eSafetyresearch



Early days, early insights:

Understanding experiences of social media age restrictions at the three-month follow-up

July 2026

Australian Government | eSafetyCommissioner

eSafety.gov.au



Acknowledgement of Country

eSafety acknowledges all First Nations people for their continuing care of everything Country encompasses – land, waters and community. We pay our respects to First Nations people and to Elders past and present.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the participants in this evaluation who gave their time to contribute to a greater understanding of the impact of the social media age restrictions on children and their parents and carers in Australia.

eSafety gratefully acknowledges the contributions of our Lead Academic Partner, Stanford University's Social Media Lab, which collaborated in the design of the evaluation, provided advice on the analysis and interpretation of findings, and peer reviewed this report. We also thank our Academic Advisory Group, who provided independent expert guidance on the evaluation design and peer review of the report.

To learn more about our Lead Academic Partner and Academic Advisory Group, visit the **Evaluation Hub**.

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Introduction

This report explores the early experiences of children, as well as their parents, three months after the commencement of Australia's social media age restrictions. The report draws on data collected via surveys at baseline (November to December 2025) and at the three-month follow-up (March to April 2026).

Context

The **social media** age restrictions require certain social media providers to take **reasonable steps** to prevent Australians aged under 16 from having accounts on their platforms, to comply with the Social Media Minimum Age (SMMA) obligation under Part 4A of the ***Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth)**. The obligation took effect on 10 December 2025.

Services operating in Australia are responsible for assessing whether they meet the conditions for an **age-restricted social media** platform and are therefore required to comply with the obligation. The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) doesn't have a formal role in declaring which services are age-restricted social media platforms.[1] However, prior to the commencement of the age restrictions, eSafety assessed several popular platforms to aid the Australian public and online industry in preparing for the new requirements. It came to the view that a number of them met the conditions of an age-restricted social media platform under the legislation. These platforms were Facebook, Instagram, Kick, Reddit, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, Twitch, X and YouTube.[2]

As part of its preparations for the commencement of the age restrictions, eSafety also provided guidance to platforms it considered likely to be captured by the legislation. From August 2025, ahead of issuing formal regulatory guidance in September, eSafety advised age-restricted social media platforms to prioritise:

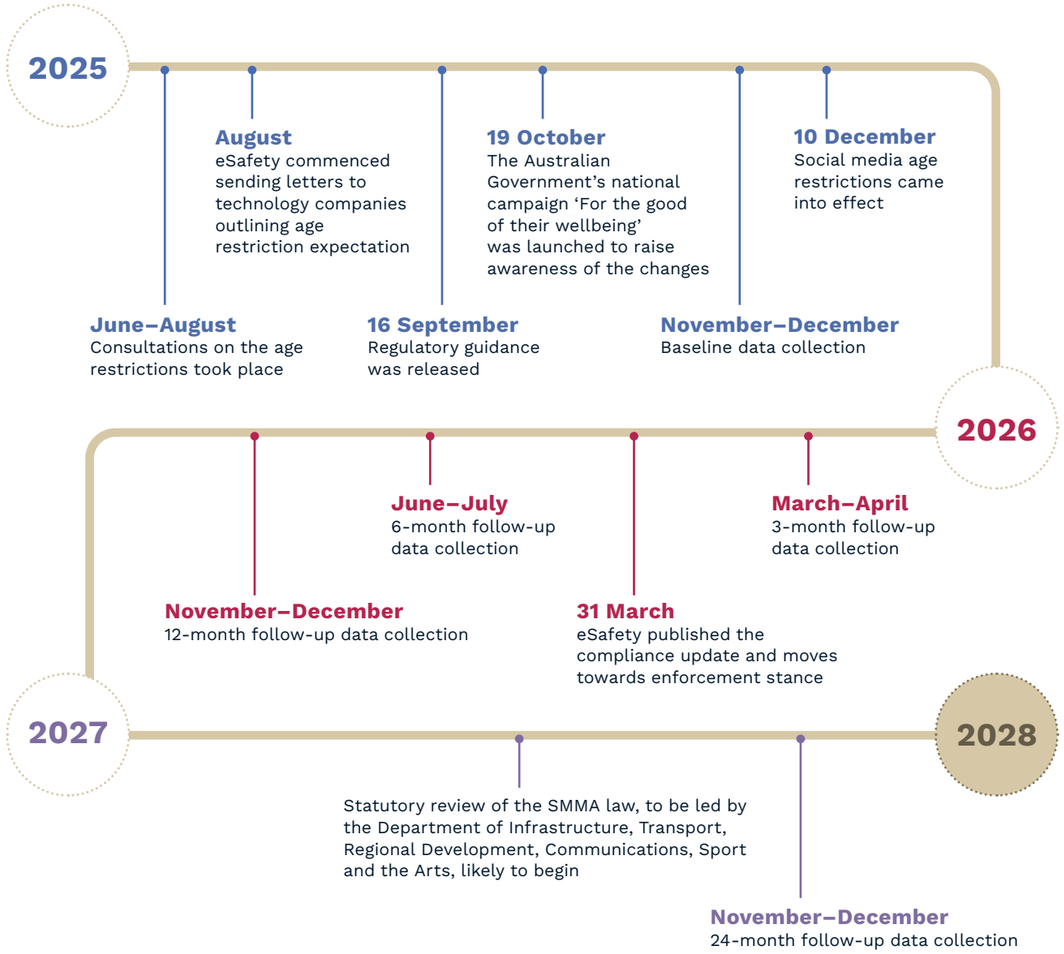
- preparing to identify and remove accounts held by Australian users aged under 16 from 10 December
- providing clear, age-appropriate information to affected users about account access, data, reinstatement processes and available support
- preventing under-16 users from bypassing restrictions by changing their age, creating new accounts or using other workarounds
- ensuring underage reporting and appeals processes are fair, accessible, transparent and capable of handling increased demand
- implementing effective **age assurance** measures, recognising that self-declared age alone isn't sufficient, and addressing potential circumvention.

[1] In the absence of any rules made by the Minister of Communications specifying that a service is either an age-restricted social media platform or not an age-restricted social media platform, any determination that a service is or is not an age-restricted social media platform is a matter for the court.
[2] This list reflects eSafety's views as at 21 November 2025. Inclusion in the list doesn't mean that each service agrees with eSafety's views. Since November 2025, additional services have notified eSafety of their view that they are age-restricted. For more information, visit: **Which social media platforms are age-restricted? | eSafety Commissioner**

It is important to note that the findings presented in this report reflect a point in time at three months after the commencement of the age restrictions. We also note that this report doesn't constitute an assessment of whether an age-restricted platform has complied with its obligations under the legislation.

eSafety continues to work with platforms to support and monitor compliance with the legislation, as signalled in its **Compliance update** published on 31 March 2026. We will continue to monitor children's account ownership through future survey waves to assess changes over time and to understand the outcomes of the implementation of the age restrictions. Key dates are provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Timeline of evaluation data collection periods and key milestones for the social media age restrictions



The evaluation

The eSafety Commissioner, in partnership with our Lead Academic Partner, Stanford University's Social Media Lab, and Academic Advisory Group, has commenced an **evaluation** of the outcomes of the social media age restrictions. The evaluation is a mixed-methods longitudinal study. It involves multiple data sources, including multi-wave surveys, focus groups and interviews with children and parents, passive smartphone tracking data, and linked and non-linked administrative datasets.

About this report

This report is the first in a series that will be published over the course of the two-year evaluation. It describes the findings from the evaluation, drawing on **baseline** data collected before the commencement of the age restrictions and data from the **three-month follow-up** survey. The report outlines any changes observed since the commencement of the age restrictions and is intended to provide a transparent assessment of early adherence[3] and outcomes, and to identify any potential unintended consequences soon after commencement. While substantial changes were not necessarily expected at this early stage, the report provides an important assessment of how the age restrictions are being experienced by children and their families, helping to identify any emerging outcomes that may warrant ongoing monitoring.

The report begins with a snapshot of children's social media use and account ownership from baseline to three months after the commencement of the age restrictions. It then explores the reasons why children may have continued to hold accounts on age-restricted platforms. Next, the report examines potential changes in children's digital practices, including their use of **messaging platforms**, online video games and **AI chatbots, assistants and companions**. It also examines whether there has been a shift in perceived social norms and attitudes among children and parents, and potential early outcomes for children and families. Finally, we examine potential age and gender differences in children's and parents' experiences **at three months**.

This report, together with future publications, will build a comprehensive picture of how the implementation of Australia's social media age restrictions is being experienced by children and their families, and whether the intended outcomes are being achieved. These reports will be one of several potential data sources that will support an independent review of the legislation, led by the Australian Government's Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts. The review will occur no later than two years after the commencement of the age restrictions.

[3] 'Adherence' refers to a participant's experience of account removal/deactivation and any attempts to bypass or circumvent those restrictions. The term is used solely for brevity, and we acknowledge that children and parents are not subject to legal obligations under the age restrictions.

Notes to readers

- The social media age restrictions require certain social media providers to take reasonable steps to prevent Australians under 16 from having accounts on their platforms. However, there are no penalties for children under 16 who have social media accounts, or for their parents or carers.
- eSafety acknowledges that families and carers are diverse. For simplicity and consistency throughout this report, the term '**parents**' is used to refer collectively to parents, guardians and primary carers of children aged 10 to 15.
- Similarly, while there are varying definitions for children and young people, for simplicity and consistency throughout the report we use the term '**children**' to refer collectively to children and young people aged 10 to 15.
- We acknowledge that children aged 10 to 15 are not a homogeneous group and that their development, behaviours and experiences can vary considerably across this age range. In this report, we begin to explore age-related differences by comparing the experiences of children aged 10 to 12 with those aged 13 to 15. We will continue to examine the role of age throughout the evaluation, including whether the outcomes of the age restrictions vary by age over time. Later survey waves will include larger samples, enabling more detailed analysis of outcomes by age.
- Throughout this report, we focus on findings that are **statistically significant**, meaning that the observed changes are unlikely to have occurred by chance in sampling under the assumption that there is no difference between two groups. However, statistical significance doesn't necessarily indicate the magnitude or practical importance of these changes. As such, we also computed effect sizes, which provide an indication of the size of observed changes. As noted in the 'Data collection and analysis' section, across analyses, effect sizes were generally small. Importantly, however, small effects shouldn't necessarily be interpreted as unimportant. Given that the policy is still in the early stages of implementation and is intended to operate at a population level, even small effects can represent meaningful change when experienced across large numbers of children and families. Moreover, these findings may reflect early signals of change, and the effects may change over time as implementation of the age restrictions continues.
- Quotes are included throughout the report to highlight key findings in participants' words. These quotes are drawn from free text questions with the surveys asking children and parents about their experiences since the age restrictions came into effect. Some of the quotes have been minimally edited for clarity. Future survey waves and qualitative evaluation activities will include a more comprehensive exploration of lived experience.

Key terms

Age assurance: Various methods used to determine a person's age. These methods offer different levels of certainty. Some determine a person's age to a very high degree of certainty (often, but not always, associated with identity verification), while others provide a range or estimation for a person's age.

Age-restricted social media: Social media platforms or apps that were assessed by eSafety in November 2025 as meeting the conditions of an age-restricted social media platform as defined under the legislation. These were Facebook, Instagram, Kick, Reddit, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, Twitch, X and YouTube.

AI chatbots, assistants and companions: Computer programs that use generative artificial intelligence.

Baseline: A comprehensive survey of over 4,000 parents and children aged 10 to 16. Data was collected from November to December 2025, prior to the social media age restrictions coming into effect.

Children: Children and young people aged 10 to 15.

Impacts: In the Theory of Change, we use 'impacts' to refer to the broader, longer-term changes to which the outcomes are expected to contribute. These changes are also influenced by other factors within the implementation context.

Elsewhere in this report, we also discuss participant-reported impacts. Here we report the changes that children and parents believe the policy has caused, and whether those changes were anticipated or have already been experienced. Participant-reported impacts may occur over the short or long term and don't necessarily correspond to the long-term impacts defined in the Theory of Change.

Messaging platforms: Platforms used to message, chat, call or video call online (for example, Messenger, WhatsApp, Facetime, Email).[4]

Outcomes: The changes that occur as a result of the policy and its outputs. They may be short-, medium- or longer-term changes and can be intended or unintended.

[4] With the exception of age-restricted social media platforms, we have categorised services in a certain way for the purposes of this report only. This doesn't mean that we have assessed them that way under the Online Safety Act or any subordinate legislation.

Outputs: The direct results of implementing a policy that create the conditions for the intended policy outcomes to occur, as outlined in the Theory of Change.

Parents: Parents, guardians and primary carers of children aged 10 to 15.

Social media: Any online platform or app where people can potentially interact with others and post or share content (such as photos or videos), as well as watch content.

Statistically significant: Changes observed between baseline and the three-month follow-up that are unlikely to have occurred by chance in sampling, under the assumption that there is no difference between two groups.

Theory of Change: Sets out how and why a policy is expected to lead to impacts. It identifies key activities, outputs, and assumptions, which may contribute to intended and potential unintended outcomes, and external factors influencing implementation.

Three-month follow-up: A shorter and modified survey fielded to a selected sub-sample of around 1,000 parents and children from the full baseline sample. This was designed to be a timely pulse check on key metrics. Data was collected from March to April 2026, approximately three months after the age restrictions came into effect. Throughout this report, we also use the term '**at three months**' to refer to the three-month follow-up survey.



Key insights

The proportion of children (aged 10 to 15) owning a social media account declined from 52.4% at baseline to 42.1% at the three-month follow-up. We saw a statistically significant reduction in the proportion of children aged 10 to 15 who held at least one age-restricted social media account at the three-month follow-up (52.4% held an account at baseline versus 42.1% at three months). Yet, the data reveals that, among children who held an account at baseline, many retained their accounts at three months.

The primary reason children continued to hold age-restricted social media accounts at three months appeared to be ineffective implementation of age assurance measures by platforms. Across age-restricted platforms, the main reason children gave for why they still held an age-restricted account was that the platform hadn't yet asked them to confirm their age (50.2%). Others reported that the platform had incorrectly estimated their age (18.2%). While there was some evidence of children taking action to bypass the age restrictions – most notably by listing their age as 16 or above on their accounts (37.1%) – other attempts to bypass the restrictions, including parental assistance to do so or using a VPN, were less common. This may reflect the relatively low barrier to continued account access, with little need for children to rely on workarounds to obtain or maintain access.

There were early signals of redistribution of online activities among children at three months. Our findings identify early signals of potential redistribution of online activities among children, including a statistically significant increase in the frequency with which they reported using messaging platforms and online video games from baseline to three months. We also saw a statistically significant increase in the proportion of children using certain social media platforms, including platforms eSafety considers to be age-restricted (Reddit [6.1% to 9.4%] and Kick [0.2% to 1.1%]) and other platforms (Pinterest [16.6% to 21.8%] and BeReal [0.2% to 2.2%]).

Parental awareness of children's social media use declined at three months. A potential unintended consequence emerged three months after commencement of the age restrictions: a statistically significant decline in parental awareness of children's social media use. The proportion of parents who were unaware their child had used social media over the prior four weeks increased from 23.3% at baseline to 33.3% at three months.

There was some evidence that perceived norms and attitudes towards social media had shifted at three months. There was a statistically significant decline in children's agreement with the statement 'most kids my age use social media', from 85.1% (quite or very true) at baseline to 74.0% at three months. We also saw a statistically significant decline in children's agreement that 'kids my age who don't have social media are missing out', from 43.3% (quite or very true) at baseline to 36.3% at three months. Similarly, there was a statistically significant decrease in parental agreement that 'it's common for children in my child's peer group to have social media accounts', from 73.4% (agreed or strongly agreed) at baseline to 60.0% at three months. Finally, there was a statistically significant decline in parental agreement that 'even though I have concerns, I feel pressure to conform to what other parents are allowing', from 22.6% (agreed or strongly agreed) at baseline to 17.3% at three months.

Parental support for and attitudes towards the age restrictions has remained consistent at three months. Around 2 in 3 parents were at least somewhat supportive of the age restrictions at baseline (68.6%) and at three months (68.1%).[5]

At three months, most children reported that there was little to no change in their engagement with offline activities, behaviours associated with problematic online use, and their wellbeing.[6] Consistent with this, most children (65.4%) also reported a belief that the age restrictions had no impact on them at the three-month follow-up, although there was some variation in their lived experiences. Among those who reported an impact, a small proportion described challenges such as finding it harder to communicate, feeling less connected, or missing social media as a source of recreation, while others reported perceived benefits including improved relationships, a greater sense of online safety, and reduced pressure to be on social media.

There has been little change in family dynamics at three months. Three months after the commencement of the age restrictions, there were no statistically significant changes in parental stress related to children's social media use or levels of family tension or conflict regarding children's digital technology use. Parents' provision of support to their children across various domains, such as helping them to find ways to handle boredom, manage their schedule or navigate friendship challenges, also remained stable across the two time points.[7]

There were some age and gender differences in children's and parents' early experiences of the age restrictions. Most notably, the decrease in parental awareness of children's use of social media was evident only among parents of girls and parents of children aged 10 to 12. Some of the early signals of redistribution of online activities were also only evident among girls, who showed a statistically significant increase in their frequency of use of messaging platforms at three months, even though they were using social media just as frequently as before the restrictions took effect. On the other hand, boys reported a statistically significant decline in the frequency with which they used social media from baseline to the three-month follow-up. Finally, relative to parents of children aged 13 to 15, we found some evidence of greater perceived normative change among parents of children aged 10 to 12, who reported a decline in pressure to conform to what other parents were allowing when it came to social media.

[5] We didn't assess children's support for the age restrictions at baseline or at the three-month follow-up. This will be assessed in future survey waves.
[6] As a range of indicators were used to assess the impact of the age restrictions on children, means and percentages are not reported here. See the main body of the report and the Appendix for statistics.
[7] As above.

What this report can and cannot tell us

This report provides a snapshot of children's and parents' early experiences three months after the commencement of the social media age restrictions, offering insight into initial patterns of access, behaviour, and emerging signals of change. Importantly, the value of this report lies not in determining the long-term effectiveness of the policy, but in providing an early indication of whether the outputs and conditions needed to achieve longer-term outcomes are beginning to emerge.

Our findings highlight that key conditions required for the policy to translate into real-world impacts have yet to be met. As such, while the report provides valuable insight into early implementation and where change may be beginning to occur, it isn't yet possible to meaningfully assess whether the policy's intended outcomes can be realised. This is because the conditions for change haven't been created and it is still early in the implementation process; many of the outcomes detailed in the Theory of Change aren't expected to occur in the short term.

In addition, the three-month follow-up survey doesn't capture the full nuance of children's lived experiences of the restrictions, nor how these may differ across subgroups. Complementary qualitative and mixed-methods research will provide deeper insight and context and further inform interpretation of these findings over time.

Methodology

This report draws on survey data from eSafety's **Social media age restrictions evaluation**. The evaluation aims to assess the **outcomes** of the social media age restrictions, including both intended and unintended outcomes, and to deliver robust, timely, evidence-based insights to guide future decision making. It will also contribute valuable new knowledge to the global conversation about the relationships between children, social media and wellbeing.

Specifically, the evaluation has five aims:

1. Assess children's adherence with the SMMA, including their knowledge, awareness and understanding of the legislation, their experience of deactivation of social media accounts, and any efforts to bypass the age restrictions.
2. Examine changes in children's digital practices, including media literacy, exposure to online harms, and potential displacement, redistribution or substitution effects across digital and offline activities.
3. Evaluate the impact of the SMMA on children's wellbeing, including psychological, social and physical wellbeing, including their experience in school.
4. Assess impacts on parents and family life, including any changes in parental mediation practices, family cohesion, and engagement in shared activities.
5. Assess impacts on community attitudes and dynamics, including any changes in social norms and attitudes towards the SMMA.

