

Mental Health First Aid guidance

Assisting those affected by social media access changes

NOTE: It is important to tailor your assistance to the needs of the person you are helping. This guide is a general set of recommendations only. In situations where the adult has an organisational responsibility, any relevant organisational policy needs to take precedence over this guide.

From 10 December 2025, access to a range of social media platforms is restricted for Australians under the age of 16. This change may influence how young people interact, socialise, learn and communicate. As with any major change, people respond in different ways. Some adjust quickly, while others find transitions more challenging.

For many young people, a change to social media access may mean less overall social time and more time offline, which may be a substantial change to their everyday life. Those who rely on social media for connection or daily routines may feel frustration, irritability or disconnection.

Many young people who may initially feel distressed adapt within days or weeks to change. Some could even experience increased resilience or stronger community connections. Others may continue to find things difficult, and their ongoing distress could be a sign of a mental health problem developing, which may not necessarily be related to the social media access change.

This guide helps members of the public to support someone experiencing an emerging or ongoing mental health problem, at the time of the enforced change in social media access.

Those who have had Mental Health First Aid training can use their knowledge and skills in assisting the person, until appropriate professional help was received or a crisis has been resolved.

Support can be offered to the young person or the adult in their life, who may benefit from confiding their feelings to a trusted other.

How do people experience change?

People may have a range of concerns about the enforced change in social media access. For some young people, social media is more than entertainment and changes to access feel particularly significant. For example, young people who rely on digital spaces to maintain social connections, build a sense of identity, or seek peer support may experience more disruption, higher levels of stress and need extra understanding and care from those around them.



A young person may experience:

- Worry about losing social connections
- Reduced access to communities or services they value
- Fear of becoming isolated
- Frustration about losing control or having reduced decision-making



Adults may:

- Be concerned about enforcing the new rules
- Be worried about those directly affected
- Have difficulty supporting distressed or anxious family members
- Be managing multiple pressures at once



Families and households may be:

- Adjusting to changes in routines and expectations
- Experiencing increased conflict or frustration

The key message is to avoid assumptions. Major changes can influence people in different ways. Be aware of those around you and take note of any signs that someone may need extra support.



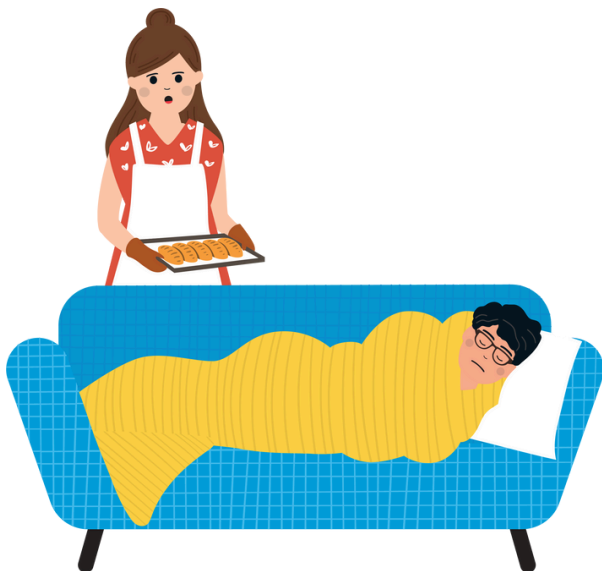
Signs to look out for in adults and young people who may need support.

Feeling unsettled during periods of change is normal. However, if you notice major changes in a person's thinking, emotions or behaviour that disrupt their daily functioning and last longer than expected (this can be weeks, months and even long term), consider having a mental health first aid conversation. Signs vary from person to person. These may be present in young people or in the adults who care for them.

Note: young people may be in school, have jobs and be engaged in extra curricular activities.

At home, you might notice:

- changes in sleeping, eating and energy levels
- neglecting responsibilities that a person used to uphold
- withdrawal from social interactions that a person used to enjoy
- uncharacteristic outbursts of emotion, such as sadness, anger or irritability
- adverse effects from substance use
- under or over-reacting to what others say or do
- increased secrecy or paranoia
- more or less time spent at home, especially without explanation.



Out of home (e.g. at school, work or clubs), you might notice:

- a decline in the quality of the person's activities in the workplace and/or in school
- dishevelled appearance
- frequent lateness
- frequent sick days, complaints of headaches and vague physical symptoms or unexplained absenteeism
- conflicts with peers in the classroom and/or at work
- difficulties with concentration and decision-making.



These lists cannot tell you for certain that a person has a mental health problem, but they may indicate that you should talk to them about what you have noticed and encourage appropriate support.

If you are concerned about possible impacts associated with the social media access restrictions, for yourself or someone else, start the conversation now.

How can I support a young person?

With reduced access to online social spaces, some young people may consider using harmful coping strategies. Keep an eye on how they're spending their time and gently support healthier options.

