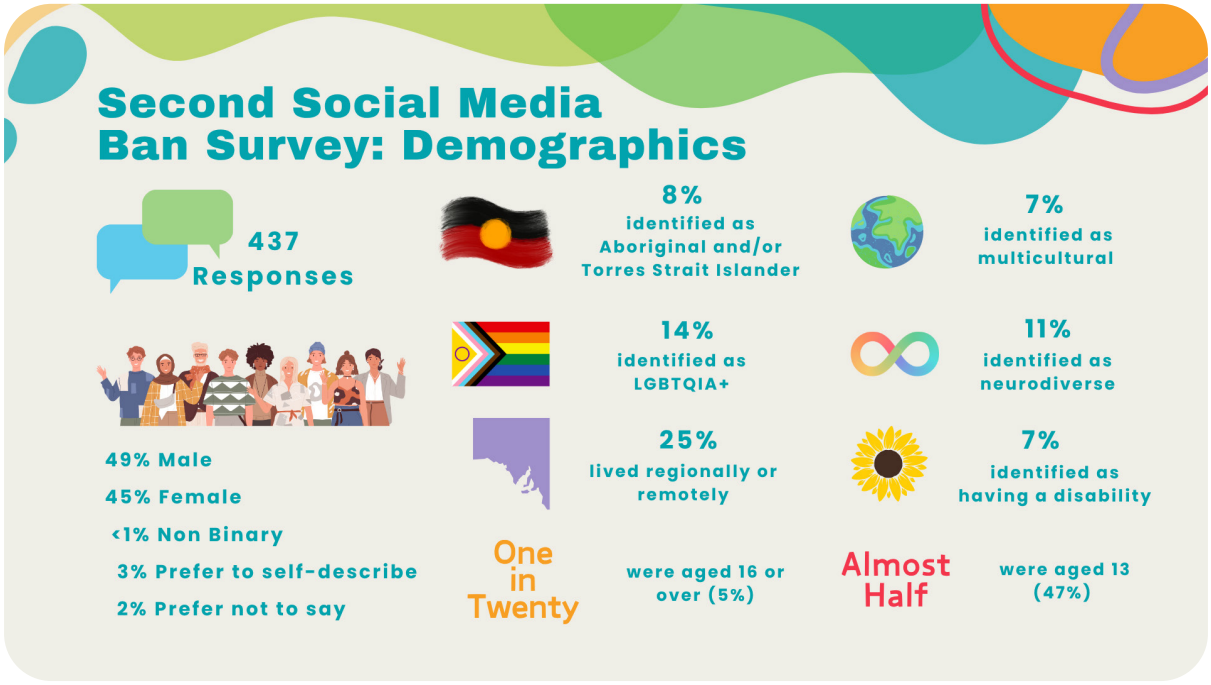

Figure 1: Demographics of young people who responded to the second survey

Quotes from children and young people included in this report

Some questions in the surveys allowed young people to leave free-text responses. Quotes from the surveys have been included throughout this report to reflect the voices of young people who participated. Quotes have largely been unedited to ensure young people's voices remain authentic; however, minor editing has been undertaken where necessary to support clarity or accessibility. Any changes or omissions have been marked with square brackets or an ellipsis (...).

Implementation and access

Due to the timing of the first survey at the outset of the ban's implementation, access was not a focus of the survey questions. The second survey explored whether young people still had access to social media three months after the ban. It also looked at whether experiences and feelings about the ban differed between young people who retained access and those who lost it. Understanding whether the ban is achieving its intended purpose is important, however understanding how young people are feeling gives us a broader picture of the ban's impact than measures of access alone.

Who retained access to social media?

Almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents in the second survey said they had used social media before the ban. Rates of reported social media use were similar across age groups and among young people living in metropolitan and regional areas.

Young people with disability were slightly more likely to have used social media before the ban. However, the number of respondents with a disability was not large enough for this difference to be statistically significant.

Among young people who had used social media before the ban:

- 41% lost access to some or all their accounts;
- 49% retained access to all their accounts; and
- A further 10% reported finding workarounds that allowed them to retain access.

The survey results show that just over half of respondents were affected in some way by the implementation of the ban, although their experiences varied considerably.

The proportion of young people who reported still having access to their accounts demonstrates that the ban has not been implemented consistently. Young people's comments suggested that whether they retained or lost access reflected several factors, including how platforms checked users' ages, decisions made by young people and their parents, and the use of workarounds.

This is consistent with early research from the eSafety Commissioner. Its survey of parents found that some young people continued to access age-restricted platforms because platforms had not asked them to verify their age. In other cases, parents permitted or helped their children to retain access, or young people found other ways to maintain their accounts[1].

Young people's comments illustrate these different experiences:

"I woke up the day it was supposed to be banned and nothing happened and nothing has happened since."

"I didn't get banned, but [my] parents are for the ban so I don't use it."

"I was only asked to verify on Facebook and that's the only one I've been banned from. I wasn't asked for any other apps, as my age was already set to older."

"For Snapchat, I made a weird face for the 16-year-old facial scan and it worked."

1 eSafety Commissioner. (2026, March). Under the new age restrictions: Early insights from Australian parents. Australian Government. https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-03/Under-the-new-age-restrictions-Early-insights-from-Australian-parents-March2026.pdf

Together these findings highlight the complexity of the ban's implementation and the importance of understanding not just how platforms are applying restrictions, but also the role of parents and caregivers, the ways young people are maintaining access, and how different experiences of access affect young people as the reforms continue to develop.

How were young people feeling?

In the survey conducted three months after the ban came into effect, young people's feelings were closely linked to whether they had used social media before the ban and whether they had retained or lost access.

The survey asked young people, "how do you feel three months into the social media ban?" Responses were provided on a scale from 1, meaning "not so good," to 5, meaning "great."

Looking across the three groups in Figure 2, young people who lost access were:

- Much less likely to rate their feelings as positive (38%) when compared to those who retained access (60%) and those who never had access (57%); and
- More than twice as likely to report their feelings as negative (36%), when compared to those who retained access (14%) and never had access (12%).