To support these aims, between November and December 2025, eSafety recruited a demographically representative sample of 4,121 children aged 10 to 16 living in Australia, as well as one of their parents. This survey represents the baseline component of the evaluation, being conducted prior to the social media age restrictions coming into effect (hereafter 'baseline' or 'baseline survey'). These children and their parents will be followed up for more than two years, using a range of complementary research methods, to assess the outcomes and impacts of the age restrictions. For further details of the evaluation design, see the evaluation **methodology report**.



This report draws on data from the baseline survey and the three-month follow-up survey, conducted between March and April 2026. The three-month follow-up included a subset of 1,021 children and their parents from the original baseline cohort. Participants were recruited from the baseline sample via a combination of probability and non-probability online panels. Quotas were used to ensure the sample was broadly representative of children aged 10 to 16 across key demographic characteristics.
Early follow-up was considered important to understand initial adherence to the age restrictions and to identify any potential unintended consequences soon after the commencement. However, to avoid overburdening participants and increasing the risk of survey fatigue and attrition, only a subset of the cohort was surveyed at this stage. This approach enabled early monitoring of outcomes, as well as early course correction where needed, while minimising survey fatigue and potential attrition between survey waves.

The sample reported on here includes 803 children aged 10 to 15 (excluding children who were aged 16 or older at three months and their parents). Of these, 336 were aged 10 to 12 and 467 were aged 13 to 15 at the three-month follow-up. Among all children aged 10 to 15, 452 were boys, 336 were girls, and 11 were trans or gender diverse. A full demographic profile of the three-month follow-up sample is provided in Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix. The three-month follow-up survey included two components: a parent survey and a child survey (both taking approximately 10 minutes to complete).

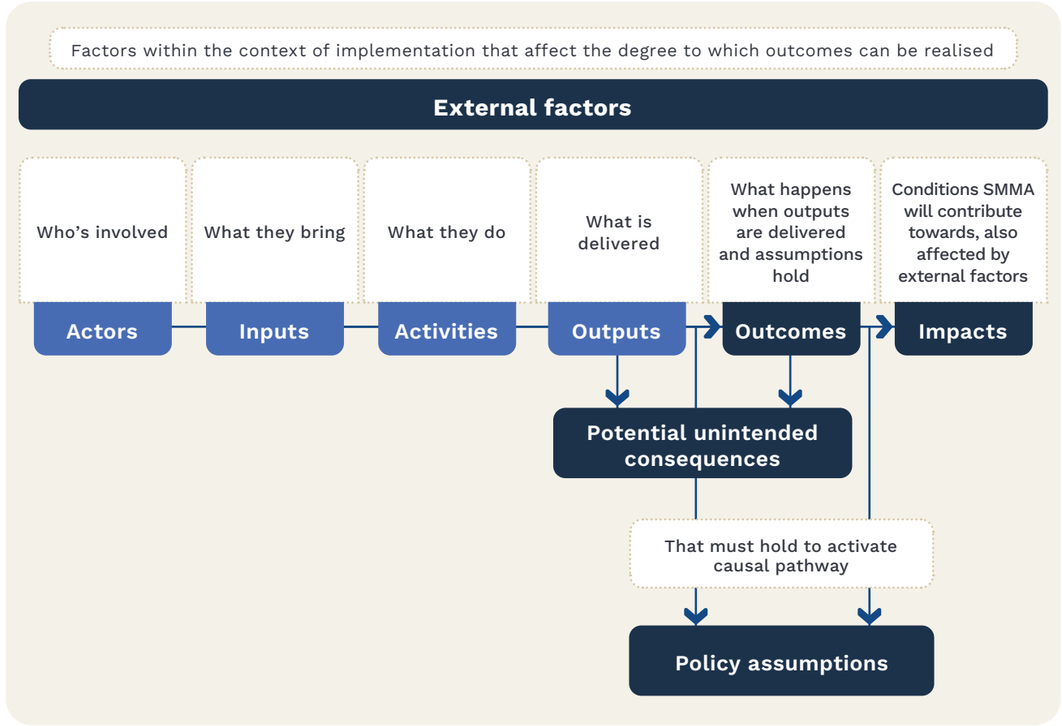
Theory of Change

The evaluation is guided by a Theory of Change developed by eSafety.

A **Theory of Change** sets out how and why a policy is expected to lead to **impacts**. It identifies key activities, outputs, and assumptions, which may contribute to intended and potential unintended outcomes, and external factors influencing implementation. In this way, it can be seen as a 'change pathway'.

Figure 2 depicts an illustrative structure of a Theory of Change to help orient readers to the framework and to understand the concepts and terminology used throughout this report. The specific Theory of Change for the SMMA legislation, including visual and narrative representations, is available on our **website**.

Figure 2: Illustrative structure of a Theory of Change framework



Note: The highlighted elements of the Theory of Change model (Actors, Inputs, Activities and Outputs) contribute directly to the implementation of the age restrictions.

The Theory of Change for the social media age restrictions draws on empirical research, stakeholder input and policy context to outline the intended pathways to improved outcomes for children and families. It recognises that the social media age restrictions are part of a complex, non-linear system in which legislative action, education, compliance and broader systemic efforts interact to improve children's online safety, mental health and wellbeing. It also recognises that outcomes depend on a range of critical assumptions – such as platform compliance, support from parents, and shifting social norms. Consistent with the complexity of the system in which the age restrictions are being implemented, the Theory of Change also acknowledges that unintended consequences may emerge regardless of whether these assumptions hold, as individuals, platforms and broader social systems may respond to the age restrictions in unexpected ways.

Importantly, the Theory of Change guides the evaluation design – for example, by informing what outcomes are measured in the evaluation, and when they might be expected to occur. For a detailed description of the Theory of Change and how it informs the evaluation, see the methodology report.

Exploring pathways of change at three months

It should be noted that the Theory of Change isn't explored in its entirety at the three-month follow-up. Throughout this report, key constructs from the Theory of Change that are examined are highlighted at the beginning of each section.

As guided by the Theory of Change, the three-month follow-up focused on assessing outputs of the policy (or what is delivered as a direct result of the policy being implemented) at an early stage of implementation, testing key assumptions (or the conditions that need to hold for the change pathway between outputs and outcomes to be activated), and identifying any early indications or signals of outcomes associated with the commencement of the age restrictions.

In this report, we focus on whether a key intended output[8] was delivered in practice. Specifically:

- Were existing accounts held by under-16s on age-restricted platforms removed, and was the creation of new accounts on such platforms prevented?

We also assessed several critical assumptions that underpin the change pathway. Specifically:

- Platforms are implementing age assurance measures consistently and effectively.
- Attitudes among parents and children are shifting to support 'adherence' to the age restrictions.
- Reduced access to age-restricted social media redirects children's time and attention towards digital practices and offline activities that support their wellbeing and development.

[8] Two outputs are not covered in this report. First, awareness of the age restrictions wasn't remeasured at the three-month follow-up due to very high baseline awareness among parents (96.3%) and young people (92.1%). Second, assessment of whether age-restricted platforms are taking reasonable steps to prevent under-16s from creating and holding accounts is undertaken by eSafety's Industry Compliance and Enforcement function and is therefore outside the scope of this report.

These assumptions are central to whether the intended outcomes can be realised over time.

The three-month follow-up also examined short-term outcomes of the age restrictions, including that children:

- spend less time on restricted platforms
- are exposed to fewer online harms and risks[9]
- engage in fewer behaviours that are harmful to themselves or others
- increase their engagement with behaviours that foster health and development.

In line with the Theory of Change, the survey included a broader set of key outcomes measures, such as changes in perceived social norms and normative attitudes regarding children's use of social media, family conflict and cohesion, and mental health and wellbeing, to enable consistent tracking across survey waves. While these are considered medium- to longer-term outcomes and changes wouldn't be expected at this stage, they were included for continuity to enable time-series analyses and an assessment of potential unintended consequences, either anticipated or unforeseen, allowing timely adjustments to policy or implementation if early signals were detected.

Data collection and analysis

The Social Research Centre hosted the survey, collected and cleaned the data, and provided eSafety with raw data. eSafety further checked, cleaned and analysed the data using SPSS Statistics and Q Research Software.

To enable comparisons between the baseline and three-month follow-up survey, the data referred to in this report includes only those respondents who participated in both surveys. As the legislation focuses on children under 16, we limit our analyses to children aged 10 to 15 and their parents, excluding those aged 16 or older at three months.

Given the smaller sample size for the three-month follow-up survey, this report focuses on differences at the cohort level, as well as age and gender differences.[10] Future reports based on larger samples will explore differences among other subgroups of children[11] to identify potential differential effects of the age restrictions among certain children, including comparisons between those who continue to hold accounts on age-restricted social media and those who no longer hold accounts.

Differences between the baseline and the three-month follow-up survey were tested for statistical significance using Q Research Software and were reported on only when the difference was statistically significant.[12] Given the number of statistical comparisons conducted, a conservative significance threshold of $p < .01$ was applied across all analyses.

[9] In the three-month follow-up, we focused solely on control-related harms (for example, problematic online use). A more fulsome exploration of online harms and risks will be completed at the six-month follow-up.
[10] We note that the sample size for trans and gender-diverse children at the three-month follow-up is small ($n = 15$), which affects how their data can be used in quantitative analyses. Restricting analyses to binary gender categories means that, in some analyses, trans and gender-diverse children's experiences are lacking. We anticipate that the sample size of trans and gender-diverse children will be larger in future survey waves, allowing us to explore their experiences in future reports.
[11] Subject to sufficient sample sizes, this may include analyses of First Nations children, children with disability, LGBTIQ+ children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children living in regional and remote areas.
[12] We computed effect sizes where significant differences were observed between average scores at baseline and three-month follow-up. Across analyses, effect sizes were generally small, with Cohen's D ranging from .09 to .27.

In cases where only a subset of respondents were asked a question, the results may have been ‘re-based’ on all participants so as to provide an accurate incidence of behaviours or experiences. ‘Re-based’ means the results have been recalculated using the full sample of participants as the denominator, rather than only those who were asked the question. This allows the reported percentages to reflect the incidence of a behaviour or experience across all participants in the study. Each table and figure included in the report includes a description of the sample used for analysis purposes.

Certain questions have been ‘reverse-coded’ to facilitate understanding and interpretation. For example, where respondents answered a question on a scale that ranged from ‘1 – Strongly agree’ to ‘5 – Strongly disagree’, we have reverse-coded responses to ensure that higher scores reflect higher agreement. Each table and figure included in the report includes a legend with response scales used for analysis purposes.

Percentages in tables and figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding or to question formats that allowed for multiple responses. Tables and figures may not include the response options ‘prefer not to answer’ or ‘don’t know’ – for example, if the number of respondents was small.

The survey was primarily designed to be analysed quantitatively; however, some free text questions allowed more detailed comments. These free text responses were analysed and coded thematically to identify and interpret key patterns and insights from this data. Selected participant quotes are included throughout the report to exemplify key themes.

Where free text responses are referenced, indicative language is used to describe the proportion of participants expressing a particular view. Specifically, ‘a small proportion’ refers to 1% to 9% of participants, ‘some’ to 10% to 39%, ‘around half’ to 40% to 59%, ‘many’ to 60% to 79%, and ‘most’ to 80% to 100%.

Positionality statement

We acknowledge the potential for real or perceived bias in conducting and reporting on the evaluation. To support confidence in the findings, we have taken deliberate steps to ensure the process is transparent and rigorous and includes independent oversight. These steps are described in detail in the methodology report. They include the establishment of a Lead Academic Partner and an Academic Advisory Group, who provide independent, evidence-based guidance throughout and have also peer-reviewed this report.

For details about members of the eSafety Research and Evaluation Team, Lead Academic Partner and Academic Advisory Group, see the **eSafety website**.

Do children retain accounts on age-restricted social media platforms three months after the commencement of the age restrictions?

In this section, we report whether children’s account ownership and use of age-restricted social media platforms have changed, relative to baseline, three months after the age restrictions came into effect. We examine whether children continue to hold accounts on age-restricted platforms, and the extent to which accounts have been shut down or deactivated. While the age restrictions are focused on account ownership rather than usage, we also report which social media platforms, both age-restricted and other social media platforms, children used at baseline and three months.

Examining the change pathway

What this section reports

This section examines early progress along the change pathway, focusing on one of the direct results of the implementation of the policy (outputs) expected under the legislation, and whether the conditions needed to support these changes appear to be in place (assumptions).

Outputs

- Existing accounts held by under-16s on age-restricted platforms are removed, and the creation of new accounts on such platforms is prevented.

Assumptions

- Platforms are implementing age assurance measures consistently and effectively.

There was a decrease in the number of children holding accounts on age-restricted social media platforms three months after the commencement of the age restrictions

At baseline, over half of children (52.4%) held at least one account on an age-restricted social media platform. At three months, there was a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of children who held at least one account on an age-restricted platform (42.1%).[13] Despite this reduction, many children who held accounts at baseline had retained them at three months (see Table 1).

When examined at the individual platform level, at three months there was a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of children who held accounts on Snapchat (28.6% versus 23.3%), TikTok (28.2% versus 21.7%) and YouTube (33.2% versus 23.3%).

YouTube (23.3%), Snapchat (23.3%) and TikTok (21.7%) remained the platforms where children were most likely to hold an account at three months. In addition, 19.3% of children held an account on Instagram and 11.2% on Facebook at three months.

Table 1: Social media account ownership among children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803) (%)

Age-restricted social media platform	Used in past 12 months and had own account - baseline	Used in past 4 weeks and had own account - baseline	Used in past 4 weeks and had own account – 3-month follow-up
YouTube	34.5	33.2	23.3
Snapchat	29.9	28.6	23.3
TikTok	29.0	28.2	21.7
Instagram	23.5	21.6	19.3
Facebook	14.7	12.4	11.2
Twitch	6.9	3.8	3.5
Reddit	4.2	3.6	3.6
X (Twitter)	3.8	2.6	1.9
Threads	2.8	1.5	2.0
Kick	0.4	0.2	0.6
Account on any age-restricted social media platform	**53.7**	**52.4**	**42.1**

Q: Do you currently have your own profile or own account on the following social media platforms or apps that you use?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences between baseline and 3-month follow-up are statistically significant at $p < .01$ level. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.

[13] At baseline, children who had used a platform since the start of the year were asked if they held their own account on that platform. At the three-month follow-up, only those children who had used a platform in the four weeks prior to the survey were asked if they held an account on that platform. To ensure an equivalent comparison between baseline and the three-month follow-up, here we focus on those children who had used a platform in the four weeks prior to the survey and held their own account on that platform.

Most children continued to use age-restricted social media platforms at three months

Despite the observed reduction in account ownership on age-restricted platforms, we saw only a relatively modest decrease in the use of age-restricted social media platforms from baseline to three months. At baseline, most children (85.9%) reported having used at least one age-restricted platform (see Table 2 for reported usage by platform).[14] At three months, there was a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of children who reported having used an age-restricted social media platform in the four weeks prior to the survey, although a majority continued to do so (81.5%).

We note that several social media platforms can be accessed without logging into an account. Children may also use social media through accounts belonging to others, such as parents, siblings or friends. Given this, and the discrepancy between the proportion of children who reported holding their own social media account and the proportion who reported using social media platforms, the data reported here likely reflects usage both with and without children being logged into their own account.

When examined at the individual platform level, a statistically significant reduction was observed only for Snapchat, where reported use decreased from 31.5% at baseline to 27.9% at three months. On the other hand, we found a statistically significant increase in the proportion of children who had used Reddit (6.1% versus 9.4%) or Kick (0.2% versus 1.1%), from baseline to three months.

We also found a statistically significant increase in the use of certain platforms not currently covered by the social media age restrictions. For example, at three months:

- 21.8% of children reported using Pinterest in the four weeks prior to the survey (versus 16.6% at baseline)
- 2.2% reported using BeReal (versus 0.2% at baseline).

[14] As shown in Table 2, in the baseline survey, children were asked if they had used each platform since the start of the year (that is, in the 12 months prior to the survey) as well as in the four weeks prior to the survey. In the three-month follow-up survey, children were only asked if they had used each platform in the four weeks prior to the survey. To ensure an equivalent comparison between baseline and the three-month follow-up, here we focus on differences between past four-week use.

Table 2: Use of social media platforms among children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803) (%)

Social media platform	Used in past 12 months - baseline	Used in past 4 weeks - baseline	Used in past 4 weeks - 3-month follow-up
Age-restricted platforms[15]			
YouTube	85.3	78.0	73.6
TikTok	41.5	35.8	34.6
Snapchat	35.0	31.5	27.9
Instagram	30.8	26.4	25.5
Facebook	22.6	17.3	17.2
Reddit	10.3	6.1	9.4
Twitch	10.4	5.0	5.0
X (Twitter)	5.8	3.3	3.4
Threads	4.4	2.1	4.1
Kick	1.1	0.2	1.1
Used any age-restricted social media platform	**91.7**	**85.9**	**81.5**
Other social media platforms			
YouTube Kids*	38.9	28.3	29.1
Pinterest	24.9	16.6	21.8
BeReal	1.7	0.2	2.2
Coverstar	1.9	0.4	1.2
Mastodon	0.1	0.0	0.7
4Chan	0.6	0.0	0.2
Lemon8**	-	-	1.9
Rednote**	-	-	0.8
BlueSky**	-	-	0.2
Wizz**	-	-	0.3
Bigo Live**	-	-	0.1
Yubo**	-	-	0.0
Used any social media platform	**92.4**	**86.2**	**83.6**

Q (past 12 months): Have you used any of these social media platforms or apps since the start of this year?
Q (past 4 weeks): In the past 4 weeks, have you used these social media platforms or apps?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences between baseline and 3-month follow-up are statistically significant at $p < .01$ level. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.
***** Not included in 'Used any social media platform'.
****** Platform not included at baseline.

[15] This refers only to those platforms that have been assessed by eSafety and are considered to meet the conditions of an age-restricted platform under the legislation. It doesn't include those platforms that have self-assessed and notified eSafety of their view that they are age-restricted social media platforms.

Account ownership and usage among children evolved in various ways from baseline to three months

We explored the various ways in which children's account ownership may have changed or evolved from baseline to three months after the commencement of the social media age restrictions.