It can help to maintain other familiar routines such as regular meals, exercise, school commitments, and connecting socially through available communication methods like voice calls, messaging apps allowed under the guidelines, or supervised platforms.

Changes in behaviour (e.g. withdrawal, irritability, frustration, or anger) may feel challenging and cause problems for the young person at home or school, or with friends or family.

These behaviours are likely to be a response to losing control, familiar online spaces and connections, worries about friendships or the future, or the discomfort of altered routines. Be caring and listen attentively and sensitively.

Young people are likely to adjust at different paces, so keep this in mind as you think about how the person is managing over time. Some may become more sensitive or stressed for a while, and good and bad days are both normal.

What should I say?

- ✓ Ask the young person how they would like to be supported. If they want to talk, be ready to listen.
- ✓ Encourage them to take time out when needed and to engage in what helps them during a change, such as sport, relaxation or mindfulness.
- ✓ Talk about healthy coping strategies and try to steer them away from unhelpful habits.
- ✓ Let them know about services and supports available to them, e.g. many youth and mental-health services offer online, phone, or text-based support that will still be accessible.
- ✓ Provide accurate information. If you're unsure how the new rules work, it's okay to say so instead of guessing.
- ✓ Encourage them to try a new hobby or return to an old interest, but don't push. For some young people, being productive will help them feel better. Others may feel overwhelmed and need extra rest or downtime, and that's completely fine too.
- ✓ Try to remain calm, patient, and non-judgemental during this adjustment time. If the conversation becomes too distressing or you feel out of your depth, help them connect with another trusted adult, counsellor, or support line.





What should I avoid?

- ✘ Do not force them to talk about how they feel or what they are experiencing.
- ✘ Do not interrupt to share your own opinions or experiences.
- ✘ Do not minimise their experience or compare it to others, e.g., “It’s not such a bad thing,” or “I survived without social media when I was young.”
- ✘ Do not try and offer solace by focusing on the explanations for the changes, e.g. “This is for your own good; you should be grateful,” or “It’s the law”
- ✘ Do not discourage them from expressing their emotions, e.g. Don’t say “Stop crying,” “Calm down,” or “You need to get over it.”
- ✘ Do not tell them how they should be feeling.
- ✘ Avoid making promises you may not be able to keep, e.g. “This won’t change anything.”



Read more about [considerations when providing mental health first aid to an adolescent](#) by accessing our [guidelines](#).



How can I support an adult?

Some adults could experience stress related to enforcing the social media restrictions or supporting the young people in their households.

- Encourage people to take time out and use relaxation methods and mindfulness to create some mental space.
- Discuss good coping strategies and encourage avoiding alcohol use.
- Give accurate information if they want it, and if you have it.
- Don’t be afraid to admit lack of knowledge if this is the case.
- Do not minimise their experience or compare it to others.
- Do not make promises you may not be able to keep, e.g. “Everything will be back to normal soon”.

If the person wants to talk, be ready to listen non-judgementally. Individuals, families or communities are likely to be impacted differently so it is important not to make assumptions. Try to remain calm and patient during this adjustment.

Mental Health First Aid guidelines can be downloaded from mhfa.com.au/resources/mental-health-first-aid-guidelines

Please cite this guide as follows:

Mental Health First Aid International. A guide to assisting someone at a time of change to social media access. Mental Health First Aid International; 2025.



Where to seek support

Kids helpline

1800 55 1800 | kidshelpline.com.au

Beyond Blue

1300 22 4636 | beyondblue.org.au

SANE Australia

1800 18 7263 | sane.org

QLife for LGBTIQ+

1800 184 527 (3pm - 12am) | qlife.org.au

13YARN

13 92 76 | 13yarn.org.au

If someone is experiencing thoughts of suicide

Lifeline

13 11 14 | lifeline.org.au

Suicide Callback Service

1300 659 467 | suicidecallbackservice.org.au



Additional resources

My Circle

A social platform supported by Kids Helpline counsellors for young people aged 12-25 years.

Headspace

Online communities and group chats for young people aged 12-25 and adults supporting young people.

Orygen #chatsafe

For parents and carers supporting young people to have safe online conversations about self-harm and suicide.

eSafety Commissioner

Get ready guide for the social media ban and personalised action plan for parents and carers.

Learn to support

Anyone can have a conversation that may save a life. Become a Mental Health First Aider at mhfa.com.au.

MHFAI Guidelines

“Considerations when providing MHFA to adolescent”

Acknowledgement of Country

Mental Health First Aid International Ltd acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and pays our respect to Elders past and present. We extend our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognise their continuing culture and connection to lands, waters and communities.



Recognition of Lived Experience

Mental Health First Aid International Ltd wishes to recognise people with lived and living experience of mental health problems and suicidality, and their loved ones who care and support them. With diverse identities, challenges and life experiences, each journey is unique and invaluable. Thank you to those who have courageously shared stories to help educate the global community.

We recognise, value and celebrate diversity and act in the spirit of inclusion.