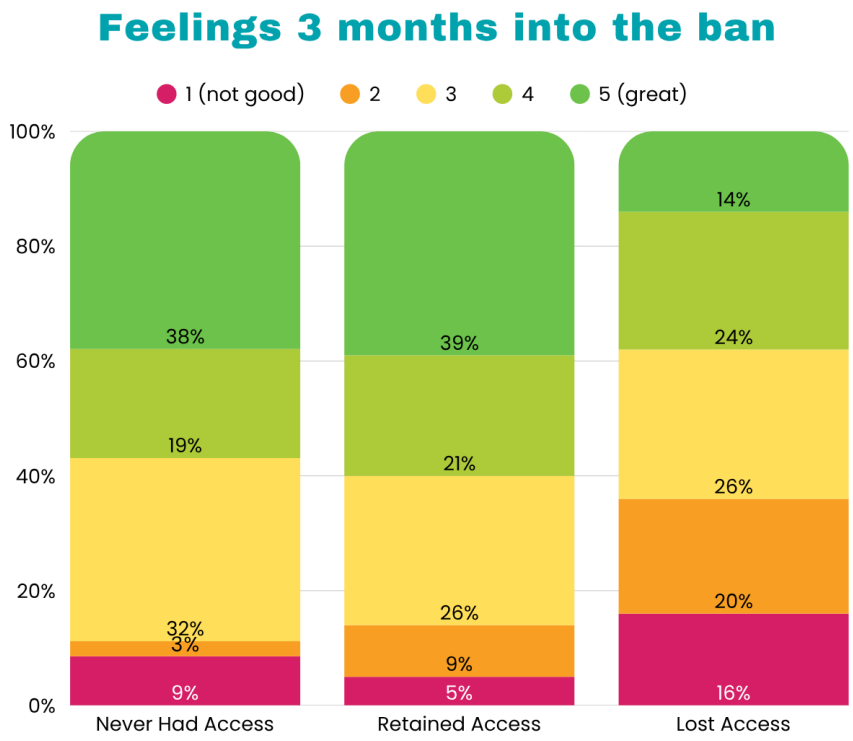

Figure 2: Responses to "how do you feel 3 months into the social media ban?"

Young people were asked to leave a written comment on what emotions they had experienced in relation to the ban. Young people who lost access were:

- More likely to describe sentiments of sadness, with more than one-third (34%) reporting feeling sad, compared with 11% of those who retained access, and 14% who never had access.
- Less likely to describe feeling positive (4%), compared with 13% of those who retained access, and 12% who never had access.
- Slightly more likely to report feeling angry 13%, compared to 10% who retained access, and 6% who never had access.
- As likely to report feeling lonely (4%) to those who never had access (3%). Of those who retained access only 1% reported feeling lonely.

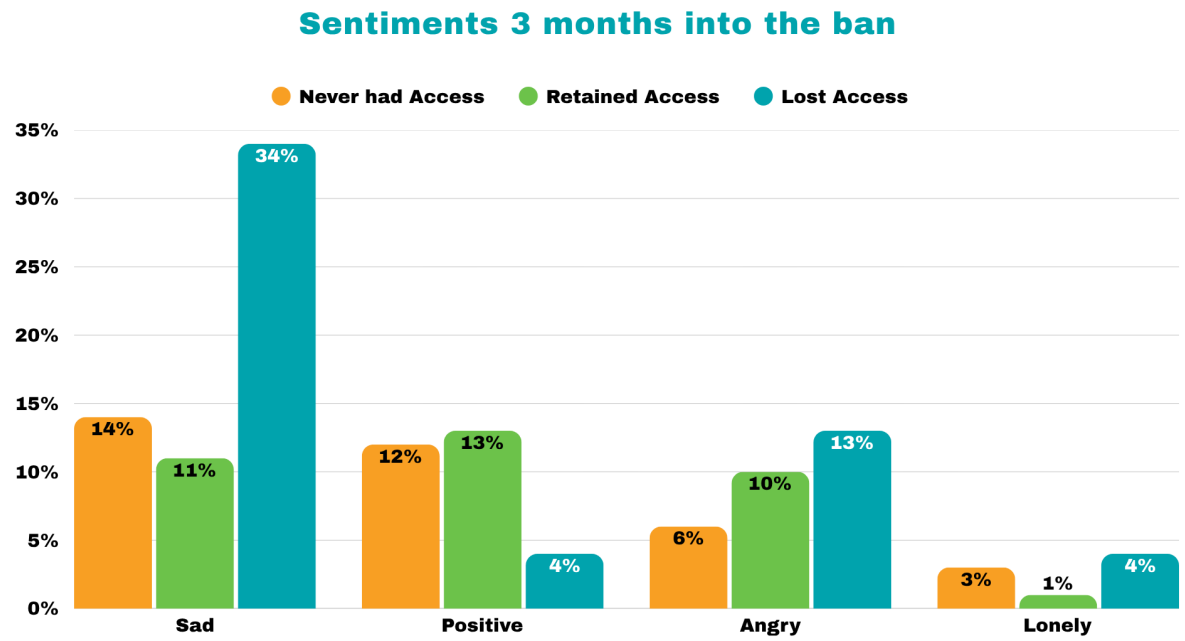

Figure 3: Sentiments described by young people 3 months into the ban.

Fairness was a common theme reflected in young people's comments about the ban. This encompassed both their concerns about the impact of the ban itself as well as the inconsistent application or compliance by social media platforms. Many comments focused on the fact that some young people had lost access while their friends continued to use the same platforms, which contributed further to feelings of unfairness and exclusion.

Young people explained some of these different perspectives:

"It is unfair for all the people under 16 because it was some peoples only way of communication and the only place they feel safe... 16 is too old- we can drive by then and have a job, so it should be lowered."

"Bad- it's hard to keep up with trends and fit in. It's not fair that we have to have things taken away from us when we've had it for years. They should've made the ban for the generation coming up so when they get to teen years they already don't have social media, so it won't affect them."

"In the middle because since the ban people have been online bullied less but I miss not accessing social media."

Comparing results from the first survey that was conducted in December 2025 as the ban took effect to the second survey, there is evidence that young people's perceptions of the ban have changed over time.