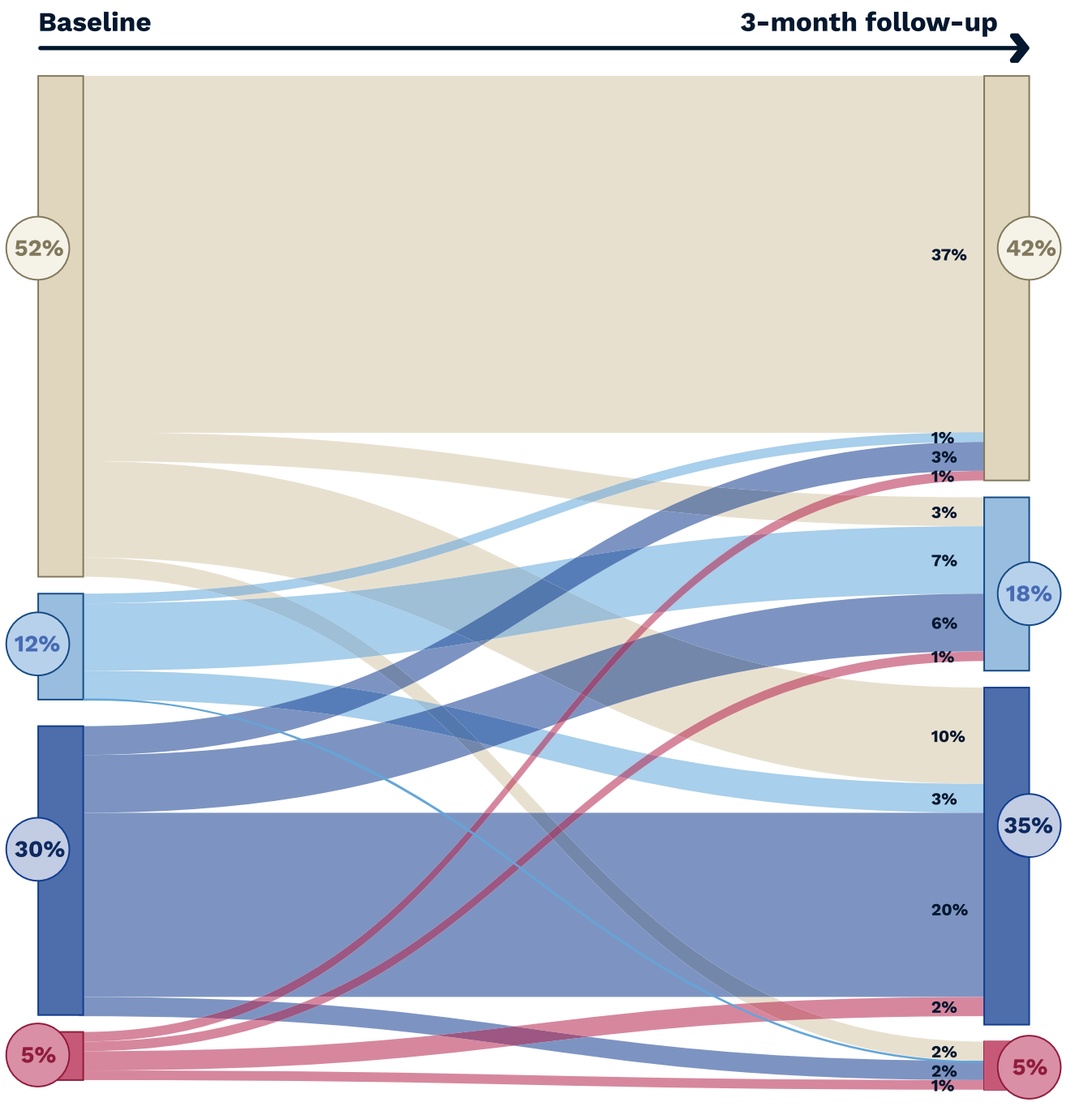
As shown in Figure 3, of the 52.4% of children who held an account on an age-restricted social media platform at baseline, many retained an account at three months. More specifically, 37% of all children surveyed reported holding their own account on an age-restricted platform at both baseline and three months. We also found that a small proportion of children (5%) held an account at three months that they didn't hold at baseline.

On the other hand, around 1 in 8 children (13%) held an account on an age-restricted platform at baseline but no longer held any accounts at three months. Some of these children had used an age-restricted platform without having their own account (10%), while others had simply not used any age-restricted social media in the four weeks prior to the three-month follow-up survey (3%).

In addition, 1 in 5 children (20%) had used an age-restricted social media platform in the past four weeks without an account at both time points, while 7% hadn't used any age-restricted social media in the four weeks prior to the survey at both baseline and three months.

Overall, Figure 3 points to the complexity of children's social media behaviours three months after the commencement of the age restrictions, with movement between account ownership, using platforms without an account, and not using platforms at all.

Figure 3: Evolution of account ownership on age-restricted social media platforms among children aged 10 to 15, from baseline to 3-month follow-up (*n* = 803)



Q: Do you currently have your own profile or own account on the following social media platforms or apps that you use?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Sum of percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding. 'Unknown/prefer not to say' includes children who weren't sure if they held their own account or didn't want to say. If a child had used at least 1 age-restricted platform in the 4 weeks prior to the survey and didn't hold their own account on that platform but said they weren't sure or didn't want to say if they had used another age-restricted platform, they are coded as 'Unknown/prefer not to say'.

One in 3 children who held an account on an age-restricted platform at baseline said they had an account shut down or deactivated because of the age restrictions

At three months, we asked children if they had had a social media account shut down or deactivated because of the social media age restrictions.

As shown in Table 3, among children who held an age-restricted social media account and had used it in the four weeks prior to the baseline survey, 1 in 3 (34.7%) said they had an account shut down or deactivated within the first three months after the commencement of the age restrictions.

Table 3: Social media account deactivations at 3 months among children aged 10 to 15 who held an age-restricted account at baseline (*n* = 451)

Social media account shut down or deactivated	Children who held an age-restricted account and had used it in the past 4 weeks at baseline (%)
Yes	34.7
No	56.2
I don't know	4.7
I don't want to say	**2.3**

Q: Did you have a social media account shut down or deactivated because of the new social media law that started on 10 December 2025?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 who held an age-restricted account at baseline (*n* = 451).

What do these findings mean?

Our findings suggest that three months after the commencement of the age restrictions, reductions in children's use of age-restricted platforms and account ownership have been limited in scale. While a statistically significant decline in account ownership was observed, many children retained accounts on age-restricted platforms, indicating that the foundational changes that platforms need to make for the policy to translate into real-world impacts haven't yet been delivered. In particular, there was limited evidence that platforms are effectively preventing children from creating and maintaining accounts or effectively removing underage users.

Our findings highlight that continued access to social media has multiple pathways, with children shifting between holding their own accounts, using age-restricted platforms without their own account, or not using age-restricted platforms at all. While reports of account shutdown or deactivation broadly align with the observed reduction in account ownership, this doesn't translate directly to children no longer holding any age-restricted accounts. Many children continued to hold or to regain access, which may reflect their ability to maintain multiple accounts within or across platforms, to create new accounts after removal, or to voluntarily deactivate their own accounts. This finding highlights limitations in interpreting account removal as a sole measure of reduced access.

There were also some early signals of potential redistribution to other platforms, with increased use of platforms such as Pinterest and BeReal observed alongside increased use of some age-restricted platforms, including Reddit and Kick. This suggests that, rather than disengaging entirely, some children may be adapting or varying how they use social media. However, it remains unclear whether these patterns reflect genuine displacement in response to the policy or typical fluctuations in children's platform use over time.

Taken together, these findings suggest that, while some early shifts are evident, many children continue to hold accounts on age-restricted platforms. In the absence of robust and effective age assurance measures implemented by platforms, reductions in account ownership are likely to remain modest. As a result, the change pathway underpinning the policy hasn't yet been fully activated, and broader impacts are unlikely to emerge until platform-level implementation becomes more effective.

In our participants' words

Some of my friends have lost accounts, but no change to me.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

I am unable to use my accounts anymore due to the ban. Now I can only view as a guest, which is limited.
(Child aged 10 to 12)

Only one platform – Instagram – has prevented him from access. He still has access to other platforms. I don't think the laws have particularly affected his habits.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

How have children continued to hold accounts on age-restricted social media platforms?

In this section, we report the reasons why children may have continued to hold accounts on age-restricted platforms three months after the commencement of the social media age restrictions.

Examining the change pathway

What this section reports

Here we continue to assess whether the following output (or direct result of implementation) is being delivered and whether a key assumption underpinning the policy is holding. Specifically:

Outputs

- Existing accounts held by under-16s on age-restricted platforms are removed, and the creation of new accounts on such platforms is prevented.

Assumptions

- Platforms are implementing age assurance measures consistently and effectively.

Platform inaction was the main reason why children still held accounts on age-restricted platforms at the three-month follow-up

Children who reported holding an account on any age-restricted social media platform at three months were asked to indicate the reason. (See Table 4 for findings aggregated across platforms.)

Among children who reported that they still held at least one account, the most common reason was that the platform(s) hadn't yet asked them to confirm their age (50.2%). This was followed by having their age listed on their account(s) as 16 or above (37.1%). Just under 1 in 5 (18.2%) said that the platform's age check got their age wrong.

Although not as common, just over 1 in 10 said they still held their account because they were able to get around the platform's age restrictions by using another method – for example, using make-up tricks or someone else's ID (12%) – or because their parent helped them to get around the platform age restrictions (10.9%).

Less common reasons given included:

- they had found a way to open a new account after deactivation (8.5%)
- they had used a VPN (7.4%)
- the platform didn't deactivate their account after it was reported (4.1%)
- they had successfully appealed a platform-led deactivation (2.5%).

Table 4: Aggregate reasons for children aged 10 to 15 still holding an account across age-restricted social media platforms at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 357)

Reasons for still holding an account	% selected
Platform has not yet asked me to verify my age	50.2
The age listed on my account is 16 or above	37.1
Platform's age verification got my age wrong	18.2
I was able to get around age restriction by using another method – for example, by using make-up tricks or an ID that is not mine	12.0
My parent(s) helped me to get around platform's age restriction	10.9
Platform deactivated my account but I found a way to open a new account	8.5
I was able to get around platform's age restriction by using a VPN	7.4
My parent(s) reported my account to platform but platform didn't deactivate my account	4.1
Platform deactivated my account but I appealed the deactivation and platform reactivated my account	2.5

Q: You said that you still have your own account on [PLATFORM]. Which of the options below describes why/what happened?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 who reported they held at least 1 age-restricted social media account at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 357).

Reasons why children continued to hold accounts at three months were also explored at the platform level for the five platforms where accounts were most commonly held: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube.[16] Across these five platforms, two reasons were most commonly reported for account retention.

The first reason was platform inaction, where children reported not having been prompted by the platform to confirm their age – specifically: YouTube (48.7%), Instagram (37.7%), TikTok (36.0%) and Snapchat (32.3%). On Facebook, this was the second most common reason, reported by 28.2% of children.

The second reason was children listing their age as 16 or above on their account. This pattern was consistent across TikTok (31.0%), Instagram (30.8%), Snapchat (29.9%) and YouTube (29.9%). Facebook again differed slightly, with reporting an age of 16 or above representing the most common reason for account retention (34.5%).

For further breakdown of reasons for account retention at the platform level, refer to Tables A3 to A7 in the Appendix.

[16] Platform-level findings are reported only for these platforms, as too few children surveyed reported holding accounts on other platforms to support reliable analysis (that is, Kick (*n* = 6), Reddit (*n* = 32), Threads (*n* = 17), Twitch (*n* = 33) and X (*n* = 17)).

What do these findings mean?

These findings indicate that ineffective platform implementation of age assurance measures was the main reason for continued age-restricted account ownership three months after the commencement of the age restrictions. The fact that children most commonly retained accounts because the platforms hadn't prompted them to confirm their age points to a gap between the intent of the legislation and its actual implementation by platforms. Specifically, the assumption that age assurance measures are being implemented effectively doesn't appear to hold true three months after the commencement of the legislation. In the absence of effective age assurance processes, including effective detection, removal and prevention of underage users, many children have simply maintained their accounts.

While there was some evidence of children bypassing the age restrictions – most notably by listing their age as 16 or above on their accounts – other attempts, such as using a VPN, were less common. Similarly, there was relatively limited evidence of parental involvement in supporting their children to bypass the age restrictions. This likely reflects the rather low barrier to continued account access, with little need for children to rely on workarounds to obtain or maintain access.

Taken together, these insights suggest that early outcomes are being shaped by ineffective implementation of age assurance measures by platforms. A foundational output that platforms need to deliver for the policy to translate into real-world impacts – namely, the removal of existing accounts held by under-16s, and the prevention of new account creation on age-restricted platforms – wasn't evidenced in full three months after the commencement of the age restrictions. We will continue to assess children's account ownership in future survey waves.

In our participants' words

Personally, I have not ran into anything that has been restricting me or threatening me because of my age to remove my account or automatically removing my account … Even without using a VPN I still have full complete access to my YouTube account and other accounts I have …
(Child aged 13 to 15)

I don't feel different because I still sometimes use social because my account is 16 or above …
(Child aged 10 to 12)

It made no change. Her accounts stayed active and the same despite her real date of birth being used at sign-up.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

Nothing has changed because both my kids (15 and 13) were able to get around it with 'face age recognition'. The system estimated them to be over 16.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

Have children's digital practices changed three months after the commencement of the age restrictions?

In this section, we report whether aspects of children's digital practices, including their use of messaging platforms, online video games and AI chatbots, assistants and companions, have changed from baseline to three months after the social media age restrictions came into effect. We also investigate how frequently children use social media platforms, as well as parental awareness of their children's use of social media.

Examining the change pathway

What this section reports

In this section, we again examine evidence as to whether a key output is being delivered. We also explore any early indications or signals of outcomes, intended or unintended, associated with the commencement of the age restrictions. This includes:

Outputs

- Existing accounts held by under-16s on age-restricted platforms are removed, and the creation of new accounts on such platforms is prevented.

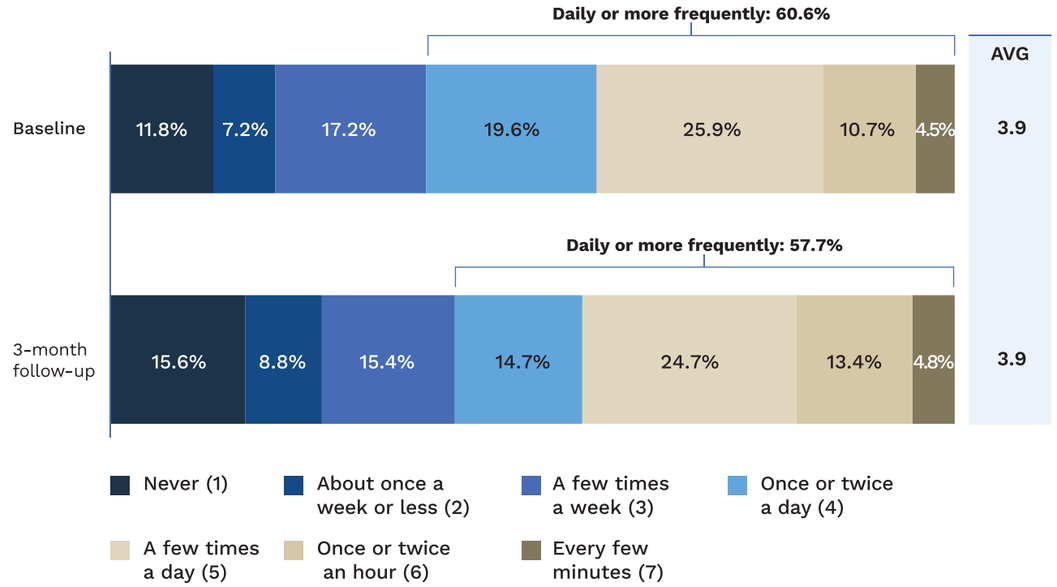
Outcomes

- Children spend less time on restricted platforms.

Children felt like they were using social media just as frequently three months after the age restrictions took effect

The frequency with which children felt they used social media[17] didn't vary from baseline to the three-month follow-up. At both timepoints, around 3 in 5 children reported using social media at least daily, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Perceived frequency of use of social media platforms among children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: When you're not at school or at work, how often do you use social media?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'I don't know' and 'I don't want to say'.

At three months, children reported spending an average of two hours and nine minutes on social media on a school day and just under four hours a day on the weekend (see Table 5). It should be noted that we didn't collect this information at baseline.

Table 5: Self-reported time spent using social media among children aged 10 to 15 at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 515 to 584)

	School day	Weekend
Average	2 hours 9 minutes	3 hours 58 minutes
Median	2 hours	3 hours 30 minutes

Q: About how much time do you usually spend using social media on a school day and on a weekend day?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 who had used social media in the 4 weeks prior to the survey and did so on school days (*n* = 515) or on a weekend day (*n* = 584). Excludes children who selected 'I don't want to say'.

[17] Findings relating to social media in this section aren't limited to age-restricted platforms and may apply to both age-restricted and other social media platforms.

Parental awareness of their children's social media use has decreased at three months

We also asked parents if, to their knowledge, their child had used any social media in the four weeks prior to the survey. At baseline, most parents of children who reported having used social media in the four weeks prior to the survey were aware that their child had done so (67.6%).

However, at three months, we found a statistically significant increase in the proportion of parents who were unaware that their child had used social media. As shown in Table 6, at three months, 1 in 3 parents of children who reported having used social media in the four weeks prior to the survey (33.3%) were not aware that their child had done so, compared with just under 1 in 4 at baseline (23.3%).

Table 6: Parental awareness of their 10- to 15-year-old child's social media use in the 4 weeks prior to the baseline (*n* = 703) and 3-month follow-up survey (*n* = 680) (%)

	Baseline	3-month follow-up
Child used social media in the 4 weeks prior to the survey, parent not aware	23.3	33.3
Child used social media in the 4 weeks prior to the survey, parent aware	67.6	52.2
Child used social media in the 4 weeks prior to the survey, parent thought so*	9.1	14.5

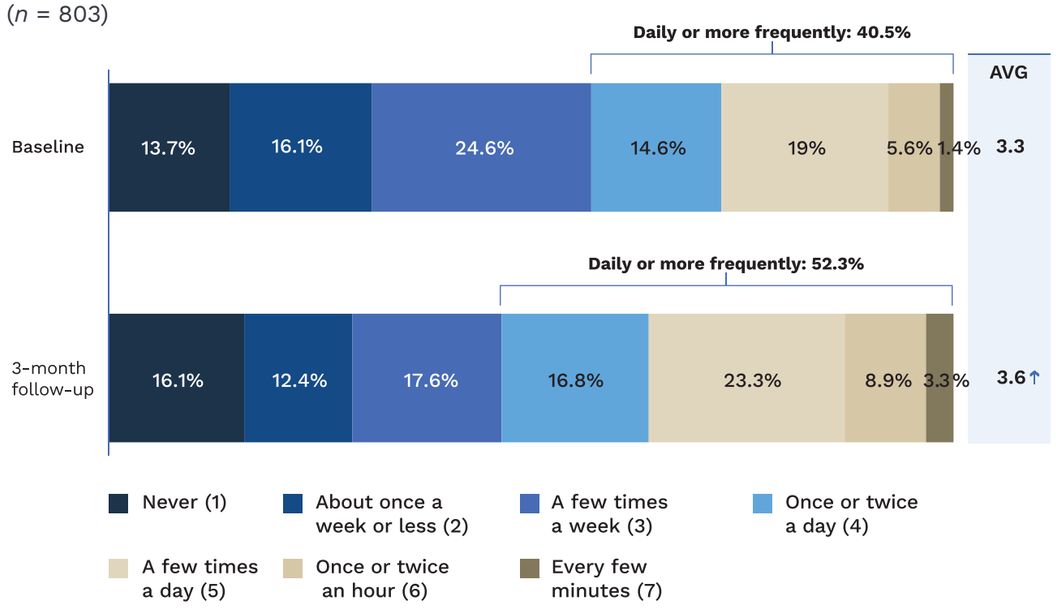
Q: 'Social media' is any online platform or app where people can potentially interact with other people and post or share content (like photos or videos), as well as watch content. Social media includes platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Reddit, X (Twitter), Threads and Kick. Has your child used social media in the past 4 weeks?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 who reported having used social media in the 4 weeks prior to the survey (baseline: *n* = 703; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 680).
Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences between baseline and 3-month follow-up are statistically significant at $p < .01$ level. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.
*Parents who selected 'No, definitely not' or 'Not that I'm aware of' in response to the survey question have been categorised as 'parent not aware'; parents who selected 'Yes, definitely' have been categorised as 'parent aware'; parents who selected 'I think so' have been categorised as 'parent thought so'.

