

# The Big Conversation with Parents in Wales

## Parents' Views on Children's Social Media Use and Online Safety



### Background

In September 2025, Parents Connect Wales undertook a series of focus groups with parents and carers to explore their views on children's use of social media, screen time and online safety. Five focus groups were held in Blaenau Gwent. These involved 26 parents and carers of children aged between 0-16 years old. The sessions were run by local practitioners, using the [Parents Connect Wales consultation toolkit](#).

This briefing presents the main themes arising from the focus groups. It provides an overview of parental experiences, concerns and priorities and highlights where further support and policy development may be required.

### Key Findings

#### 1. Managing children's digital use is becoming increasingly difficult

Parents reported that keeping up with children's online behaviour is challenging. Current tools such as parental controls, app settings and family-link systems were often described as:

- Too complex or difficult to navigate
- Inconsistent across devices
- Not sufficiently reliable in filtering inappropriate content

## **2. Strong preference for delaying social media use**

Parents generally favoured delaying children's access to social media until the mid-teen years.

- Some expressed regret about allowing access too early.
- Decisions typically depended on a child's maturity or transition to secondary school.
- Several parents felt primary-aged children should not have social media at all.
- Peer pressure emerged as a major factor; many parents felt compelled to allow access earlier when their child's friends were already online.

## **3. Mixed methods used to support online safety at home**

Parents rely on a combination of strategies, including:

### **Monitoring and supervision**

- Checking devices regularly
- Reviewing content and screen activity
- Allowing internet use only when adults are present

### **Controls and technical restrictions**

- Parental control apps, family-link apps, and internet provider settings to limit access
- Managing screen time limits
- Blocking inappropriate content
- Using shared or linked accounts to oversee children's activity

### **Use of shared spaces**

- Restricting device use to shared family areas.
- Prohibiting devices in bedrooms, especially overnight, to prevent unsupervised use.

### **Communication and awareness**

- Frequent conversations about online risks, behaviour and safety
- Challenges noted in some families, particularly where children have additional needs, and may not fully understand the risks

## **4. Families feel under pressure**

While parents are proactive and committed, many reported feeling overwhelmed by:

- The pace of technological change
- The growing complexity of safety tools
- The social pressures children face through peers
- Balancing safety with independence and trust

## Policy, practice and recommendations:

- **Practical accessible support** available for families in managing screen-time.
- **Clear and consistent advice** from schools and services on reliable and effective parental controls and digital safety.
- **Increase community awareness** via campaigns on online risks and harms
- **Improve digital education** through Wales-wide programmes for parents and children, supported by clear national guidance on online risks, screen-time and parental controls.
- **Provide clear digital safety approaches in schools**, including guidance on phone use and education on online risks and safe use of AI.
- **Simplify digital safety tools** by requiring technology companies to provide easy-to-use parental controls, stronger age-verification and clearer alerts for unsafe content.
- **Strengthen platform accountability** requiring social media and gaming companies to take greater responsibility for stricter age verification, preventing harmful content, bullying and abuse.
- **Address emerging AI risks** through further research, national guidance and support to help parents to understand and manage children's use of AI tools.

A co-ordinated, Wales-wide approach is vital. Policymakers, schools, services and technology companies need to work together to make digital safety simpler, strengthen protections, and ensure families have the tools, guidance and confidence to support children in an increasingly complex online world—while reducing the pressure placed on families themselves.