In the first survey:

- 57% of all respondents reported negative sentiments about the ban, such as anger, sadness, anxiety or loneliness/isolation (compared with 28% in the second survey);
- 37% reported neutral emotions such as "nothing", "normal" or "chill" (compared with 64% in the second survey); and
- 4% reported positive emotions such as happiness or understanding (compared with 10% in the second survey).

As these surveys involved different groups of young people, the results do not track how individual feelings changed over time. However, they suggest that young people responding around the time of implementation felt more negative emotion than those responding several months later. This may partly reflect reduced uncertainty about the ban's effects at the time of the second survey and the fact that many young people have retained access to their accounts.

Figure 4: Thematic snapshot of young people's responses from the first survey.

Focus group: expectations and experiences

When the ban was announced, students in a Whyalla focus group described feeling scared, worried, nervous and annoyed about how it might affect their lives.

After implementation, only one of the 14 students had been prevented from accessing their accounts. Some never lost access, while others created new accounts or used their parents' accounts. Their experiences help illustrate why young people's feelings before implementation did not always match what happened afterwards.

Figure 5: Insights from Whyalla Secondary College focus group

The second survey found considerable differences in how young people felt about the ban, depending on whether they had social media before the ban and whether they subsequently retained or lost access.

This highlights the importance of involving young people with a range of experiences in future consultation and evaluation. It also aligns with eSafety's future evaluation approach, which will examine differences between children who continue to use age-restricted platforms and those who no longer hold accounts[2].

2 eSafety Commissioner. (2026, July). Early days, early insights: Understanding experiences of social media age restrictions at the three-month follow-up. https://www.esafety.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/early-insights-from-esafetys-comprehensive-evaluation-project

Wellbeing, connection and belonging

Social media can expose young people to harm. However, young people's comments in both surveys suggest that social media and online spaces have played a significant role in how they maintain relationships, find information, access support and participate in communities.

For many young people, online and offline life are closely connected. To understand the broader impacts of the ban, the second survey examined not only whether young people retained access to social media, but also how the changes affected their wellbeing, relationships and daily lives.

"Instead of getting rid of it completely you should help get rid of the bad stuff...a lot of kids use social media to connect and express their emotions whether that's through reposts, or talking to online friends and watching videos that can make them feel not so alone."

Effects on wellbeing

In the second survey, young people were asked in a free-text question, "how would you describe the ban's impact on your wellbeing?" Among previous social media users, 37% of those who lost access described a negative impact on their wellbeing, compared with 11% of those who retained access. However, those who lost access were also more likely to report a positive effect: 7%, compared with 1% of those who retained access. This suggests that losing access did not affect every young person in the same way. In addition, for those who had never had access to social media and were therefore not directly impacted by the ban, it is interesting to note that they still reported some impacts on their wellbeing. Of the young people who never had access to social media, 16% still reported negative wellbeing impacts.

"Good- I'm happier and more engaged."

"My wellbeing is no different."

"Lots- I used social media for calming myself down but now I can't do that."

"Not good, because I can't talk to most of my mates."

During the ban's design and implementation process, concerns were voiced by inclusion advocates that the social media ban might disproportionately impact particular groups of young people including those with a disability and who identified as LGBTQIA+.

This was an emergent theme in the second survey in relation to wellbeing, with social media users who were neurodiverse being more likely to describe a negative impact on their wellbeing (38% negative compared to 20% of respondents overall). Respondents who were LGBTQIA+ or had a disability were also more likely to describe a negative effect, although these differences were smaller than for neurodiversity and not statistically significant.

"Not all is harmful- some can be really helpful to the LGBTQIA+ community, people with mental health struggles, and people of colour, to connect and feel supported by people and know they're valid."

"As a neurodivergent lesbian I will [see] less of my community as I am already oppressed in the real world. As an autistic individual I struggle to connect with people, I can't just "go out", social media helps me to connect...This ban is horrible to the neurodivergent community, specifically autism community."

Although mental health was not asked about specifically in the second survey, many young people described a direct relationship between their wellbeing, digital connection and access to social or community support. These findings suggest that young people's concepts of wellbeing in relation to the ban encompass not just access to social media but engagement with, and access to, mental health support and diverse communities.

"... on social media people who had a bad household or even just a bad mental health [could] go to talk to people on social media to connect with people."

"Not good, social media can make people speak out about issues such as health or wars, or mental health issues etc, and as an autistic individual it's so amazing to see other people who I can relate to, taking social media away takes community away."

Comparing the first and second survey (Figure 6), young people who responded to the first survey were:

- More likely to report a negative impact on their wellbeing (43%), compared with 20% in the second survey;
- Less likely to report no impact (54%), compared with 76% in the second survey
- As likely to report a positive impact (2%), compared with 3% in the second survey (noting that reported positive impacts represented a relatively small proportion of responses in both surveys).

The pattern of responses differed between the two surveys, with fewer respondents to the second survey describing a negative impact and more reporting no impact. The difference may reflect several factors, including reduced uncertainty and the fact that many respondents to the second survey had retained access.

