

Government Considers Two-Hour Daily Social Media Limit and 10 pm Curfew for Under-16s

July 23, 2025

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The UK government is reportedly exploring a legal limit on children's social media use, including a two-hour daily cap on individual apps and a nationwide digital curfew at 10pm.

Technology Secretary Peter Kyle has expressed concern about the “addictive nature” of apps and smartphones used by young people. He is

considering regulations that would block access to social media platforms after 10 pm and potentially during school hours, reinforcing existing age-appropriate standards under the Online Safety Act. Any child wishing to spend more than two hours on an app would need to switch to use by a parent or guardian.

Peter Kyle describes the curfew proposal as the “online equivalent of a TV watershed,” aimed at breaking unhealthy habits and promoting safer, more balanced digital use. While a complete ban for under-16s is not being pursued, app caps and time-based access restrictions are being examined to strengthen safety frameworks.

Supporters argue that this initiative adds a vital layer of protection, ensuring that bedtime is respected and reinforcing early evening routines. Campaigners, drawing on research linking late-night screen use to poor sleep, anxiety, depression, and diminished academic performance, argue a curfew should be part of a wider online safety strategy.

However, critics warn that the measures may offer only short-term relief. They point to experience in countries such as South Korea and China, where strict curfews and time limits on online activity were relatively ineffective, sometimes resulting in workarounds or minimal behavioural change. Most parents already employ parental controls or “night mode” apps, while children often find ways to bypass system-wide restrictions.

Practitioners have also raised concerns about enforceability and practicality. Accurate age verification remains technically challenging, and a broad curfew may fail to account for older teens who use social media for valid academic purposes or social support. Some argue that statutory curfews could be inflexible, undermining parental discretion and

placing undue burdens on policymakers to define appropriate access levels.

Technology Secretary Kyle maintains that any new regulations will be evidence-led and aligned with Ofcom's Children's Code. The aim is to guard against late-night digital exposure while promoting healthier development and enriching family time. He suggests a combination of legislative measures and voluntary industry initiatives, such as default curfews and built-in timers, could strike a balance that supports both child welfare and technological freedom.

As debate intensifies over how best to protect young people from online harm, the government appears set to move cautiously. Whether app-level caps and time-based access restrictions become law, or remain advisory recommendations, will depend on evidence, parental feedback, and industry readiness to adapt.