Children used messaging platforms and online video games more frequently at three months

Although the frequency with which children used social media remained unchanged at three months, we found that there was a statistically significant increase in the frequency with which they used other digital platforms. For example, at three months:

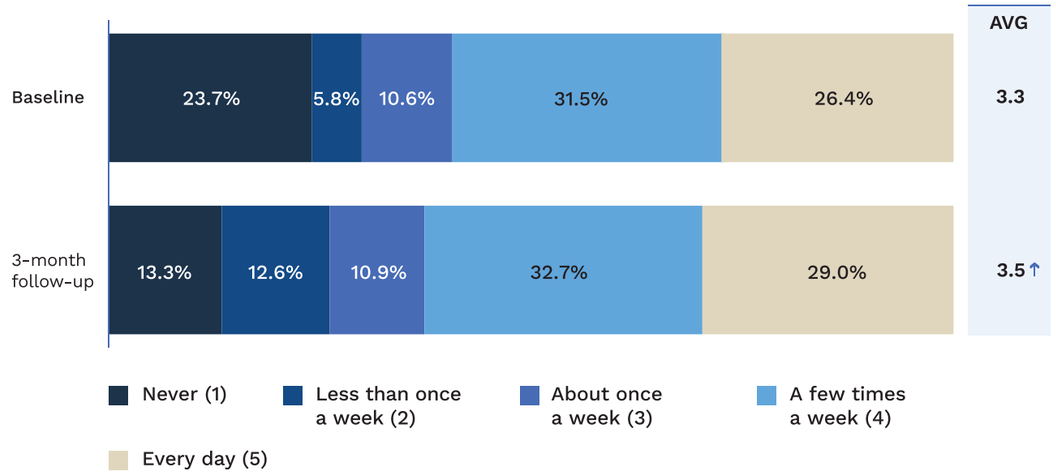
- 52.3% of children reported using messaging platforms daily or more frequently, compared with 40.5% at baseline (see Figure 5)
- 29.0% reported playing video games online every day, compared with 26.4% at baseline (see Figure 6).

Figure 5: Perceived frequency of use of messaging platforms among children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: When you're not at school or at work, how often do you message, chat, call or video call anyone using an online messaging platform, app or email?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'I don't know' and 'I don't want to say'. Arrow indicates that the difference in average score between baseline and 3-month follow-up is statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.

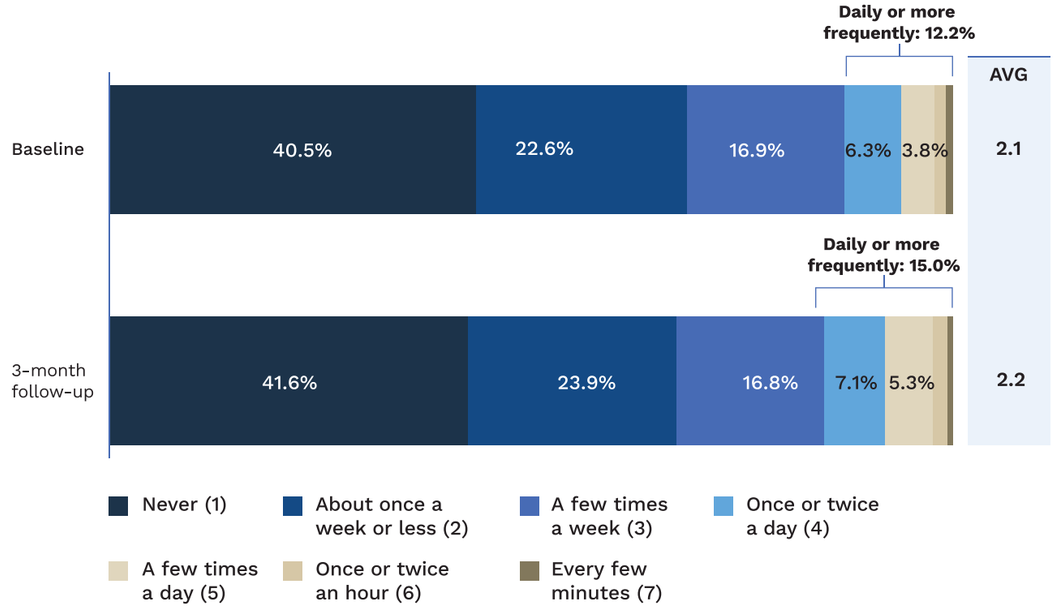
Figure 6: Perceived frequency of use of online video games among children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: When you're not at school or at work, how often do you usually do the following online? – Play video games online (on a console, handheld gaming device, website or phone).
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'I don't know' and 'I don't want to say'. Arrow indicates that the difference in average score between baseline and 3-month follow-up is statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.

As shown in Figure 7, however, there was no statistically significant change in the frequency with which children reported having used AI chatbots, assistants or companions from baseline to three months.

Figure 7: Perceived frequency of use of AI chatbots, assistants and companions among children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: When you're not at school or at work, how often do you use any AI chatbots, AI assistants or AI companions?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'I don't know' and 'I don't want to say'.

The proportion of parents who were unaware that their child had used messaging platforms, online video games, or AI chatbots, assistants or companions in the four weeks prior to the survey also remained unchanged from baseline to three months (see Tables A8 to A10 in the Appendix).

What do these findings mean?

Our findings show early signals of potential redistribution of online activities among children. Specifically, we saw an increase in the frequency with which children reported using messaging platforms and online video games, and, in an earlier section of the report, an increase in the proportion of children using certain social media platforms. It will be important to explore the potential motivations behind this apparent redistribution of online activities in future qualitative work.

However, these changes don't yet indicate a sustained shift away from age-restricted social media platforms. This finding is consistent with the limited progress observed in delivering a foundational output as per the Theory of Change (that is, effectively preventing under-16s from creating and maintaining accounts on age-restricted platforms). In the absence of these changes, it is unsurprising that we are yet to see substantial movement away from age-restricted social media or much progress towards the intended outcome – that children spend less time on age-restricted platforms.

Notably, the findings also point to a potential unintended consequence. We observed a decline in parental awareness of children's use of social media at three months. This may indicate that some children are less likely or willing to disclose to their parents that they are using social media, or that some parents may simply assume their children aren't using social media, given that the age restrictions are now in effect. It's also possible, however, that parents had increased awareness of their children's social media use in the lead-up to commencement of the age restrictions, given the increased media coverage and public dialogue surrounding the restrictions. Regardless of the cause, this dynamic may have implications for help-seeking behaviours and the identification of online harms, as reduced parental awareness could limit opportunities for support or early intervention. This finding underscores the importance of continuing to encourage open dialogue within families about young people's digital engagement, regardless of age restrictions being in effect.

In our participants' words

... Before the ban came in, she exchanged phone numbers with her friends + created a WhatsApp group chat instead. I think [my daughter] has a similar app to TikTok where she doesn't sign in & she doesn't post anything – she merely views content.
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

It hasn't affected the family in any way that we have to change our lives dramatically. It's just the kids have found other ways to connect with friends and spend more time playing games and watching movies.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

My child deleted the apps initially but then started to use them again sneakily behind our backs.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

Have perceived norms around social media use and attitudes towards the age restrictions changed three months after their commencement?

In this section, we report whether children's and parents' perceived norms and attitudes have changed from baseline to three months after the social media age restrictions came into effect. Specifically, we examine perceived descriptive norms – beliefs about what other people are doing, rather than what they think should be done. For example, these measures reflect what children and parents think is common behaviour among their peers, regardless of whether those perceptions are an accurate reflection of their peers' behaviour. We also examine perceptions of the 'right age' for social media and parents' attitudes towards the age restrictions.

Examining the change pathway

What this section reports

Here we assess whether key assumptions underpinning the policy are holding, and we explore any early indications or signals of outcomes associated with the introduction of the age restrictions. Specifically:

Assumptions

- Attitudes among parents and children shift to support adherence to SMMA.

Outputs

- There are changes in perceived social norms and normative behaviours regarding children's use of social media.

It is important to note that, according to our Theory of Change, this is a medium- to long-term outcome. However, as this is a world-first policy intervention, there is limited evidence about how quickly normative change may occur. These outcomes were therefore included at three months to assess whether any early signs of change were emerging, particularly given external factors such as growing international momentum behind age restrictions, high-profile legal action involving social media platforms, and increased public discussion about the potential harms associated with social media.

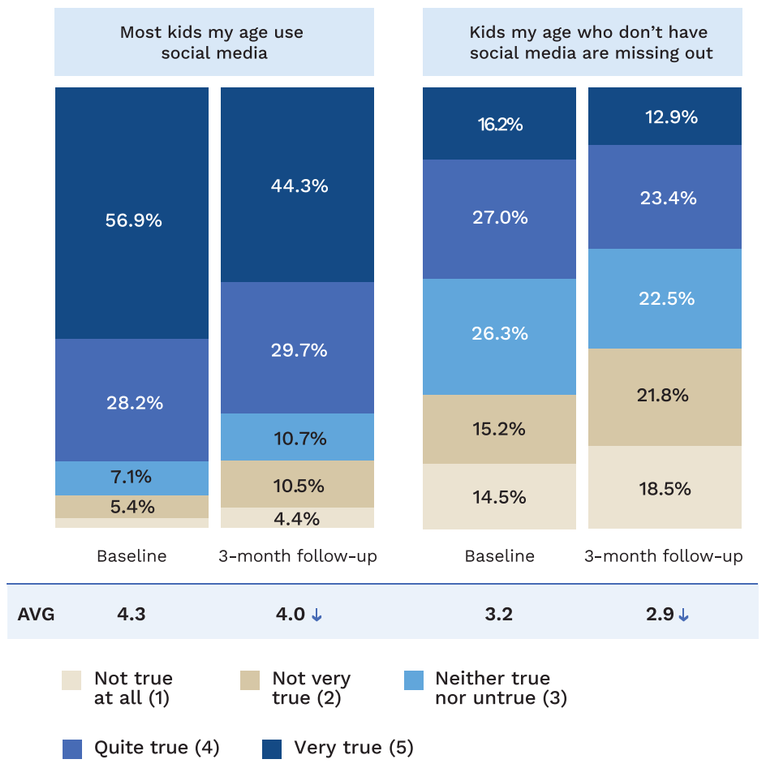
There was a decrease in the proportion of children who believed that most people their age use social media, and that those who don't are missing out

We asked children and their parents to respond to a series of statements related to perceived normative attitudes around social media use – that is, their perception of what is considered 'normal' or standard behaviours and attitudes among other children and parents when it comes to social media.

As shown in Figure 8, there were statistically significant shifts in these perceived norms among children at the three-month follow-up.

At baseline, 85.1% of children thought it was (quite or very) true that 'most kids my age use social media'. This decreased to 74.0% at three months. Additionally, at baseline, 43.3% of children thought that 'kids my age who don't have social media are missing out'. This decreased to 36.3% at three months.

Figure 8: Perceived norms around social media among children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)

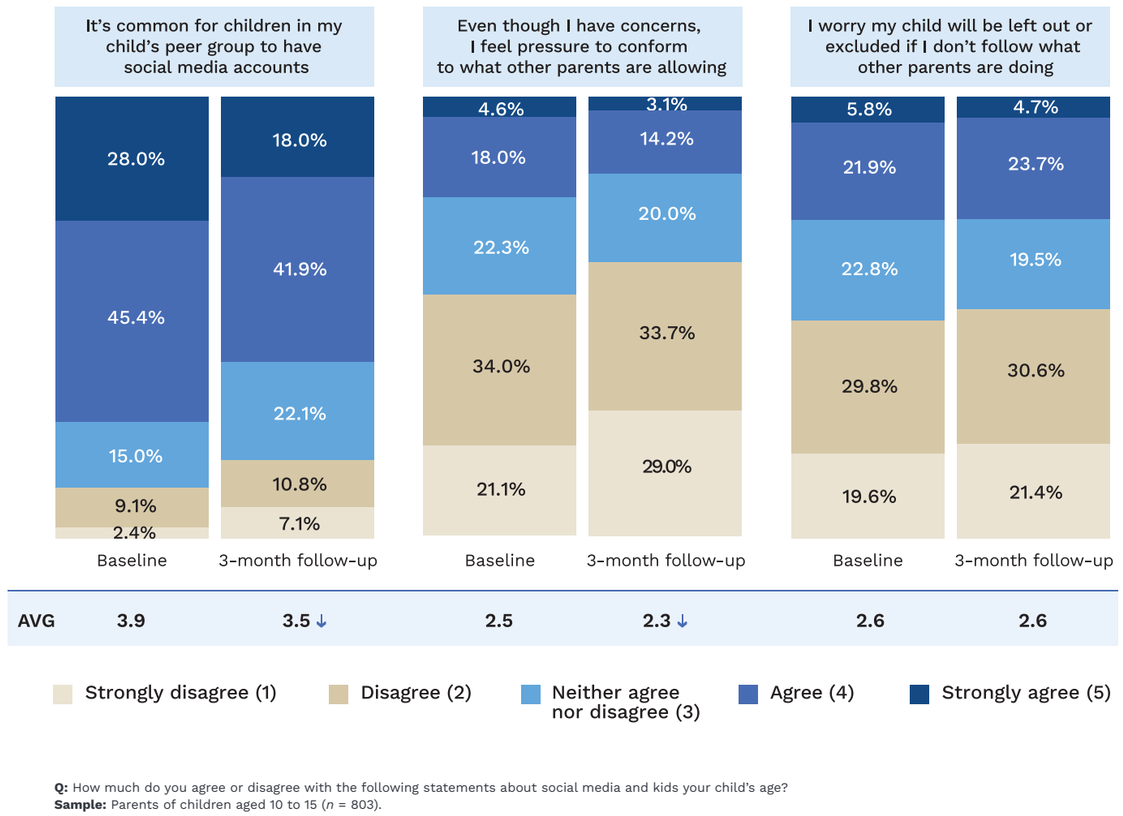


Q: How true or untrue do you think each of these statements about social media are?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'. Arrow indicates that the difference in average score between baseline and 3-month follow-up is statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.

Similarly, we asked parents to rate their agreement with a series of statements relating to social media use, including their perceptions of what their child's peers are doing and the extent to which they felt pressure to conform to what other parents are allowing.

As shown in Figure 9, there was a statistically significant decline in the extent to which parents agreed that 'it's common for children in my child's peer group to have social media accounts', from 73.4% agreed or strongly agreed at baseline to 60.0% at three months. Additionally, there was a statistically significant decline in parental agreement with the statement 'even though I have concerns, I feel pressure to conform to what other parents are allowing', with 22.6% agreeing or strongly agreeing at baseline versus 17.3% at three months. In contrast, there was no statistically significant change in the extent to which parents agreed that 'I worry my child will be left out or excluded if I don't follow what other parents are doing', with 27.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing at baseline versus 28.4% at three months.

Figure 9: Perceived norms around social media use among parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about social media and kids your child's age?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'. Arrow indicates that the difference in average score between baseline and 3-month follow-up is statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.

Children and their parents have differing opinions on the right age to hold social media accounts

At three months, we asked children and parents to respond to a series of statements related to their normative beliefs about the 'right age' for children to have social media accounts – that is, what they believe to be the 'right age', as opposed to their preferences about the current age restrictions.

As shown in Table 7, on average, children felt that the 'right age' for children to have social media accounts was 13.6 years. Notably, parents reported a higher 'right age' compared to their children, believing that the 'right age' was around 15, on average, for both their child and other children to have their own social media account.[18]

Table 7: Normative beliefs about the 'right age' for children to have accounts on social media (%)

	Child report	Parent report	
	Children to have social media accounts	Your child to have social media accounts	Other children to have social media accounts
Average	13.6	15.2	15.3
Median	14	16	16

Q (child report): What do you think is the right age for kids to have accounts on social media?
Q (parent report): What do you think is the right age for your child to have accounts on social media?
Q (parent report): What do you think is the right age for other children to have accounts on social media?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 756) | parents of children aged 10 to 15 answering about own child (*n* = 787) | parents of children aged 10 to 15 answering about other children (*n* = 766). Average and median exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'.

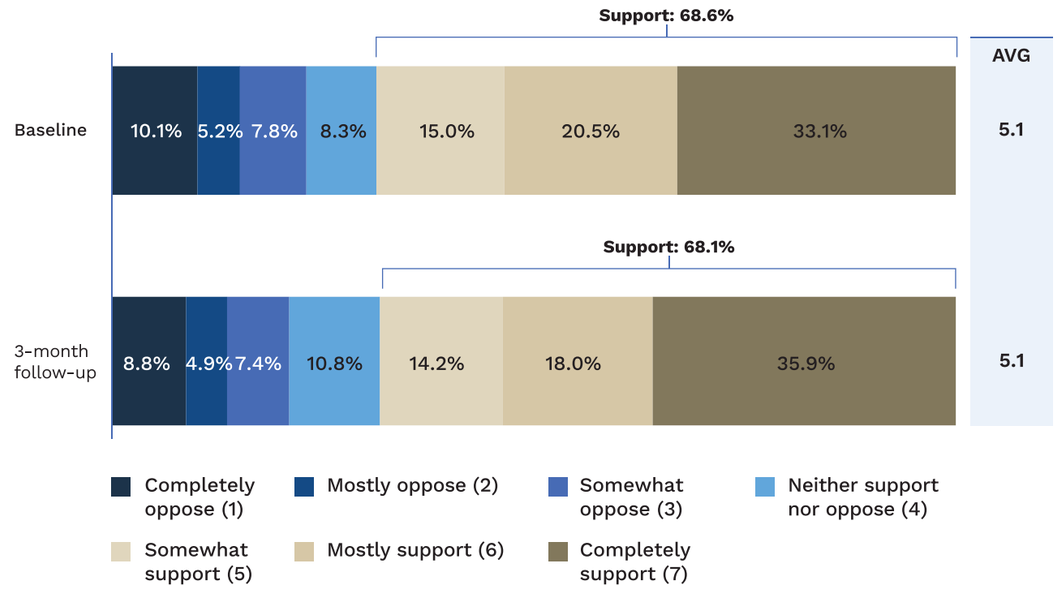
There has been no change in parents' attitudes towards the age restrictions

We asked parents of 10- to 15-year-olds the extent to which they supported or opposed the introduction of the social media age restrictions, both at baseline and three months. As shown in Figure 10, there has been no change in parental support of or opposition towards the age restrictions three months after they took effect.

Around 2 in 3 parents supported the age restrictions (somewhat, mostly, or completely), both at baseline (68.6%) and three months (68.1%). The proportion of parents who opposed the age restrictions also remained largely unchanged (baseline: 23.1%; three months: 21.1%).

[18] Children and their parents were not asked about the perceived 'right age' to use social media in the baseline survey.