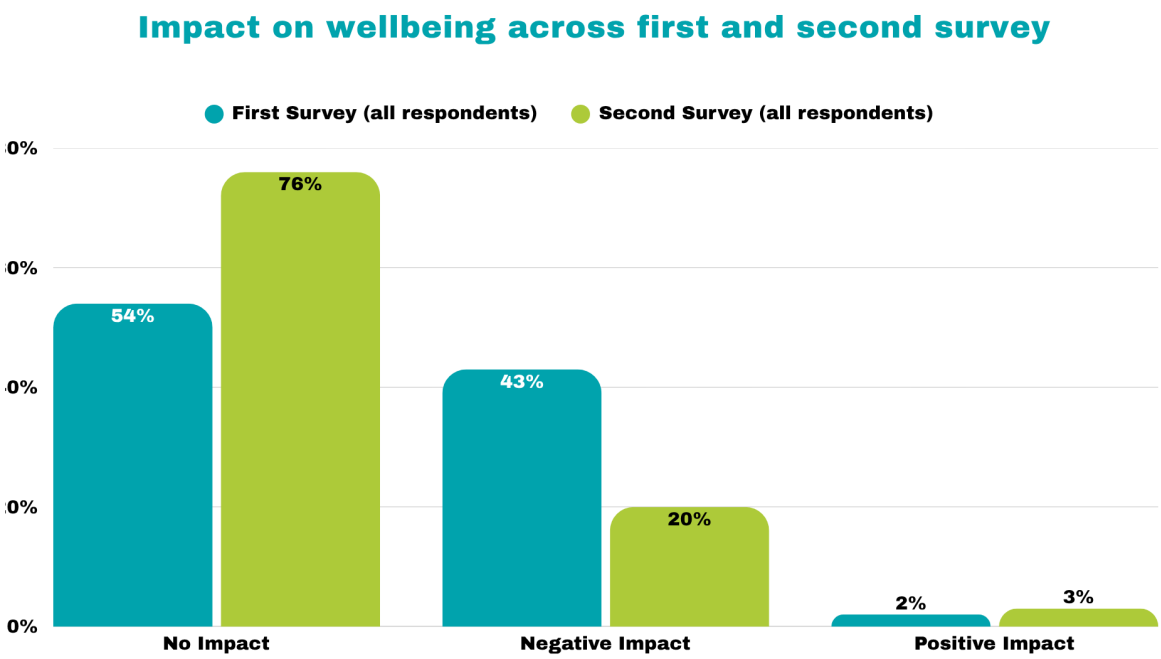

Figure 6: Comparison of reported wellbeing among respondents to the first and second surveys (note: 1% of responses in both surveys did not address wellbeing so were not given a label).

Feelings of connection

Young people were asked in the second survey "how connected they felt to others now" on a scale from 1 (meaning "not connected") to 5 (meaning "very connected.") Once again, there was distinct variation in responses across groups with different experiences of the ban (Figure 7).

Young people who lost access to the ban were:

- Less likely to report feeling high levels of connection (32%), compared with those who retained access (52%), and those who never had access (49%).
- Much more likely to report low levels of connection (44%), compared with those who retained access (20%) and those who never had access (28%).

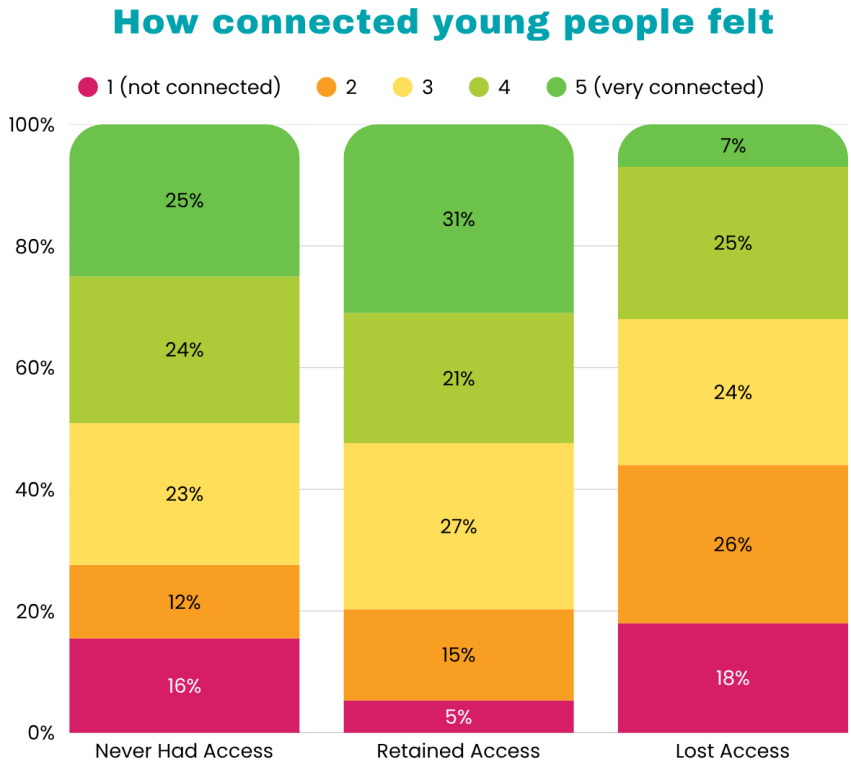

Figure 7: How connected young people reported feeling in the second survey

Overall, the findings show that young people who retained access were more likely to report feeling connected than those who lost access. While the survey does not provide a causal link between losing access and lower feelings of connection, the findings do suggest an association between whether social media access was lost and young people's sense of connection. For young people who have never had access to social media, their level of connectedness was similar to those who retained access, suggesting that connection is not necessarily dependent on social media access but that once it is part of young people's lives, it can become a primary mechanism to connect with others.

"The ban can disconnect people who live far from their school, or are different from others [e.g. neurodivergent]."

"[I] can't connect with people dealing with similar experiences to me on YouTube."

"Really bad. It has impacted my relationships with friends."

"Hanging out with friends etc, but that can be hard especially for neurodivergent people like me."

How important was social media for connection?

The second survey asked, "how important is social media to you to connect with others," on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

When looking further at how different groups of young people rated the importance of social media for connection (Figure 8), results follow the same pattern as other questions, with those who lost access having quite different results than the other two groups.

Young people who lost access were:

- More likely to assign high importance to the role of social media in connection (76%) compared to those who retained access (60%). Both those who lost access and retained access were much more likely to say social media was important than those who never had access (34%).
- Less likely to assign low importance to the role of social media in connection (7%) than both those who retained access (17%) and those who never had access (43%).

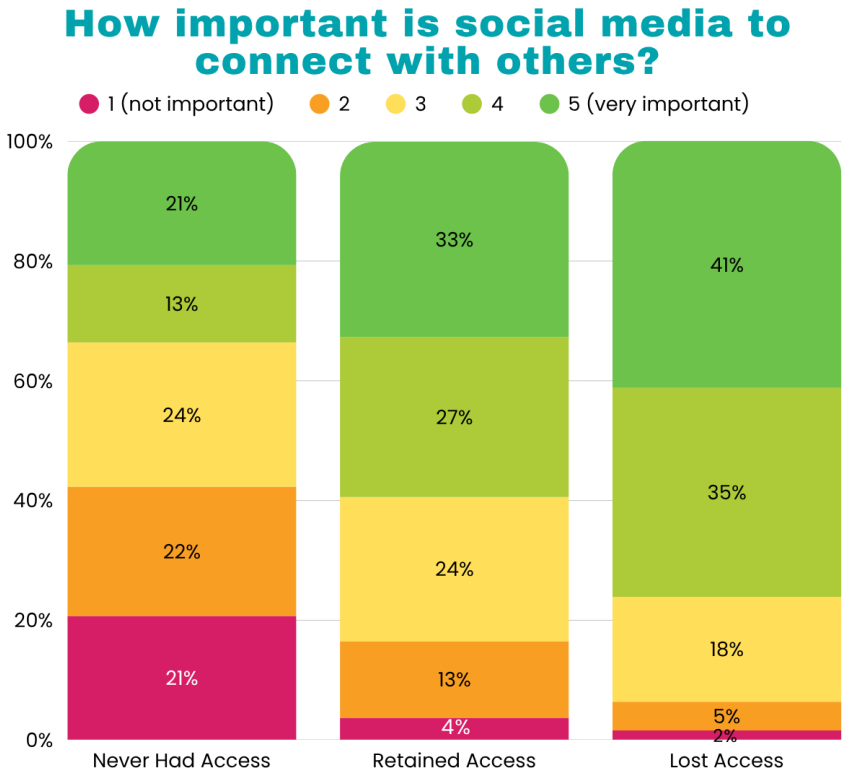

Figure 8: How important is social media to connect with others?

"I can't do anything ... because I live far from my friends, I can't stay connected."

"Plans to hang out that would normally have been easy to make are now getting difficult."

The second survey found that young people who identified as neurodiverse were more likely to describe social media as important to very important to connect to others (Figure 9). Respondents with a disability were also more likely to describe social media as important or very important, but due to the small number of respondents this difference was not statistically significant. These findings indicate that social media may play a particularly important role in connection for some groups of young people who may already face barriers to social participation in person. There was no clear difference between respondents living in metropolitan areas and those living in regional and remote areas.

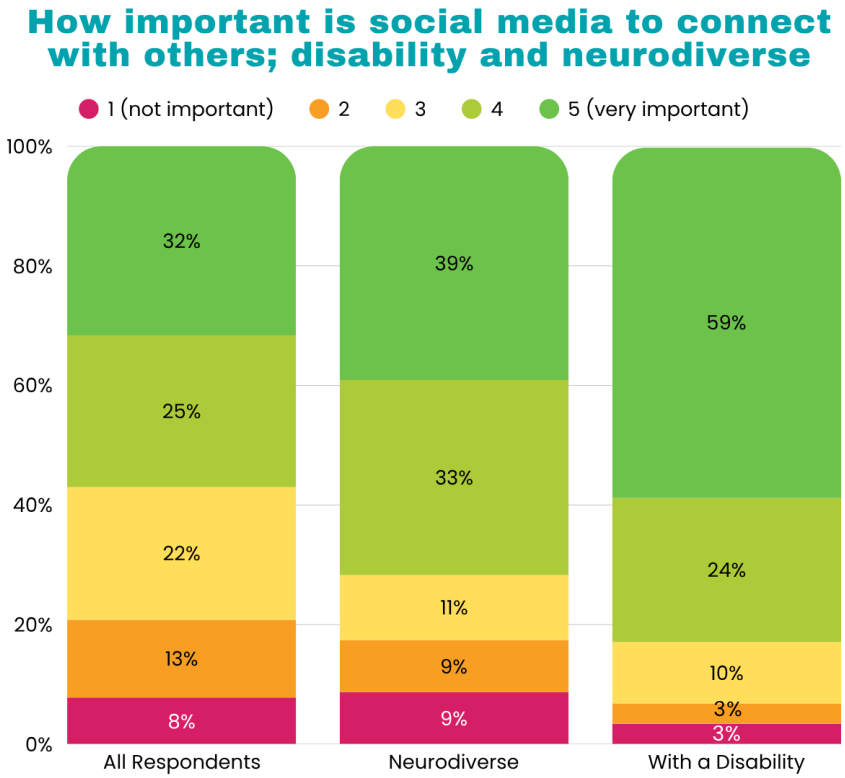

Figure 9: Importance of social media to connect with others. Comparison of young people with disability and neurodiverse young people to all respondents.

Finding other ways to connect

When asked if they had found alternative ways to connect with others, almost three-quarters (74%) of respondents in the second survey said they had found, or had partly found, other ways to connect with people.

Young people described talking to friends in person, using text messages and moving to other messaging, gaming or digital platforms. One in five respondents (20%) reported connecting online in new ways, including through games.

"Other apps that haven't been banned."

"I feel like I just spend more time playing more useless games or websites (Roblox, TikTok,Picrew)."

"I go for walks with my friends most days after school."

"I always hung out with my friends before and I still do."

These responses suggest that reducing access to age-restricted social media platforms has not necessarily led young people to disengage from digital environments. For some, it has only resulted in a move to other apps, messaging services or gaming platforms. A similar pattern was identified in eSafety's national evaluation[3].

3 eSafety Commissioner. (2026, July). Early days, early insights: Understanding experiences of social media age restrictions at the three-month follow-up.

Another key theme in the survey responses was that not every young person has found an effective alternative way to connect, with some describing that unequal access to communication devices or different levels of motivation to socialise between friends were factors impacting connection.

"I am trying to find alternatives, but my friends aren't so I just sit there and do nothing but play games all by myself and I don't even want to tell you guys cause you might even ban the internet from us, and school will need to be in textbooks."

"The only thing it has changed is that I can no longer say good morning to my friend who moved, as she does not have a phone."

Young people also called for more safe and accessible places to connect, both online and in person. These comments spanned both physical and digital environments and included subthemes about physical spaces being free, age appropriate and hospitable for young people.

"Another app that can be used to communicate with friends."

"Better opportunities for in person interactions and social events."

"Offer free places for teens to hang out."

These findings suggest that when talking about the ban, young people in the survey are linking its impacts with their access to safe and appropriate online and in-person places to connect. Further engagement with young people should explore what safe connection looks like to them and what they need from both their digital and physical environments.