Figure 10: Support of or opposition towards the social media age restrictions among parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



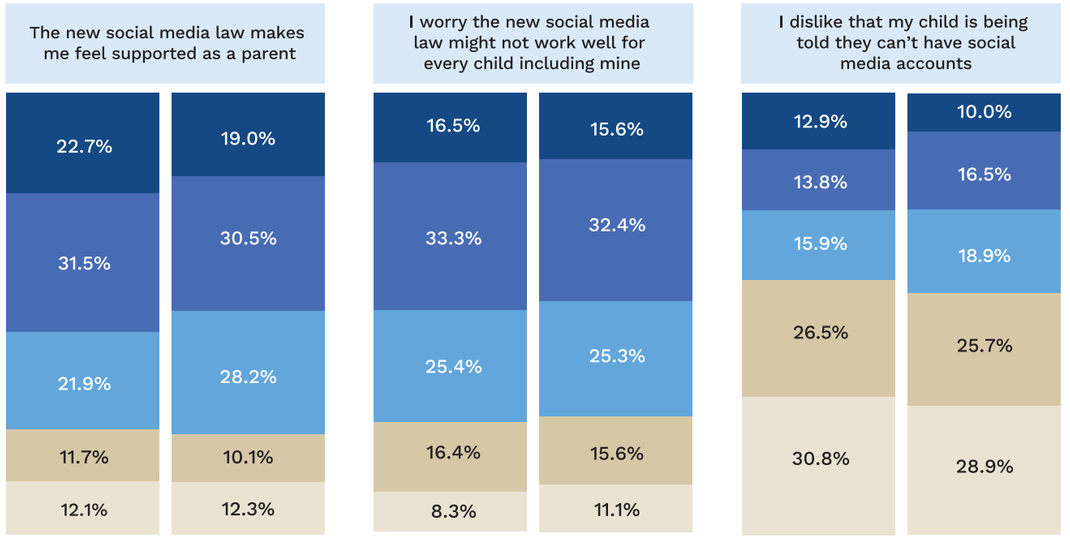
Q: To what extent, if at all, do you support the introduction of the new social media law?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'.

We also asked parents the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about the social media age restrictions. As shown in Figure 11, there was no change in parents' attitudes towards the age restrictions three months after they took effect.

While around half of parents agreed (or strongly agreed) that the age restrictions make them feel supported as a parent, both at baseline (54.2%) and three months (49.4%), a similar proportion indicated that they worry the age restrictions won't work well for every child, including their own (baseline: 49.9%; three months: 48.0%).

Additionally, around 1 in 4 parents agreed (or strongly agreed) that they dislike that their child is being told they can't have social media accounts, both at baseline (26.7%) and three months (26.5%).

Figure 11: Attitudes towards the social media age restrictions among parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



AVG	**3.4**	**3.3**	**3.3**	**3.3**	**2.5**	**2.5**

Strongly disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly agree (5)

Q: Overall, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'.

What do these findings mean?

Overall, our findings highlight mixed early signals of change in perceived social norms and normative beliefs at three months. Our findings suggest that while perceptions of peer behaviour may be shifting, normative beliefs about the appropriate age for social media use among children remain more closely aligned with the pre-restriction status quo (that is, prior to the age restrictions taking effect, most social media platforms had a minimum age of 13). In contrast, parents reported a higher 'right age' (around 15), more closely aligned with the current age restrictions. Indeed, despite evident deficiencies in platform implementation at three months, parental support for the age restrictions has remained consistent, with a majority continuing to support the policy.

It should be noted that perceived norms may change more quickly than actual behaviours, and there is limited evidence of corresponding behaviour change at this early assessment. Moreover, in the absence of strong platform-level implementation of age assurance measures, it is possible that these early shifts in perceived social norms are not driven by lived experience of account removals and their flow-on effects, but potentially reflect increased conversations in schools, households and the media that have occurred alongside the introduction of the policy. They also may be influenced by other external factors, such as growing international momentum behind age restrictions, high-profile legal action involving social media platforms, and increased public discourse on the potential harms associated with social media in the lead-up to implementation.

While these emerging shifts in norms and attitudes are important, they are unlikely to drive sustained behavioural change in the absence of strong platform-level implementation. Continued progress towards the intended outcome will depend on whether these shifts are reinforced over time and are accompanied by observable changes in children's access to age-restricted accounts. We will continue to monitor these dynamics as implementation of and compliance with the age restrictions evolve.

In our participants' words

Nothing much has changed, but it has made me feel like I am not missing out as much because more of my friends don't have social media now.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

I'm a little sad that kids can't have social media. But it took the pressure off having what everyone else has.
(Child aged 10 to 12)

It's put my kids back on a more level playing field socially with kids who have had social media in the past and now don't. Now my kids don't feel as 'left out' as those communicating through social media.
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

What have been the early outcomes of the social media age restrictions for children?

In this section, we examine early outcomes of the social media age restrictions for children. Specifically, we report if there have been any changes in children's potentially problematic use of online platforms, including the extent to which children feel bothered when they can't go online or believe that being online interferes with their other activities. We also examine changes in how children are spending their time offline, and their mental health and wellbeing. Finally, we compare children's anticipated impacts of the age restrictions, as reported at baseline, with their subjective reported impacts at the three-month follow-up.

Examining the change pathway

What this section reports

Here we assess whether key assumptions underpinning the policy are holding, and explore any early indications or signals of outcomes associated with the introduction of the age restrictions. Specifically:

Assumptions

- Platforms are implementing age assurance measures consistently and effectively.

Outcomes

- Children spend less time on restricted platforms.
- Children engage in fewer behaviours that are harmful to others or themselves.
- Children have decreased exposure to online harms and risks.
- Children increase their engagement with behaviours that foster health and development.

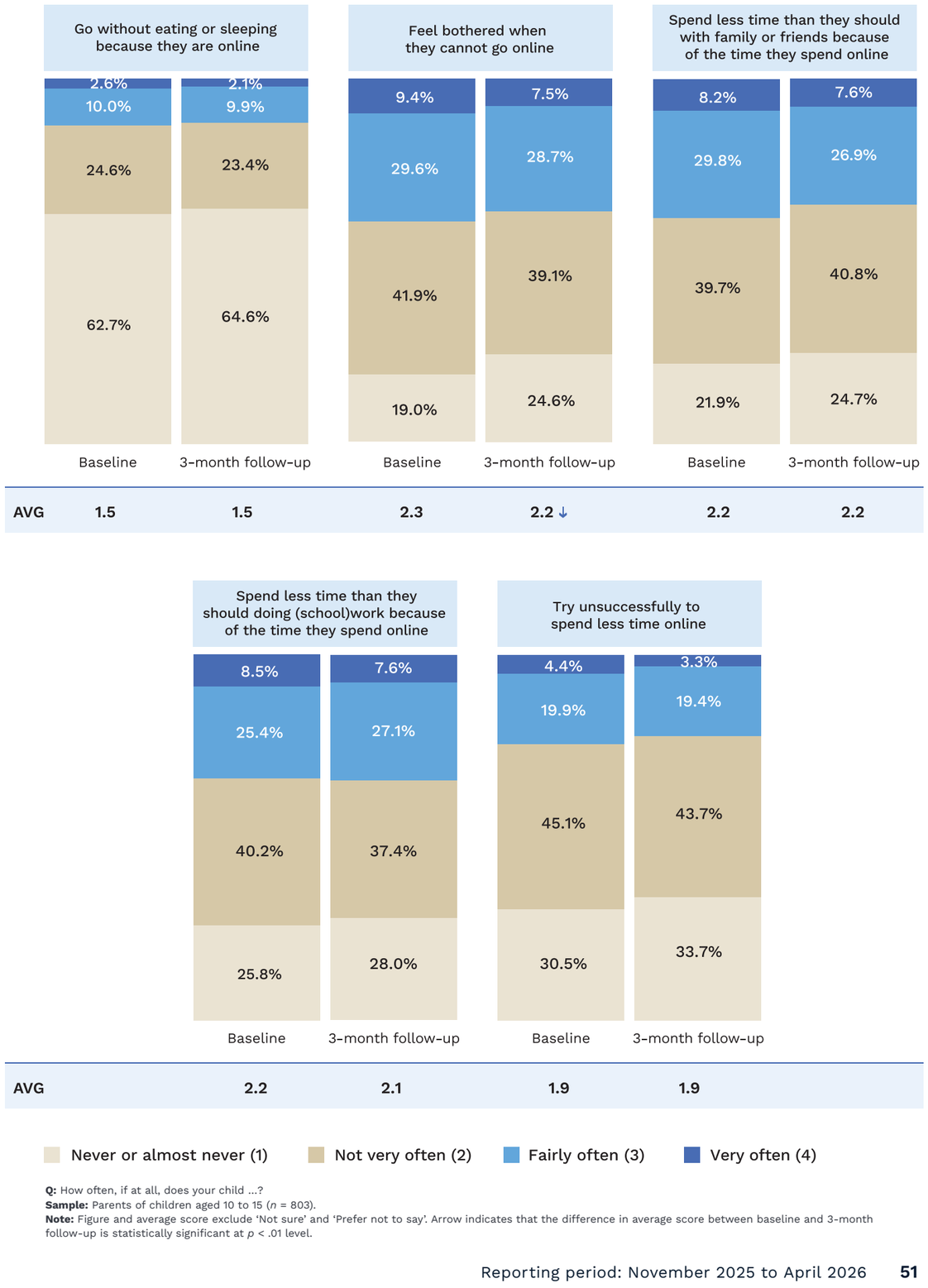
It is important to note that many of these outcomes are considered medium- to long-term, and we wouldn't anticipate significant changes at only three months after the commencement of the age restrictions. Moreover, the conditions required to enable these changes are evidently not yet in place, as highlighted in the preceding sections. However, including these outcomes at the three-month follow-up provided an opportunity to identify any potential unintended consequences at an early stage, allowing for a more timely and responsive policy or implementation adjustment if required.

Children's potentially problematic online use remained largely unchanged from baseline to three months

To assess whether children were engaging in potentially problematic online behaviours – such as going without eating or sleeping or spending less time with family and friends due to being online – and how these behaviours change over time, both children and their parents were asked a series of questions at baseline and again at the three-month follow-up.

Overall, across several indicators of potentially problematic online use, as reported by both children and parents, we found little evidence of change. While there was a statistically significant decrease in the extent to which parents perceived their child to be bothered when they couldn't go online, similar changes were not observed across other indicators of potentially problematic online use (see Figure 12). Likewise, children's reports of potentially problematic online use remained stable from baseline to three months (see Figure A1 in the Appendix).

Figure 12: Children's potentially problematic online use reported by parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



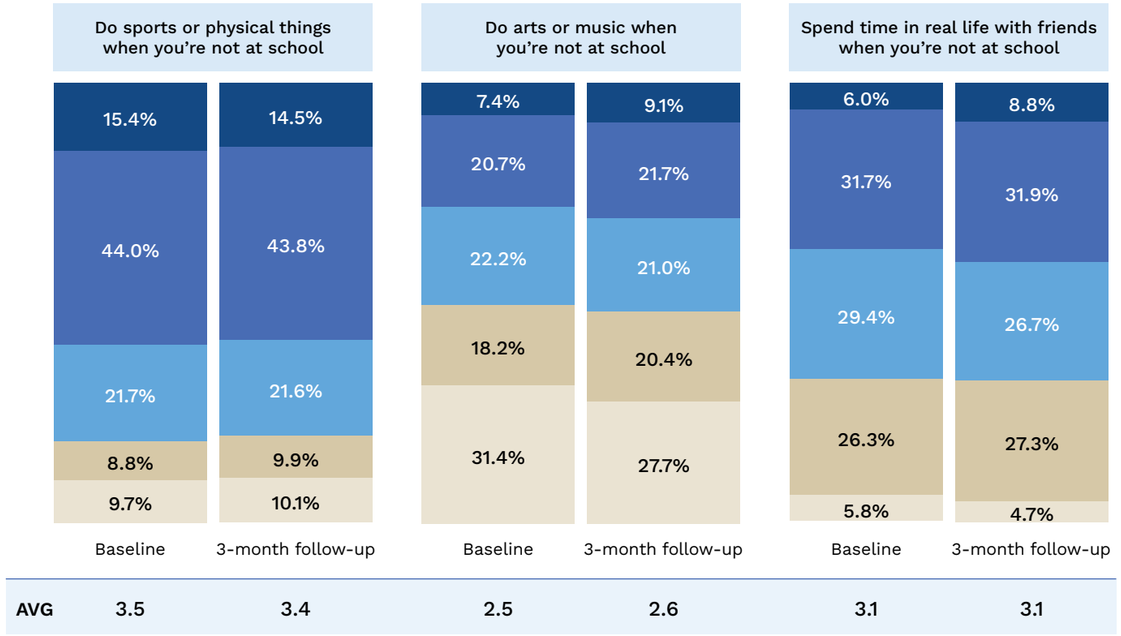
Q: How often, if at all, does your child ...?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'. Arrow indicates that the difference in average score between baseline and 3-month follow-up is statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.

There were limited changes in how children were spending their time offline at three months

Children were asked how often they engage in certain offline activities, to help us better understand how they spend their time outside of school, and whether this had changed three months after the commencement of the age restrictions. Overall, we saw consistent levels of participation in activities such as sports and physical activity, arts and music, spending time with friends and family, and attendance at community events at baseline and three months (see Figure 13).

As shown in Figure 13, there was a statistically significant increase in the average reported frequency of children doing homework or other educational activities when they are not at school. This change may, however, be attributable to the time of year that the surveys were completed – the baseline survey was conducted towards the end of the school year and early in the summer holidays. This highlights the importance of interpreting behavioural changes within their broader temporal context.

Figure 13: Offline activities reported by children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: For this question, think about things you do when you're not at school. How often, if at all, do you usually ...?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'. Arrow indicates that the difference in average score between baseline and 3-month follow-up is statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.

Children's mental health and wellbeing were unchanged from baseline to three months

Our evaluation of the social media age restrictions seeks to assess the mental health and wellbeing of children through measuring several outcomes, including sleep, self-esteem, psychological distress, and wellbeing.

Three months after the commencement of the age restrictions, sleep quality as reported by children remained stable. See Figure A2 in the Appendix for how children rated their sleep quality at baseline versus three months.

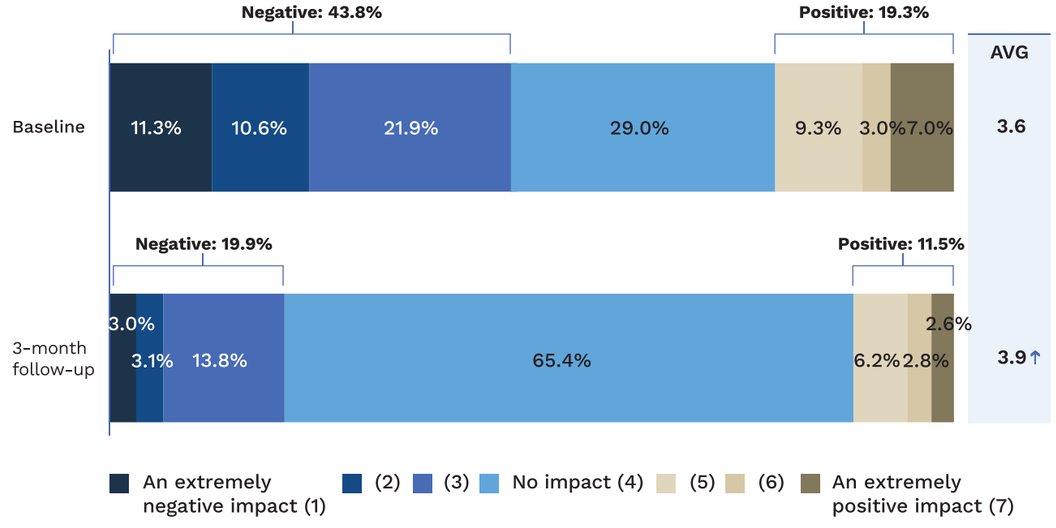
Also at this early stage, children's reported self-esteem (see Figure A3 in the Appendix), reported wellbeing, and experiences of psychological distress (see Tables A11 and A12 in the Appendix) all remained consistent from baseline to three months.

Children's anticipated impacts of the age restrictions emerged among a relatively small group at three months

At baseline, children were asked what impact, if any, they thought the age restrictions would have on them. As shown in Figure 14, prior to the age restrictions taking effect, almost 1 in 3 (29%) said they expected there to be no impact, 19.3% expected positive impacts, and 43.8% expected negative impacts.

We repeated this question at three months to assess the perceived impact of the age restrictions in the early stages of implementation. Our findings highlighted a clear divergence between the anticipated and early perceived impacts. A majority of children (65.4%) reported that the age restrictions had no impact on them. A smaller proportion reported experiencing negative impacts (19.9%) compared to what was anticipated, consistent with the ineffective implementation of age assurance measures by platforms at this early stage. This was also true of positive impacts, with fewer children (11.5%) reporting positive impacts compared to what they anticipated at baseline.

Figure 14: Anticipated and perceived impact of the social media age restrictions among children aged 10 to 15 (n = 803)



Q: What impact, if any, do you think the new social media law will have on you when it starts in December?
Q: What impact, if any, has the new social media law had on you since it started in December 2025?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (n = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'. Arrow indicates that the difference in average score between baseline and 3-month follow-up is statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.

These findings are reinforced by children's responses when asked to tell us, in their own words, what they thought would happen when the age restrictions took effect[19] and what their experience had been like in the three months since their commencement.

In line with the findings in Figure 14, prior to commencement of the age restrictions, in their reflections on potential impacts children anticipated both positive and negative effects. Others expected little to no impact, generally due to their infrequent use of social media, the fact that they would be turning 16 soon, or their planning to find a way around the age restrictions.

[19] **Q:** How do you think the social media law will affect you personally?

The most prominent anticipated negative impact expressed among some children was that the age restrictions would affect their communication and sense of connectedness in some way – for example, through difficulties in talking and staying up to date with friends and family, and in scheduling social, work or extracurricular activities, as well as through a broader sense of social isolation. A small proportion of children also expressed concerns about loss of connection to the broader community, zeitgeist and current affairs. A small proportion also anticipated that the loss of social media as a source of social connection and support would have negative mental health and wellbeing impacts.

In our participants' words

It will also make me sad because I will not be able to chat with my friends and family. I will also not be able to talk to anyone overseas.
(Child aged 10 to 12)

I already have a job and we use Snapchat to swap shifts and rosters and staff chat, so I don't know how I will keep up. How will I swap shifts when I need to?
(Child aged 13 to 15)

It will not allow me to chat with my friends or be able to read up on current news, so I fear I will become more lonely because of the law.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

I have a lot of family members that are overseas and now it will be more difficult for me to talk to them, which is very worrying. Thinking about the ban makes me anxious and lose hope. This ban will do nothing for me except make my mental health worse.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

Some children expected increased boredom, through losing a key source of entertainment and recreation. A small proportion expected other impacts to arise from the age restrictions, including disruptions to personal or school-related learning, concerns about negative impacts from losing access to YouTube, and reduced opportunity for creative inspiration or expression.

In our participants' words

It will affect my fun. I won't be able to easily watch stuff my favourite music artists are doing and hear new songs and stuff.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

I don't like it at all because I learn so much when I go online and I love to draw and going on YouTube shows me tutorials to help me draw.
(Child aged 10 to 12)

A small proportion of children also anticipated potential positive impacts from the age restrictions, including spending more time participating in offline hobbies and activities, improvements in online safety, as well as a reduction in screen time or excessive use of social media.

In our participants' words

I think it will encourage me to spend less time on my phone or a screen, which will allow me to explore new things beyond my phone.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

I think it will help cyberbullying and help children not [to] be exposed to inappropriate things too early.
(Child aged 10 to 12)

We asked children a similar question at three months, inviting them to tell us, in their own words, what it's been like for them in the first three months of the age restrictions.[20]

[20] **Q:** There's a new social media law in Australia. What's it been like for you? Have you noticed anything different in what you do or how you feel? Have there been any changes in how you use social media or what you see or experience on social media or online?