Changes to daily routines

The second survey asked young people, "to what degree has the social media ban changed your daily routine?" on a scale from 1 (meaning "little change") to 5 (meaning "a lot of change.")

Overall, the results showed that the ban had minimal effect on the daily routines of most respondents. When asked how much their routine had changed:

- 69% of all respondents reported little or low levels of change; and
- 16% reported a high level of change.

However, when we look at changes to routine by previous social media use, and level of access following the ban (Figure 10), young people who lost access were:

- More likely to report substantial changes to their routine, with 32% reporting high levels of change compared to those who retained access (7%) and never had access (16%).
- Significantly less likely to report low levels of change, with only half reporting low levels of change (49%) compared with 80% for those who retained access, and 77% of those who never had access.

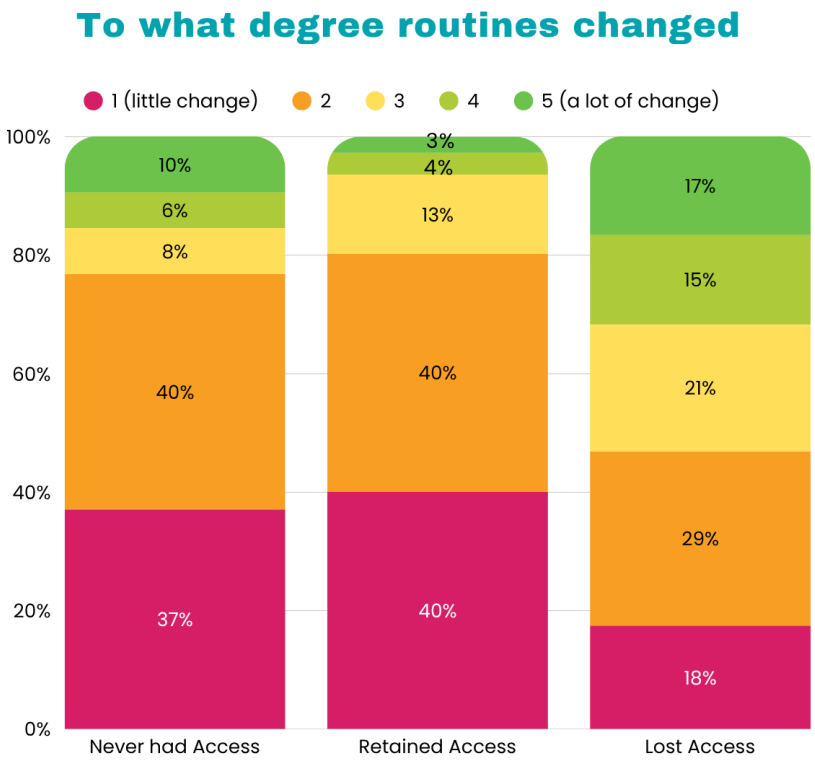

Figure 10: Extent to which young people in the second survey reported the ban changed their routine

When young people in the second survey were asked to leave comments to describe what had changed in their routines and daily lives, the most common response was that nothing had changed (Figure 11). However, young people who lost access were more likely to report communicating less with friends (24%), compared with both those who retained access (6%) and never had access (6%).

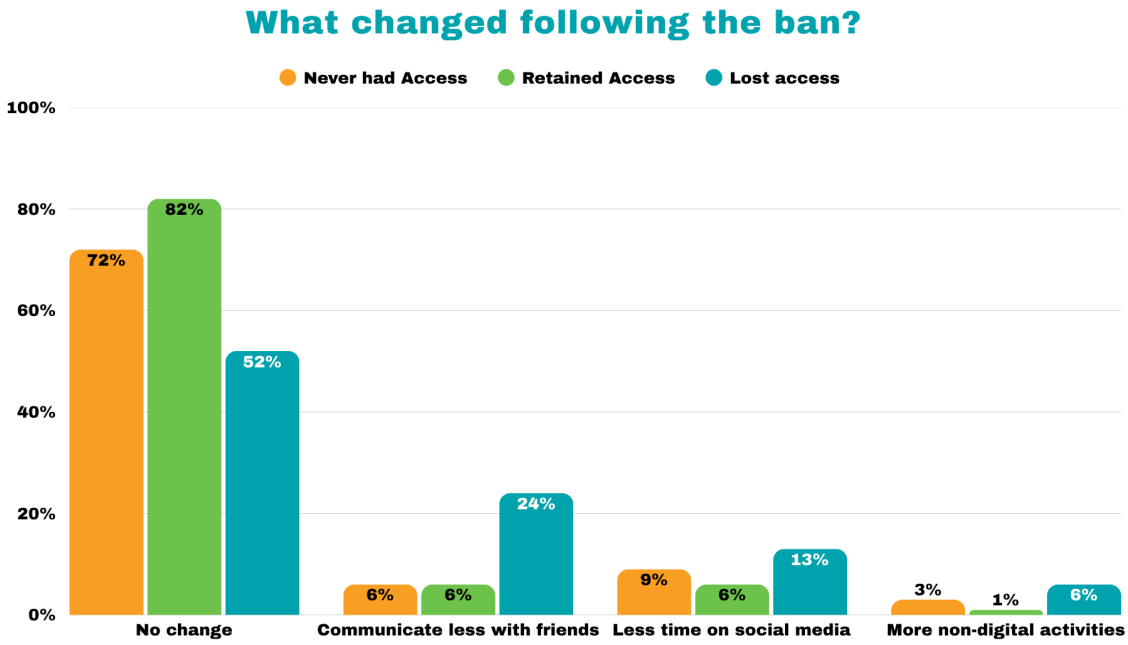

Figure 11: Comparison of what young people said had changed following the ban

Young people who lost access were the most likely group to report doing more non-digital activities, however, relatively few reported this change, representing just 6% of responses within this group (Figure 11). This is consistent with young people reporting elsewhere in the survey that they are primarily replacing social media use with other digital activities.

"I have been much more active which has made me more happier."

"There is no change I just don't really know what's going on in the world that much."

"I am still on my phone most of the time."

What do young people want to happen next?