Given that many children have retained access to their social media accounts, the effects of the age restrictions to date may have been limited at a population level. While there were substantially fewer negative impacts reported by children compared to baseline expectations, as outlined in Figure 14, a small proportion noted experiencing challenges so far. The main unintended impact was in relation to finding it harder to communicate and feeling less connected, echoing children's concerns prior to commencement of the age restrictions.

In our participants' words

Sometimes [it's] hard to communicate with my friends, or I miss out on group chats about sports or assignments my friends have been discussing.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

I feel more isolated and distant from everyone in my life, and [it's] harder to make plans with people as I can't organise it with them.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

I'm not able to know the latest thing that happen in the world. I'm also not able to follow my favourite artist on Instagram.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

Other impacts noted by a small proportion of children included feeling bored, missing social media as a source of recreation, feeling that they are missing out because others are still on social media, and a sense of lost freedom and control.

In our participants' words

I just feel bored sometimes ... and sometimes I can't relate to jokes that are online that my friends say.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

... I just miss posting on Instagram as I feel kinda left out since my friends and others still have the app. It's unfair just because I follow the rules I miss out.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

Feels restricting and like I am being monitored closely. I can't enjoy social media like I used to ... [I] feel like I am untrusted...
(Child aged 13 to 15)

Meanwhile, a small proportion of children reported experiencing positive impacts from the age restrictions, in line with those anticipated at baseline. A small proportion of children said they had reduced their screen time or time online, experienced improvements in relationships, felt safer or were engaging in safer online behaviours, and spent more time participating in offline hobbies and activities. A small proportion of children also reported feeling less pressure to be on social media, in line with the small early shifts identified in perceived social norms surrounding social media use.

In our participants' words

I spend less time on there, as some of my friends don't have an account anymore. We talk about it less at school.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

No, because I don't use social media. I'm happier not to feel like I'm missing out as much.
(Child aged 10 to 12)

It's been really good to not spend so much time on my phone and to spend more time with my family.
(Child aged 13 to 15)

Like their children, many parents felt that the age restrictions have had minimal impact at three months

At baseline, we also asked parents to share their views on how they thought the age restrictions would impact children in Australia.[21]

Around half of parents expected the age restrictions to bring positive impacts for children. Some anticipated increased safety for children online through reducing exposure to online harms. In addition, some parents anticipated that the age restrictions would positively impact children's mental health and wellbeing, both generally and by enhancing various protective factors, such as reduced screen time, more time spent participating in offline activities or outdoors, and decreased dependency on social media. A small proportion of parents also anticipated that these changes would enhance children's social relationships by promoting more in-person connections and would remove the pressure for children to be on social media.

In our participants' words

Hopefully, [it] will save a lot of innocent children from being abused online, or exploited or seeing things they shouldn't.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

I think it will reduce the amount of social bullying, reduction of screen time for children to spend more time actually being kids.
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

A lot less bullying. Less child/teen suicide. Less mental health issues. Less addictions to social media.
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

More social in person, less stress about how they look, less obsession with other people's lives to focus on their own lives.
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

At the same time, some parents identified potential unintended consequences. As observed among children, a small proportion of parents were concerned about reduced social and community connectedness. A small proportion also anticipated adjustment difficulties, and possible negative effects on children's mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, while enhanced safety was anticipated by some parents, a small proportion expressed concern about the potential for increased risk, such as through displacement to unregulated online spaces.

In our participants' words

[It] will impact older children who have grown up using it for years (social isolation) ...
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

Children in rural areas will be further isolated, and children with relatives who live further away will not be able to connect with those relatives as easily.
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

I think they'll suffer as they are addicted to social media, are in the generation that has grown up with it and some children use it as an escape from their own reality.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

[21] **Q:** What impact, if any, do you think the new social media law will have for Australian children?

At three months, parents were invited to share their perspectives on any early impacts experienced by themselves and their families.[22]

Mirroring the perspectives of children, many parents shared that their family had experienced little to no changes since the age restrictions took effect. For some, this was because their children either had limited previous exposure to social media or they were still active on it.

In our participants' words

My child has not had his social media apps restricted. Nothing has changed.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

Very little has changed as I did not permit my child to have social media. It has made saying no so much easier and providing support to my position.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

Although many parents observed few changes, some felt there were areas where the age restrictions had positively impacted their children and families. These included feeling that their children are better protected from online harm or have greater awareness of online risks, and that the age restrictions have helped to support their discussions and rule setting around social media use. A small proportion of parents also noted that their children's screen time has reduced, and that there have been improvements in relationships, such as through positive in-person communication

In our participants' words

My child is aware of the law and is more aware of how vulnerable children are on social media.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

It's helped us. We've already had a strong stance that [our child] is too young for social media. Having the support of the government has given it extra justification.
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

I noticed that my child has reduced screen time, improved focus on studies, and better communication.
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

It has been OK. My son seems more engaged with friends and is spending more time outside.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

[22] **Q:** In Australia, some social media apps now stop people under 16 from creating and holding accounts. What has this been like for you and your family? Tell us what changed (if anything) and how it affected you and your family.

In line with concerns raised at baseline, a small proportion of parents reported negative impacts at three months. These included concerns about reduced social interaction, with some parents noting that their children have had fewer opportunities to connect with friends and peers. Others described their children feeling they were missing out, particularly where their children believed their friends continued to use social media. A small proportion of parents raised concerns about reduced access to content or information, and increased family or household conflict related to social media use. In addition, a small proportion of parents expressed concerns about increased secrecy around online behaviour. This reflects the potential unintended consequence previously discussed of parents becoming less aware of their child's social media use.

In our participants' words

My child lost contact with friends.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

Has just made my child more isolated. Taught them to be sneaky.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

A lot of my child's friends still have accounts. This leads to arguments around the whole point of the law if they still have it and why other parents allow it and we don't.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

What do these findings mean?

Substantive population-level outcomes are unlikely to emerge until platforms effectively implement age assurance measures and consistently prevent under-16s from holding or creating accounts on age-restricted platforms. In this context, our findings indicate that, at three months, the age restrictions had resulted in little observable change for most children.

This finding is reflected in children's own accounts, with most reporting minimal impacts at three months. The divergence between anticipated and perceived impacts highlights the extent to which public expectations shifted following the commencement of the age restrictions. The anticipated impacts identified prior to commencement of the age restrictions were reported by only a relatively small group of children. Among this group, challenges were largely centred around reduced social and community connectedness and missing social media as a source of recreation. A small proportion also reported other impacts, such as reduced screen time, improved relationships, an increased sense of safety online, and reduced pressure to be on social media. Parents' perspectives reinforce this pattern. Like their children, many parents perceived that the age restrictions had little overall impact in the first three months, further supporting the conclusion that impacts haven't yet been widely experienced at a population level.

Taken together, these findings suggest that, while there is some variation in individual experiences, early outcomes remain limited. This likely reflects the fact that key outputs and assumptions underpinning the Theory of Change haven't yet been realised. As such, meaningful progress towards reduced time on restricted platforms, lower exposure to harms, and improved wellbeing will depend on whether these assumptions are borne out in practice. Ongoing monitoring will be critical to understanding whether outcomes emerge over a longer period, and how evenly these are distributed across the population.

What have been the early outcomes of the social media age restrictions for families?

In this section, we report on some indicators of early outcomes of the social media age restrictions on family dynamics. We examine whether there has been any change in parental stress, family behaviours, digital media conflict or parental monitoring from before to three months after the commencement of the age restrictions.

Examining the change pathway

What this section reports

In this section, we continue to examine any early indications or signals of outcomes associated with the introduction of the age restrictions. Specifically:

Outcomes

- Family dynamics improve between children and parents.
- Parental stress and family conflict related to social media is reduced.

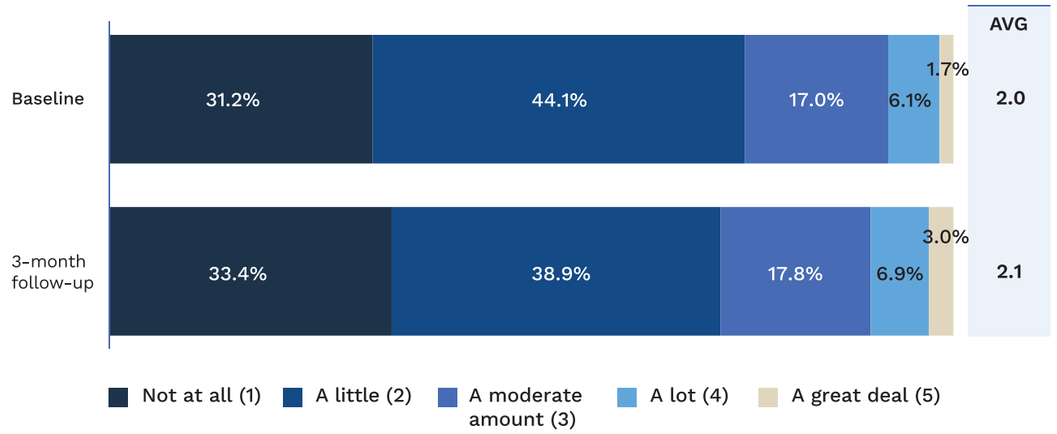
As noted in the previous section, many of these outcomes are considered to be medium- to long-term in nature, and we wouldn't anticipate significant changes at only three months after the commencement of the age restrictions. Family-level outcomes may also reasonably lag behind behavioural changes relating to social media use, which themselves remained largely unchanged at this early stage, given that the conditions required to enable such changes were not yet in place.

There was little change in family dynamics from baseline to three months

Our findings suggest there was little change in family dynamics from baseline to three months after the commencement of the social media age restrictions. As shown in Figure 15, parental stress related to their child's social media use remained consistent from baseline to three months. At baseline, 24.7% of parents who believed their child had used social media in the four weeks prior to the survey reported at least a moderately negative impact on their own stress levels. This remained broadly unchanged at 27.7% three months after the age restrictions took effect.[23]

[23] This question was only asked of parents who thought their child had used social media in the four weeks prior to the survey.

Figure 15: Parental stress related to their child's use of social media among parents of children aged 10 to 15 who thought their child had used social media in the 4 weeks prior to the survey (baseline: *n* = 562; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 468)



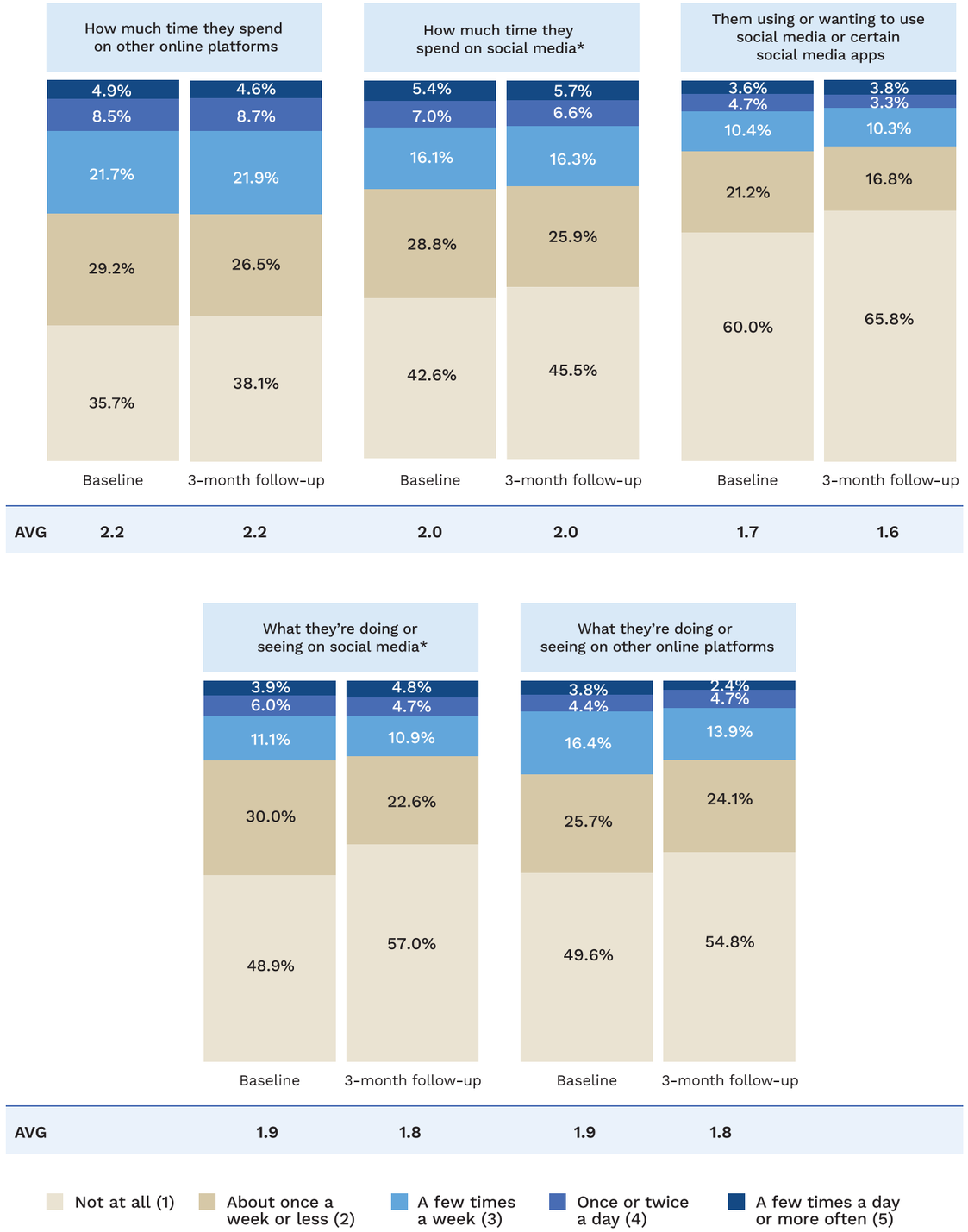
Q: To what extent, if at all, does your child's use (or potential use) of social media negatively impact your stress levels?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 who thought their child had used social media in the 4 weeks prior to the survey (baseline: *n* = 562; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 468).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'.

Family tension or conflict regarding children's use of digital technology, including social media, also remained consistent, both when considering children's reports and parents' reports.

As shown in Figure 16, the frequency with which parents reported arguing with their children about their digital technology use remained consistent from baseline to three months.

Likewise, as shown in Figure A4 in the Appendix, the frequency with which children reported arguing with their parents about how much time they spend online or what they are doing or seeing online didn't differ from baseline to three months.

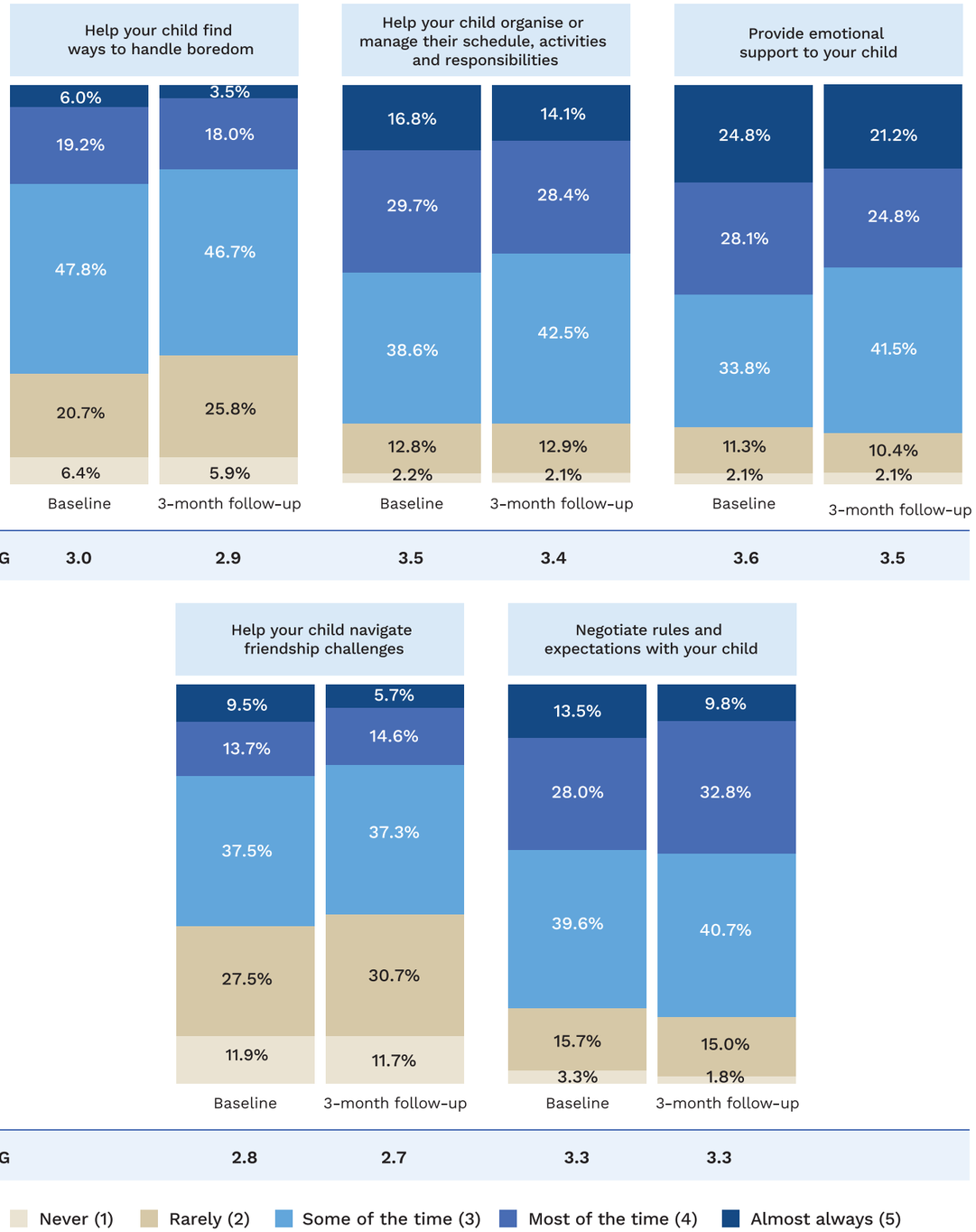
Figure 16: Family tension or conflict regarding digital technology use reported by parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: Over the past 4 weeks, how often, if at all, have you argued with your child about ...?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803). *Items only asked of parents who thought their child had used social media in the 4 weeks prior to the survey (baseline: *n* = 562; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 468).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'.

We also asked parents how often they assisted their child across various domains, such as helping their child find ways to handle boredom, providing emotional support to them, or negotiating rules and expectations. As shown in Figure 17, the frequency with which parents supported their children in these ways remained consistent from baseline to three months, as did the level of effort required to provide such support to their children (see Figure A5 in the Appendix).

Figure 17: Parental support provided to children among parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: In the past 4 weeks, to what extent, if at all, did you personally ...?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'.

What do these findings mean?

Many of the family-focused outcomes reported in this section are considered medium- to long-term. As such, substantial changes wouldn't be expected to emerge at a population level at this early stage. However, much like for children, it is important to recognise that the conditions required to enable change in these domains haven't yet been realised. As a result, many children continue to hold accounts on age-restricted platforms, limiting the likelihood of downstream impacts on families.

Indeed, our findings suggest that three months after the commencement of the age restrictions, change in family-focused outcomes has been minimal. Specifically, we didn't observe any change across several indicators of family dynamics, including parental stress, family conflict and support behaviours. This convergence across several indicators provides a consistent picture of unchanged family dynamics three months after the commencement of the age restrictions.

In our participants' words

There has been no change to my child's account, no change to his usage, no change to his behaviour. We have discussed what it might be like if his accounts were closed.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

It actually helps me and my family in the form of relationship. We argued less about the time spent on social media and less stress for me when I don't have to check what content my child is viewing or searching for in the social media.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

It created discussions around why this ban is being implemented. It also created disagreements, as some of the kids did not like the new rules. It's been difficult to enforce the ban because kids have ways of getting around these things, which has also caused arguments.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

Are there age and gender differences in the early experiences and outcomes of the age restrictions?

In this section, we report age and gender[24] differences in the early experiences of children three months after the commencement of the social media age restrictions.[25] As noted in the methodology section, given the smaller sample size at three months, here we focus on age and gender differences. Future reports will explore differences among other subgroups of children, to identify potential differential effects of the age restrictions among certain children and/or families.

Examining the change pathway

What this section reports

Here, we examine whether the patterns observed across outputs, assumptions and outcomes vary by age and gender.

Fewer children aged 13 to 15 were using age-restricted social media platforms from baseline to three months, yet the perceived impacts of the age restrictions were minimal

As reported earlier, most children (81.5%) continued to use age-restricted social media platforms three months after the commencement of the age restrictions. However, there was a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of children aged 13 to 15 (*n* = 467) who had used an age-restricted social media platform in the four weeks prior to the survey from baseline (92.4%) to three months (87.8%). Conversely, there was no statistically significant change in the proportion of children aged 10 to 12 (*n* = 336) who had used an age-restricted platform in the four weeks prior to the survey (baseline: 78.9%; three-month follow-up: 74.8%).

[24] As noted in the methodology section, the sample size for trans and gender-diverse children at the three-month follow-up is small (*n* = 15) and this affects how their data can be used in quantitative analyses. Restricting analyses to binary gender categories means that, in this section of the report, trans and gender-diverse children's experiences are lacking. We anticipate that the sample size of trans and gender-diverse children will be larger in future survey waves, allowing us to explore their experiences in future reports.
[25] We only report on findings where there were apparent differences between the experiences of boys and girls or children of different ages from baseline to the three-month follow-up.

Our findings also suggest that there has been a shift in how children aged 13 to 15 perceived the age restrictions would impact them at baseline, and how these impacts manifested at three months. At baseline, children aged 13 to 15 largely expected the age restrictions to have a negative impact on them, reporting an average score of 3.3 on a scale from 1 (extremely negative) to 7 (extremely positive). At three months, the average rating increased to 3.9. This change appears to reflect a greater proportion of children aged 13 to 15 reporting that the age restrictions had no impact on them (61.0% at the three-month follow-up, compared with 22.3% at baseline).

On the other hand, children aged 10 to 12 tended to anticipate minimal impacts of the age restrictions at baseline, and likewise largely reported minimal impacts at three months (baseline average: 3.8; three-month follow-up average: 3.9). Of course, prior to the age restrictions taking effect, these children were below the previous age of access of 13 that was in place on most social media platforms.

Parents of children aged 10 to 12 reported less familial conflict about their child's social media use from baseline to three months, yet were more likely to be unaware that their child had used social media

At three months, we found that parents of children aged 10 to 12 reported a statistically significant decrease in the frequency with which they had argued with their child in the four weeks prior to the survey about them using or wanting to use social media[26] or certain social media apps (baseline average: 1.7; three-month follow-up average: 1.5).[27] At the same time, however, we found a statistically significant decline in parental awareness of their 10- to 12-year-old child's social media use at three months. Among parents of children aged 10 to 12 who reported having used social media in the four weeks prior to the survey:

- at baseline, 35.4% of parents weren't aware that their child had used social media
- at three months, 49.1% of parents weren't aware that their child had used social media.

We also found a statistically significant decrease in the extent to which parents of children aged 10 to 12 felt pressure to conform to what other parents are allowing when it came to social media (baseline average: 2.5; three-month follow-up average: 2.1).[28]

[26] Findings in this section relating to family conflict, parental awareness, and pressure to conform aren't limited to age-restricted platforms and may apply to both age-restricted and other social media platforms.
[27] Rated on a scale where 1 = 'Not at all (in the past 4 weeks)', 2 = 'About once a week or less', 3 = 'A few times a week (but not every day)', 4 = 'Once or twice a day', 5 = 'A few times a day or more often'.
[28] Rated on a scale where 1 = 'Strongly disagree', 2 = 'Disagree', 3 = 'Neither agree nor disagree', 4 = 'Agree', 5 = 'Strongly agree'.

On the other hand, the frequency with which parents of children aged 13 to 15 reported arguing with their child about their social media use didn't vary from baseline (average: 1.7) to three months (average: 1.7), nor was there a statistically significant increase in the proportion of parents of children aged 13 to 15 who were unaware that their child had used social media (baseline: 13.8%; three-month follow-up: 20.9%). The pressure felt by parents of children aged 13 to 15 to conform to what other parents are allowing also didn't vary from baseline (average: 2.5) to three months (average: 2.4).

Boys were using social media less frequently from baseline to three months, while girls were using messaging platforms more frequently

Our findings suggest that there was a shift in the frequency with which girls (*n* = 336) and boys (*n* = 452) used different digital platforms from baseline to three months. More specifically:

- There was a statistically significant decline in the frequency with which boys had used social media[29] in the four weeks prior to the survey (baseline average: 3.9; three-month follow-up average: 3.7).[30]
- There was a statistically significant increase in the frequency with which girls had used messaging platforms in the four weeks prior to the survey (baseline average: 3.5; three-month follow-up average: 3.8).[31]

Conversely, the frequency with which girls used social media in the four weeks prior to the survey didn't vary from baseline (average: 4.0) to three months (average: 4.0), nor did the frequency with which boys used messaging platforms (baseline average: 3.2; three-month follow-up average: 3.4).

Reflecting the reduction in frequency of use of social media platforms among boys, we also found a statistically significant reduction in the proportion of boys who had used an age-restricted social media platform in the four weeks prior to the survey at baseline (87.3%) compared with three months (80.8%). On the other hand, the proportion of girls who had used an age-restricted social media platform in the four weeks prior to the survey didn't differ from baseline (84.2%) to three months (81.9%).

Notably, despite not observing a statistically significant change in the frequency with which girls used social media from baseline to three months, our findings suggest that girls are more likely than boys to report a higher 'right age' for children to have accounts on social media. When asked 'What do you think is the right age for kids to have accounts on social media', girls reported an average age of 13.9, compared to an average of 13.3 reported by boys.

[29] Findings relating to the frequency with which children used social media aren't limited to age-restricted platforms and may apply to both age-restricted and other social media platforms.
[30] Rated on a scale where 1 = 'About once a week or less', 2 = 'A few times a week (but not every day)', 3 = 'Once or twice a day', 4 = 'A few times a day (but not every hour)', 5 = 'Once or twice an hour', 6 = 'Every few minutes'.
[31] As above.

Parents of girls reported less familial conflict about what their child was doing or seeing online from baseline to three months, yet were more likely to be unaware that their child had used social media

At three months, we found a statistically significant increase in the proportion of parents of girls who were unaware that their child had used social media. Among parents of girls who reported having used social media in the four weeks prior to the survey:

- at baseline, 20.2% of parents were unaware that their child had used social media in the four weeks prior to the survey
- at three months, 33.2% of parents were unaware that their child had used social media in the four weeks prior to the survey.

Parents of girls also reported a statistically significant decline in the frequency with which they argued with their children about what they are doing or seeing on other online platforms, including online games and streaming services (baseline average: 1.9; three-month follow-up average: 1.7).[32]

On the other hand, the frequency with which parents of boys reported arguing with their children about what they are doing or seeing on other online platforms didn't vary from baseline (average: 1.9) to three months (average: 1.8), nor was there a statistically significant change in the proportion of parents of boys who reported having used social media in the four weeks prior to the survey, who were unaware that their child had done so (baseline: 26.6%; three-month follow-up: 33.7%).

[32] Rated on a scale where 1 = 'Not at all (in the past 4 weeks)', 2 = 'About once a week or less', 3 = 'A few times a week (but not every day)', 4 = 'Once or twice a day', 5 = 'A few times a day or more often'.

What do these findings mean?

Our findings highlight that the early outcomes of the age restrictions are not being experienced uniformly, with differences emerging across age and gender among children, as well as across their parents. While overall outcomes at the population level remain limited at this stage, these findings suggest that how children experience and respond to the age restrictions may vary across subgroups.

In particular, some distinct patterns were seen among children aged 10 to 12 and among girls. The statistically significant decrease in parental awareness of children's use of social media was only apparent among parents of girls and parents of children aged 10 to 12. This may suggest that girls and children aged 10 to 12 are more likely to hide their social media use from their parents and this, in turn, may reduce opportunities for support if something were to go wrong online.

Alongside this reduced parental awareness, parents of children aged 10 to 12 reported reduced family conflict – specifically, fewer arguments related to their child using or wanting to use social media or certain apps. However, this change wasn't reported by the children themselves. These aren't necessarily contradictory findings. Rather, they may suggest that in some cases, parents' perceived improvements in family conflict may reflect reduced visibility rather than substantive changes in family dynamics.

There are also signs that early shifts in online activities may differ by gender. For example, increased use of messaging platforms among girls, alongside continued social media use, suggests potential adaptation rather than disengagement. By contrast, boys showed some reductions in use of age-restricted platforms without corresponding increases in alternative platform use. These patterns reinforce that behavioural responses to the age restrictions are not uniform; ongoing monitoring of these differences, and those among other subgroups, will be important, as these may evolve over time.

Finally, we found some evidence of increased normative change among parents of children aged 10 to 12 relative to parents of children aged 13 to 15, particularly in the extent to which they felt pressure to conform to what other parents allow when it comes to social media. This finding may suggest that parents of children aged 10 to 12 may be using the age restrictions as a tool to set or reinforce boundaries. However, given the concurrent evidence of decreased parental awareness of social media use, these findings highlight the need for families to balance rule setting with maintaining open and honest conversations about social media.

Taken together, these findings suggest that, while the age restrictions are a population-level intervention, early outcomes do differ across groups. This highlights the importance of continuing to monitor these differences in order to better understand how impacts evolve over time and to identify any unintended consequences or emerging risks. Future waves of the evaluation will also explore variation across a broader range of subgroups, including the intersection of age and gender, as well as other characteristics of children and families.

In our participants' words

I'm happy to have the support now, as my older child had much more pressure to join (social media) ... She was the only child sitting there with nothing while her friends all had TikTok ... I feel that I finally have some support to continue to have my own restrictions. I would have carried on anyway, but it's bloody hard feeling like the only parent actually doing something to restrict phone and app use.
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

It has allowed us to keep our younger child (year 7) off social media easier. Our older child (year 9, 14yrs) was on snap, came off at time of law change & enjoyed being disconnected. However recently gone back on due to being excluded as remainder of friends were still/back on snap.
(Parent of child aged 13 to 15)

My daughter bypassed the ban and her and her friends are all 14 years old and continue to use the apps they shouldn't be using. I absolutely hate this but can't seem to do anything about it. My son who is 11 and his friends aren't interested whatsoever in social media apps.
(Parent of child aged 10 to 12)

Conclusion

This report provides a snapshot of children's and parents' early experiences three months after the commencement of the social media age restrictions. Overall, while there was a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of children holding accounts on age-restricted platforms, many have retained access. The findings point to ineffective implementation of age assurance measures by platforms, with many children reporting that they hadn't been prompted to confirm their age. At the same time, there is limited evidence of widespread attempts by children or parents to bypass the age restrictions, and little indication that doing so requires substantial technical knowledge or effort, suggesting that barriers to access remain relatively low. The findings highlight a gap between policy intent and platform implementation and suggest that the foundational changes required at the platform level haven't yet been fully realised.

In line with the Theory of Change, these findings indicate that a foundational platform-level output hasn't yet been delivered, and that critical assumptions underpinning the Theory of Change haven't held. In particular, there is limited evidence that platforms are effectively preventing under-16s from creating and maintaining accounts or removing underage users. Similarly, the central assumption that age assurance measures are being effectively implemented doesn't appear to hold at this stage. As a result, the conditions required to activate the change pathway in the Theory of Change aren't yet in place, and it's therefore unsurprising that outcomes for most children and families are minimal at three months, with anticipated impacts observed among only a relatively small group of children.

While we did observe some early signals of shifts in perceived norms and attitudes towards social media, both among children and their parents, in the absence of strong platform implementation, it's possible that these shifts may have been driven more by other factors, including increased conversations around social media and youth wellbeing, within families, schools and the wider community, rather than by lived experience of account removals and their flow-on effects. External factors, including international momentum behind age restrictions, as well as the extensive public discourse and media coverage in the lead-up to the commencement of the age restrictions in Australia, are also expected to have contributed to these shifts. However, without corresponding improvements in platform compliance, these early shifts are unlikely to translate into sustained behavioural change.

Importantly, the findings also point to the emergence of potential unintended consequences. Most notably, there has been a decline in parental awareness of children's social media use, particularly among parents of 10- to 12-year-olds and girls. We also saw early signals of redistribution of online activities among children, including an increase in use of certain age-restricted platforms as well as other social media platforms, and an increased frequency of use of online video games and, especially among girls, messaging platforms. The findings further highlight that early outcomes aren't experienced uniformly, with differences emerging by age and gender. This reinforces that, while the age restrictions are a population-level intervention, their effects are likely to be differential and dynamic, with some groups adapting in different ways to others.

Taken together, these findings reflect the early phase of the policy's implementation, with the change pathway not yet fully activated. While there are early indications of both benefits and challenges at the individual level, these remain limited in scale and haven't yet translated into widespread population-level change. Meaningful progress towards intended outcomes, such as reduced time spent on restricted platforms, decreased exposure to harms, improved wellbeing, and reduced family conflict, will depend on whether platform-level implementation strengthens, particularly in relation to age assurance, detection, and the prevention and removal of underage accounts. Ongoing monitoring will be essential to assess whether early signals of change translate into sustained and more widely distributed outcomes over time, as implementation matures and evolves.



Appendix: Additional data tables and figures

Table A1: Demographic characteristics of children who participated in the 3-month follow-up survey[1]

Demographics	3-month follow-up sample (*n*)	3-month follow-up sample (weighted %)[2]
Age[3]		
10–12	336	39.9
13–15	467	43.1
16–17	218	17.0
Gender[4]		
Boys	569	51.3
Girls	437	47.3
Trans and gender-diverse[5]	15	1.4
State/territory		
NSW	314	31.6
VIC	280	25.0
QLD	208	21.3
SA	69	6.7
WA	98	10.7
TAS + NT + ACT	51	2.1
SEIFA[6]		
IRSAD[7] Quintile 1	145	14.6
IRSAD Quintile 2	165	17.8
IRSAD Quintile 3	257	24.4
IRSAD Quintile 4	231	23.0
IRSAD Quintile 5	222	20.0
Remoteness		
Major cities	796	78.7
Remote and regional areas	224	21.2
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity		
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	54	5.4
Total	**1,021**	**100.0**

Notes: [1] Children reported on their age and gender. Parents reported on their child's state/territory, SEIFA, remoteness, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity. Percentages may not sum to 100% as the table excludes those who selected 'Prefer not to say'.
[2] Weighting was applied to the sample to correct for minor deviations from the quota targets. Population statistics for weighting were sourced from comparable population estimates for children aged 10 to 16 published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
[3] Children's age when the 3-month follow-up survey was fielded in March to April 2026.
[4] Where a child declined to provide their gender identity, the gender provided by their parent is reported (*n* = 7). Where the gender provided by the parent and child differed, the gender provided by the child is reported (*n* = 14).
[5] 'Trans and gender-diverse' includes children who identified as 'non-binary', 'trans girl', 'trans boy', 'sistergirl', 'brotherboy', 'another gender' or 'questioning' their gender.
[6] The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) is a product developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics that ranks areas in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage.
[7] The **Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage** (IRSAD) summarises information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area. A low score indicates relatively greater disadvantage and a lack of advantage in general. A high score indicates a relative lack of disadvantage and greater advantage in general.

Table A2: Demographic characteristics of parents who participated in the 3-month follow-up survey[1]

Demographics	3-month follow-up sample (*n*)	3-month follow-up sample (weighted %)
Age[2]		
18–34	78	5.7
35–44	495	41.5
45–54	384	45.9
55+	64	6.9
Gender		
Men	355	44.6
Women	663	55.1
Non-binary	2	0.1
Total	**1,021**	**100.0**

Notes: [1] Percentages may not sum to 100% as table excludes those who selected prefer not to say.
[2] Parent's age when the baseline survey was fielded in November to December 2025.

Table A3: Reasons children aged 10 to 15 still held an account on Facebook at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 98) (%)

Reason	Total
The age listed on my Facebook account is 16 or above	34.5
Facebook has not yet asked me to verify my age	28.2
Facebook's age verification got my age wrong	9.3
My parent(s) helped me get around Facebook's age restriction	7.6
I was able to get around Facebook's age restriction by using another method – for example, by using make-up tricks or an ID that is not mine	7.4
I was able to get around Facebook's age restriction by using a VPN	5.2
Facebook deactivated my account but I appealed the deactivation and Facebook reactivated my account	2.9
Facebook deactivated my account but I found a way to open a new account	2.8
My parent(s) reported my account to Facebook but Facebook didn't deactivate my account	2.8
I don't know	8.2
I don't want to say	5.2

Q: You said that you still have your own account on Facebook. Which of the options below describes why/ what happened?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 who held a Facebook account at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 98).

Table A4: Reasons children aged 10 to 15 still held an account on Instagram at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 171) (%)

Reason	Total
Instagram has not yet asked me to verify my age	37.7
The age listed on my Instagram account is 16 or above	30.8
I was able to get around Instagram's age restriction by using another method – for example, by using make-up tricks or an ID that is not mine	10.8
Instagram's age verification got my age wrong	8.9
I was able to get around Instagram's age restriction by using a VPN	7.5
My parent(s) helped me get around Instagram's age restriction	5.7
Instagram deactivated my account but I found a way to open a new account	4.6
My parent(s) reported my account to Instagram but Instagram didn't deactivate my account	2.0
Instagram deactivated my account but I appealed the deactivation and Instagram reactivated my account	0.9
I don't know	5.3
I don't want to say	5.3

Q: You said that you still have your own account on Instagram. Which of the options below describes why/ what happened?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 who held an Instagram account at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 171).

Table A5: Reasons children aged 10 to 15 still held an account on Snapchat at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 204) (%)

Reason	Total
Snapchat has not yet asked me to verify my age	32.3
The age listed on my Snapchat account is 16 or above	29.9
Snapchat's age verification got my age wrong	20.1
I was able to get around Snapchat's age restriction by using another method – for example, by using make-up tricks or an ID that is not mine	11.2
Snapchat deactivated my account but I found a way to open a new account	6.0
My parent(s) helped me get around Snapchat's age restriction	4.8
I was able to get around Snapchat's age restriction by using a VPN	3.7
My parent(s) reported my account to Snapchat but Snapchat didn't deactivate my account	1.9
Snapchat deactivated my account but I appealed the deactivation and Snapchat reactivated my account	1.7
I don't know	4.2
I don't want to say	4.6

Q: You said that you still have your own account on Snapchat. Which of the options below describes why/ what happened?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 who held a Snapchat account at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 204).