Young people in the second survey recognised that social media could expose them to harmful content, cyberbullying, predatory behaviour and create pressures that negatively impact their mental health. However, while they agreed that online environments need to be safer, many did not see excluding young people from social media as the best or only solution.

Throughout the surveys and focus group, young people's responses showed that they have practical ideas about platform safety, age restrictions, education, parental involvement and alternative ways to connect.

While some of their ideas may already be part of work being led by governments, eSafety, schools or other organisations, one message is clear: young people want more than to be informed about these changes, they want to help shape them.

Focus group: young people focused on solutions

When students in the Whyalla focus group were asked how social media platforms could be improved, the energy in the room shifted. They offered thoughtful and practical ideas, including stronger filters to prevent bullying and predatory behavious, screen-time controls and safer alternatives to a complete ban.

Students felt that adults sometimes underestimated their ability to think critically about online content and manage risk. Comments such as "we have the skills" and "we know the dangers" reflected their desire to be recognised as active participants in online sfaety discussions.

"We don't believe in everything that people say on the internet.

Warn people about what might be on apps."

"I want adults to know I know how to be safe online.

I think instead they should ban randoms from texting/ commenting to you."

Figure 12: Perspectives from Whyalla Secondary College focus group

What do young people want support with?

In the second survey, young people were asked, "which parts of being online would you like more help or support with?" Young people could pick multiple options from a predefined list or select "other" with a comment (Figure 13).

Of those who responded, a little under half (43%) selected "none," indicating they did not want further support. Of those who indicated they wanted further support, responses included:

- messaging or chatting with friends (28%)
- watching videos (25%)
- using social media (20%)
- staying safe online (16%)
- finding reliable information (15%) and
- managing screen time or online habits (13%).

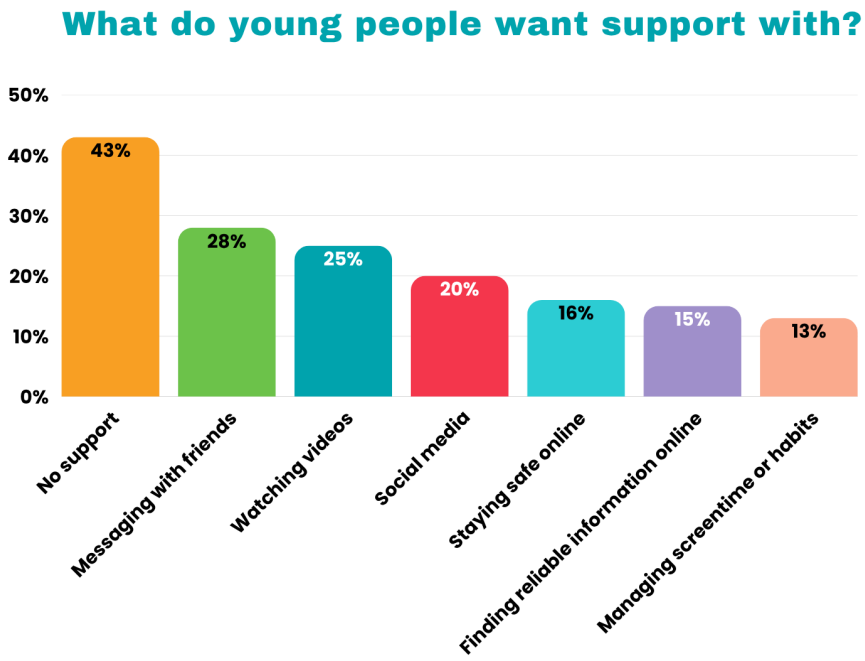

Figure 13: All respondents in second survey, what do you want support with online?

Young people who lost access were more likely to identify areas where they wanted support. Only 29% said they did not need support, compared with 54% of those who retained access and 41% of those who never had access.

Among those who lost access:

- 43% wanted support with messaging or chatting with friends;
- 36% wanted support with watching videos; and
- 32% wanted support with using social media.

Support with messaging and watching videos was also the most commonly selected options among those who retained or never had access (Table 1).

Young people who never had access to social media were more likely than those who lost or retained access to want support with staying safe online (23%) and managing screen time (18%).

Top 4 categories young people want support with online

	Never had Access	Retained Access	Lost Access
1	Messaging (26%)	Messaging (20%)	Messaging (43%)
2	Videos (26%)	Videos (18%)	Videos (36%)
3	Staying safe online (23%)	Gaming (16%)	Social Media (32%)
4	Screen time (18%)	Social Media (14%)	Gaming (25%)

Table 1: Top 4 categories where respondents indicated they would like more support.

These results suggest that young people's support needs differ according to their previous use of social media and whether they retained access, however, being able to connect digitally (messaging) was a consistent need across all three groups. The findings also demonstrate that young people who have never had access are aware of the potential safety challenges of digital environments and are wanting support to navigate online spaces.

What should future access look like?

The second survey asked young people to write a comment to the question "What would you like to see happen in the future with social media access for young people?" Young people expressed a wide range of views about future social media access, which have been categorised thematically below:

- 17% wanted the ban removed;
- 2% wanted things to remain as they were;
- 38% suggested an alternative or improvement; and
- 41% were unsure or did not comment.

Among the 166 young people who offered suggestions, the most common theme was the age limit. Almost one-third (30%) commented on this. Most wanted the minimum age lowered, usually to 13, while others proposed different age limits or features for different platforms.

"Allow under 16 to watch social media but only content for their age."

"I want to see young people allowed on social media, but with more restrictions. That, or more kid friendly social media alternatives that people over 15 aren't allowed on."

Safety was the second most common theme, raised in 26% of suggestions. Young people wanted better moderation, stronger content filters, safer messaging and age-appropriate versions of platforms.

A further 17% suggested technological changes, including better age-assurance processes, time limits and gradual access to features as young people get older.

Other suggestions included:

- giving parents greater control (7%)
- providing more education about online safety (5%), and
- creating more opportunities to connect away from social media (4%).

What needs to change?

When asked in the second survey if anything needs to change to better support young people with the ban, young people's responses were themed into six priorities:

1. Ensure the ban is effective and fair

Young people frequently raised concerns about inconsistent implementation. Some had lost access while their friends continued to use the same platforms or found ways around the restrictions.