Table A6: Reasons children aged 10 to 15 held an account on TikTok at the 3-month follow-up (%) (*n* = 191)

Reason	Total
TikTok has not yet asked me to verify my age	36.0
The age listed on my TikTok account is 16 or above	31.0
TikTok's age verification got my age wrong	14.6
TikTok deactivated my account but I found a way to open a new account	8.0
I was able to get around TikTok's age restriction by using another method – for example, by using make-up tricks or an ID that is not mine	5.1
I was able to get around TikTok's age restriction by using a VPN	5.0
My parent(s) helped me get around TikTok's age restriction	4.8
My parent(s) reported my account to TikTok but TikTok didn't deactivate my account	1.3
TikTok deactivated my account but I appealed the deactivation and TikTok reactivated my account	1.1
I don't know	5.5
I don't want to say	4.8

Q: You said that you still have your own account on TikTok. Which of the options below describes why/ what happened?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 who held a TikTok account at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 191).

Table A7: Reasons children aged 10 to 15 still held an account on YouTube at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 197) (%)

Reason	Total
YouTube has not yet asked me to verify my age	48.7
The age listed on my YouTube account is 16 or above	29.9
My parent(s) helped me get around YouTube's age restriction	10.4
I was able to get around YouTube's age restriction by using another method – for example, by using make-up tricks or an ID that is not mine	7.8
YouTube's age verification got my age wrong	7.3
I was able to get around YouTube's age restriction by using a VPN	6.0
My parent(s) reported my account to YouTube but YouTube didn't deactivate my account	4.1
YouTube deactivated my account but I found a way to open a new account	1.8
YouTube deactivated my account but I appealed the deactivation and YouTube reactivated my account	1.2
I don't know	4.2
I don't want to say	4.8

Q: You said that you still have your own account on YouTube. Which of the options below describes why/what happened?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 who held a YouTube account at the 3-month follow-up (*n* = 197).

Table A8: Parental awareness of their 10- to 15-year-old child's use of messaging platforms in the 4 weeks prior to the baseline (*n* = 670) and 3-month follow-up survey (*n* = 665) (%)

	Baseline	3-month follow-up
Child used messaging platform in the 4 weeks prior to the survey – parent not aware	18.9	14.7
Child used messaging platform in the 4 weeks prior to the survey – parent aware	69.5	69.4
Child used messaging platform in the 4 weeks prior to the survey – parent thought so*	11.7	15.9

Q: Has your child messaged, chatted with, called or video called anyone using an online messaging platform, email or app (like WhatsApp, Messenger Kids, iMessage, Discord, WeChat) in the past 4 weeks? IMPORTANT: Do not include social media apps here that your child might use to message or chat to others on, like Instagram, Snapchat or TikTok.
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 who reported having used a messaging platform in the 4 weeks prior to the survey (baseline: *n* = 670; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 665).
***Parents who selected 'No, definitely not' or 'Not that I'm aware of' in response to the survey question have been categorised as 'parent not aware'; parents who selected 'Yes, definitely' have been categorised as 'parent aware'; parents who selected 'I think so' have been categorised as 'parent thought so'.

Table A9: Parental awareness of their 10- to 15-year-old child's use of online video games in the 4 weeks prior to the baseline (*n* = 614) and 3-month follow-up survey (*n* = 691) (%)

	Baseline	3-month follow-up
Child played online video games in the 4 weeks prior to the survey – parent not aware	9.0	13.7
Child played online video games in the 4 weeks prior to the survey – parent aware	80.7	69.1
Child played online video games in the 4 weeks prior to the survey – parent thought so*	10.3	17.2

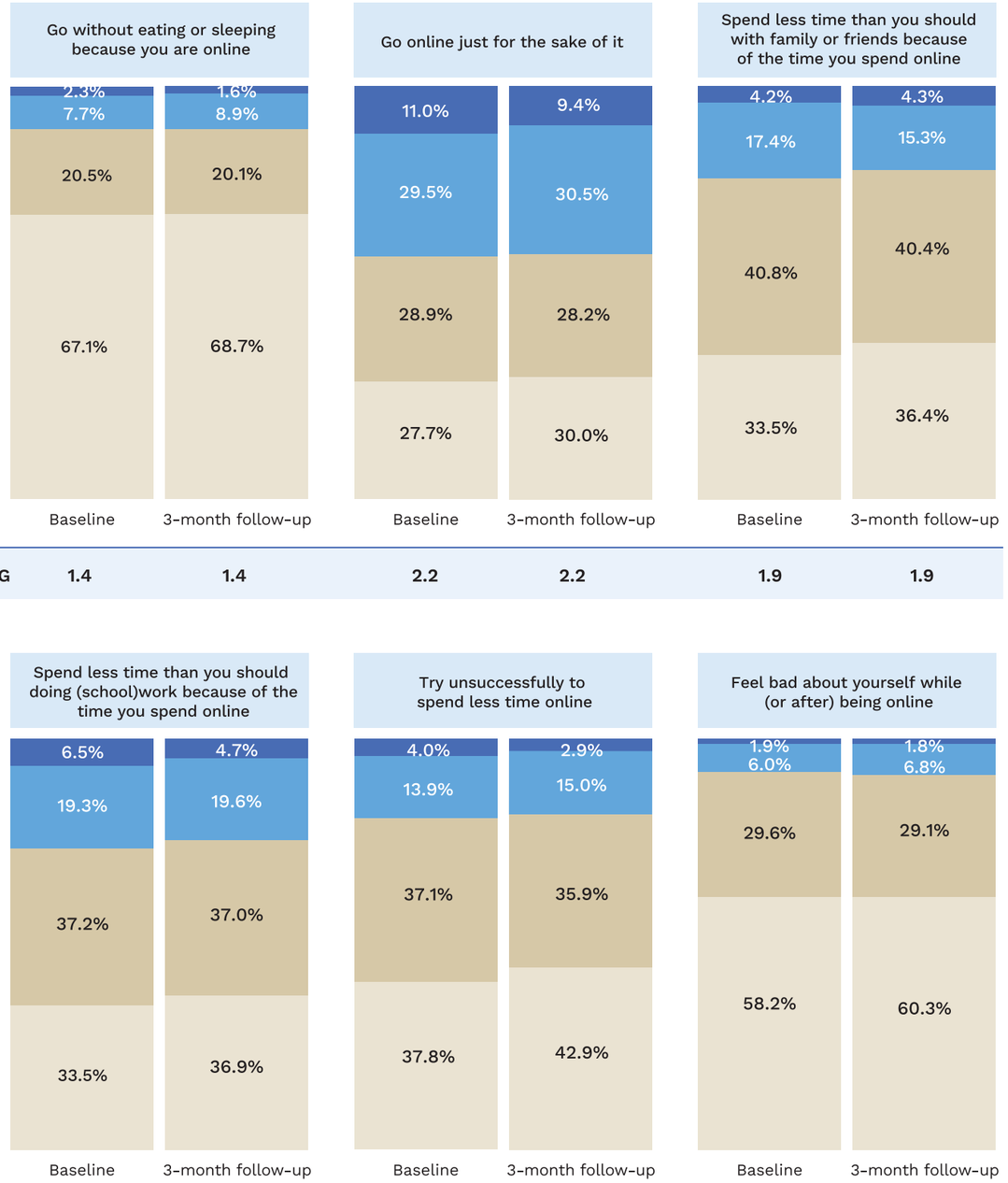
Q: Has your child done any of these things in the past 4 weeks - Played video games online?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 who reported having played online video games in the 4 weeks prior to the survey (baseline: *n* = 614; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 691).
Note: Different colour shading indicates that differences between baseline and 3-month follow-up are statistically significant at $p < .01$ level. White shading indicates that differences are not statistically significant at $p < .01$ level.
* Parents who selected 'No, definitely not' or 'Not that I'm aware of' in response to the survey question have been categorised as 'parent not aware'; parents who selected 'Yes, definitely' have been categorised as 'parent aware'; parents who selected 'I think so' have been categorised as 'parent thought so'.

Table A10: Parental awareness of their 10- to 15-year-old child's use of AI chatbots, assistants or companions in the 4 weeks prior to the baseline (*n* = 442) and 3-month follow-up survey (*n* = 462) (%)

	Baseline	3-month follow-up
Child used AI in the 4 weeks prior to the survey – parent not aware	39.3	31.9
Child used AI in the 4 weeks prior to the survey – parent aware	31.5	30.8
Child used AI in the 4 weeks prior to the survey – parent thought so*	29.3	37.3

Q: Has your child done any of these things in the past 4 weeks – Used an AI chatbot, AI assistant or AI companion (like ChatGPT, My AI, characteri.ai)?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 who reported having used an AI chatbot, assistant or companion in the 4 weeks prior to the survey (baseline: *n* = 442; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 462).
***Parents who selected 'No, definitely not' or 'Not that I'm aware of' in response to the survey question have been categorised as 'parent not aware'; parents who selected 'Yes, definitely' have been categorised as 'parent aware'; parents who selected 'I think so' have been categorised as 'parent thought so'.

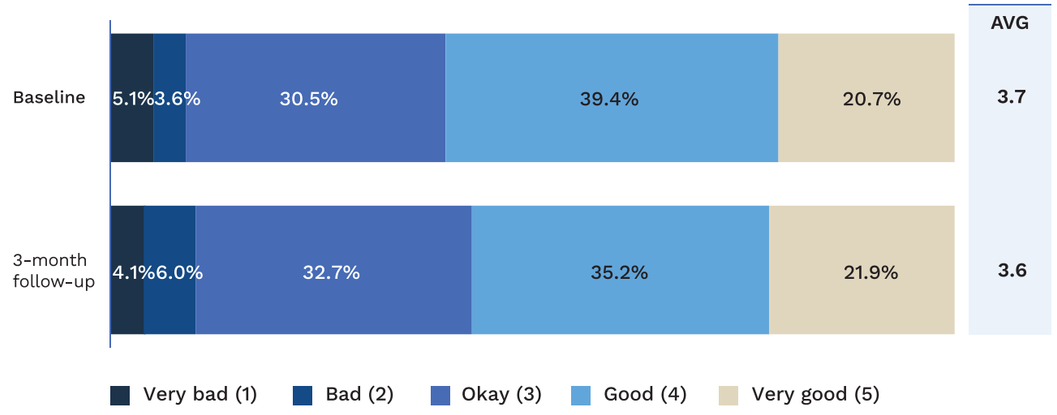
Figure A1: Potentially problematic online use reported by children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



AVG	**1.4**	**1.4**	**2.2**	**2.2**	**1.9**	**1.9**
AVG	**2.0**	**1.9**	**1.8**	**1.8**	**1.5**	**1.5**

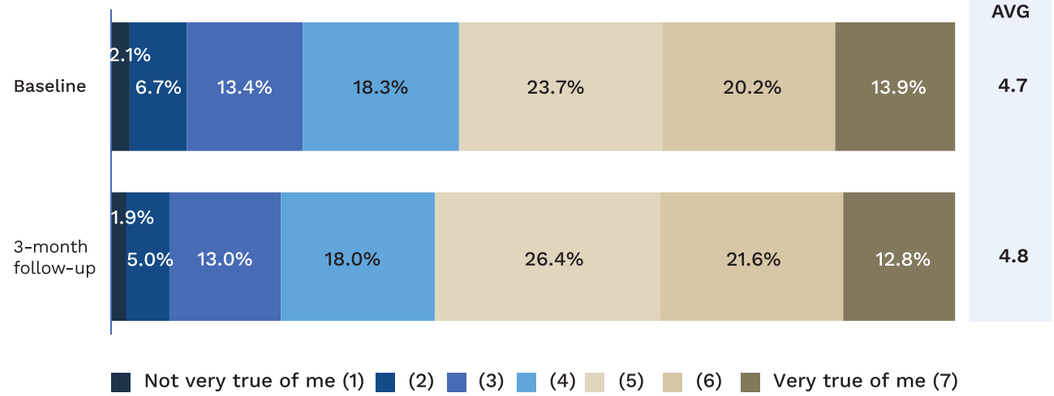
Q: How often, if at all, do you personally ...?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'.

Figure A2: Sleep quality reported by children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: In the past 2 weeks, how would you rate the overall quality of your sleep?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'.

Figure A3: Self-esteem reported by children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: How true or untrue is the following statement for you? – I have high self-esteem.
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Self-esteem is assessed with the Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale. Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'.

Table A11: Psychological wellbeing reported by children aged 10 to 15 (baseline: *n* = 783; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 785)

SWEMWBS*	Baseline	3-month follow-up
Average score	18.4	18.0
Median score	18.6	19.0

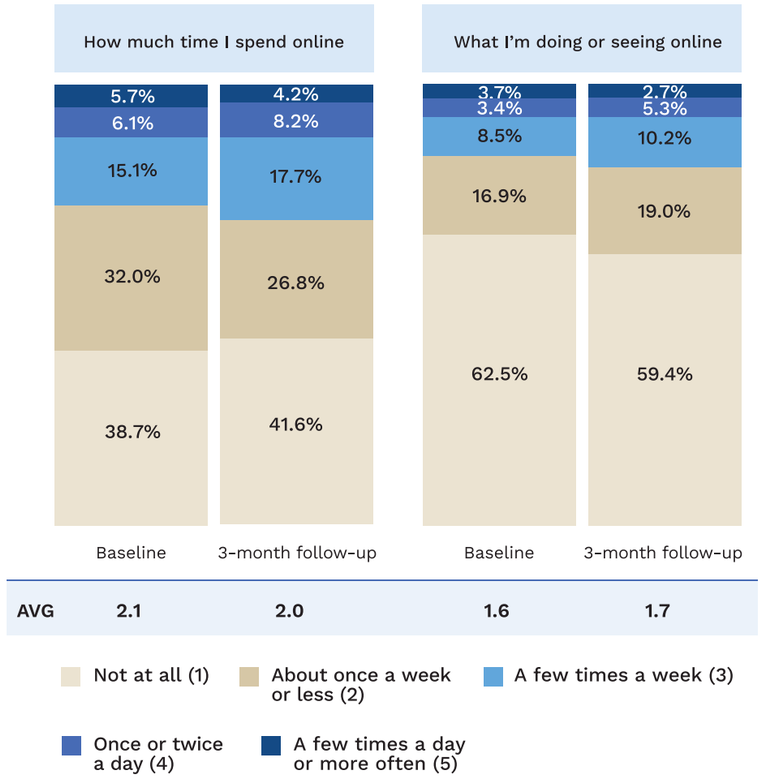
Q: In the past 4 weeks, how often have you felt this way?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (baseline: *n* = 783; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 785). Excludes those who selected 'Not sure' or 'Prefer not to say'.
Note: *Psychological wellbeing was assessed with the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS).

Table A12: Internalising mental health symptoms reported by children aged 10 to 15 (baseline: *n* = 785; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 786)

K6*	Baseline	3-month follow-up
Average score	11.4	10.0
Median score	11.3	10.0

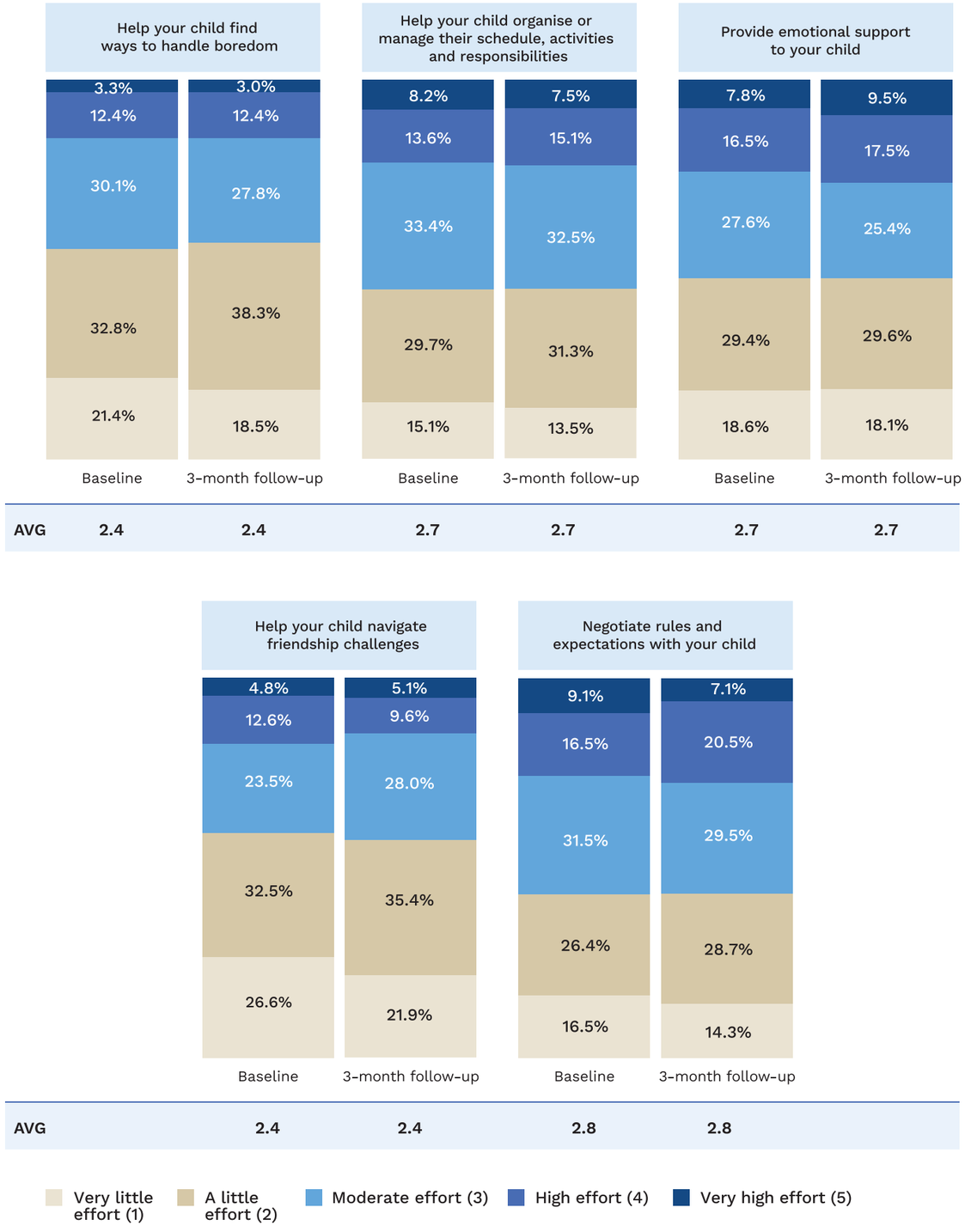
Q: In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel ...?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (baseline: *n* = 785; 3-month follow-up: *n* = 786). Excludes those who selected 'Not sure' or 'Prefer not to say'.
Note: *Internalising symptoms were assessed with the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6).

Figure A4: Family tension or conflict regarding digital technology use reported by children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803)



Q: Over the past 4 weeks, how often, if at all, have you argued with your parents or caregivers about ...?
Sample: Children aged 10 to 15 (*n* = 803).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'I don't know' and 'I don't want to say'.

Figure A5: Parent-reported effort of support provided to 10- to 15-year-old child (*n* = 692 to 791)



Q: Still thinking about the past 4 weeks, how much effort (mental, emotional and/or physical) was it for you to ...?
Sample: Parents of children aged 10 to 15 who had provided each type of support in the 4 weeks prior to the survey (*n* = 692 to 791).
Note: Figure and average score exclude 'Not sure' and 'Prefer not to say'.