For young people, fairness was closely connected to effectiveness. If restrictions apply differently to people of the same age, those who lose access may feel excluded without the ban necessarily achieving its intended safety outcome.

"You guys need to figure out better ways to stop every Tim, Dick and Harry from getting around the ban."

"Annoyed since most of the friends that I have are younger than me so I can't talk to them."

Young people wanted the rules to be applied consistently and clearly, with better information about how and why restrictions were being implemented.

2. Ensure we can still communicate with our friends

Many young people were concerned about losing connection rather than entertainment. They described using social media to organise plans, maintain long-distance friendships and communicate with people who did not use the same messaging services.

They wanted access to safe, age-appropriate ways to communicate online, even if other social media features remained restricted.

"Not everyone can meet up with friends or go out all the time. Having a social life is good for your mental health because you know you have people to rely on. It brings in comfort and creates a safe space for others."

3. Share ownership of social media change

Young people did not believe reforms of social media and technological developments should focus on them alone. Their suggestions identified roles and responsibilities for platforms, governments, parents, carers and young people themselves.

Many wanted parents and carers to have greater involvement through conversations, guidance, parental controls and agreed limits. Others suggested gradual access to more features as young people developed the skills to use them safely.

"Instead of bans there should be time limits."

"I'd say get the adults in kids' lives to explain online safety. Have a long conversation about it."

"I feel like it should be 13+ or the adults should be tracking their kids time."

This is consistent with eSafety's finding that some parents were unaware of their children's social media use after the age restrictions took effect. It highlights the importance of supporting families to discuss and manage online safety together.[4]

4. Make platforms safer for us

Young people shared many of the concerns expressed by adults about harmful content, addictive design, bullying, harassment and predatory behaviour.

However, many wanted these risks addressed through safer platform design and stronger regulation, rather than through age-based exclusion alone. Their suggestions included:

- stronger moderation of content and users;
- better filters for harmful or age-inappropriate content;
- restrictions on direct messages and comments;
- removal of addictive design features;
- stronger protections against adult contact; and
- safer, age-appropriate versions of existing platforms.

"I mean I think instead of a full on ban you could have just implemented things such as no DM's, no comment's and actually doing a better job to filter and censor inappropriate things."

"Get the Roblox chat to be better. Let us say no, or ok in the chat without hashtags."

"Ban discord there's way too many paedophiles on there so if you want kids to be safe THEN BAN DISCORD."

"Placing a legal duty of care on platforms to fix harmful algorithms ensures that the internet becomes inherently safer for everyone, rather than just restricted by age."

Young people also distinguished between different platforms and features. For example, some described using YouTube to learn practical skills and questioned why educational and creative content should be treated in the same way as more harmful content.

4 4 eSafety Commissioner. (2026, March). Under the new age restrictions: Early insights from Australian parents. Australian Government. https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-03/Under-the-new-age-restrictions-Early-insights-from-Australian-parents-March2026.pdf

5. Provide more education about online safety and mental health.

Young people did not dismiss online harm. Many argued that delaying access until age 16 would not, on its own, prepare them to use digital platforms safely.

They wanted practical education about online safety, reliable information, healthy online habits, harmful content, cyberbullying and clear accessible guidance on where to seek help. Some also wanted more support with mental health and managing screen time.

"Not ban social media. Instead teach them how to use it safely because if you wait till their 16 you are only delaying the inevitable. Online bullying won't change because people can just text, so teach young people how to use it."

"I feel like online support should be expanded, and education should also be expanded to keep people safe."

These responses suggest that age restrictions should be accompanied by education that helps young people build digital skills before they gain, or regain, access.

6. Provide free in-person alternatives for social interaction.

Some young people recognised that spending less time online could be beneficial. However, they also said that meeting friends in person was not always easy.

Cost, the impact of disabilities or mental health, and distance were identified as some of the issues that could limit opportunities to connect. Many young people called for free or affordable spaces where they could meet friends, participate in activities and feel welcome.

"To better support young people, there needs to be a shift toward providing safe offline social hubs and identity-affirming communities to replace the digital ones lost."

Young people's comments show that encouraging offline connection requires intentional efforts to provide opportunities and places for them to engage. They need safe, accessible and age-appropriate places where they can go and feel they belong.

Young people want to help shape the solution. Across all six themes, the strongest message was that young people want to be included in decisions about online safety.

They understand that social media presents risks, but they also understand how digital environments fit into their relationships, learning, identity and daily lives. Their perspectives can help identify unintended consequences and produce solutions that are safer, fairer and more practical.

Future changes should therefore be developed in partnership with young people, including those who have lost access, those who retained access and those who have never used social media.

Conclusion: Being heard means influencing change

Young people's experiences of the Social Media Minimum Age reforms represented in this report demonstrate that the issue of online safety is complex and that there are a number of factors that can shape how young people are feeling not just about the ban, but their wellbeing and sense of connection. These results demonstrate the importance of continuing to listen to and engage a broad range of young people, including those most affected by the changes.

Throughout this report, young people have shared thoughtful insights into both the opportunities and challenges created by the ban, as well as practical ideas for improving online safety and wellbeing. Ensuring their perspectives and ideas for managing technological change are heard and can influence the next stages of reform, including AI, is a key priority for the Commissioner for Children and Young People SA.

This report has been publicly released to ensure young people's perspectives inform ongoing discussions about the ban and future approaches to online safety. The findings will be shared with decision-makers and others involved in the implementation and evaluation of the reforms, along with participating schools and young people.

As the ban continues to evolve, the Commissioner will continue to engage with South Australian children and young people, monitor emerging evidence, and advocate for their meaningful involvement in future consultations, evaluations and decision-making processes. Young people have been clear that they want to be part of the solution. The Commissioner's role is to ensure their voices are heard and are at the forefront of future reforms.

Young people's experiences of the social media ban are all different. But their message about what should happen next is clear. They want safe places to connect online and in person, and they want to be included in the next stage of reform. Children and young people should be at the forefront of decisions that directly impact their lives.

Find out more

Commissioner for CHILDREN & YOUNG People

Scan the QR code for resources and support with the Federal Government's Social Media Ban

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