NEWS LESSON

The Ban Is in Place. Are Teenagers Better Off?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you have wanted an age limit on social media when you were younger?
2. What makes an online space feel suitable for young people?
3. Would an age limit change a habit if friends kept using the app?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**dilemma**	☐	A	the process of putting a plan into action
2	**intervention**	☐	B	officially chosen for a particular purpose
3	**premature**	☐	C	happening too early, before enough is known
4	**futility**	☐	D	the fact that something has no chance of working
5	**assurance**	☐	E	checking or confirming that something is true
6	**designated**	☐	F	an action taken to change a situation
7	**implementation**	☐	G	a difficult choice where every option has a problem
8	**excessive**	☐	H	much more than is reasonable or needed

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Since 10 December 2025, Australian platforms have had to take reasonable steps to keep under-16s from holding accounts. Counting deleted accounts is easy; knowing whether teenagers are better off is harder.

1 From 10 December 2025, designated social media platforms in Australia had to take reasonable steps to prevent under-16s from keeping accounts. The policy was presented as a bold intervention in a problem that parents, schools and regulators had struggled to get to grips with. It shifted responsibility towards technology companies, but it left open a harder question: what would success actually look like for teenagers themselves?

2 The popular description of the policy as a "ban" obscures important distinctions. It does not outlaw every encounter with social-media content, nor does it prevent under-16s from using all digital communication services. What it targets is account ownership on selected platforms, leaving publicly accessible material and excluded services available under different conditions. The gap between the headline and the law matters, because a measure judged against a promise it never made will always look like a failure. Precision here is not pedantry: it determines what the policy can reasonably be expected to achieve.

3 Advocates argue that the rules provide a necessary pause before young people are exposed to systems built around recommendation algorithms, social comparison and continual engagement. The policy may also take the pressure off parents, who are otherwise left to hold the line alone while their children insist that everybody else is allowed to join. Critics, however, warn that some adolescents fall back on online communities for friendship, information and support unavailable locally, and that closing an account can sever a genuine connection as readily as a harmful one.

4 Enforcement presents a second dilemma. Age assurance must be effective enough to limit access without encouraging excessive data collection, and the more reliably a platform establishes how old somebody is, the more it tends to know about them. Removing millions of accounts gives a company a large number to report. It does not tell us whether teenagers spend less time online, move to other apps or feel any better.

5 Early research published by the eSafety Commissioner in July 2026 offered insight into the initial implementation while leaving many longer-term outcomes unresolved. Evaluating the policy means separating visible administrative results from changes in children's actual experiences, a demanding task in an online environment that shifts faster than the research designed to track it. Nor is there any comparison available with an Australia that left the rules alone, which makes confident claims in either direction hard to sustain.

6 What Australia has created, then, is an international test case rather than a settled answer. Governments watching closely will be tempted to read the first figures as vindication or as proof of futility, and both readings would be premature. If the underlying harm arises from the design of online platforms, age restrictions may deliver partial protection without touching the commercial incentives that shape the technology in the first place. The broader debate is less about when young people should be let in than about what kind of digital environment they are eventually entering.

Sources: Australian eSafety Commissioner. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer implies that a company's total of closed accounts is not evidence that teenagers benefit. T F NG
2. According to the text, the 2026 research answered most questions about long-term effects. T F NG
3. The eSafety Commissioner's research found that many teenagers had moved to other apps. T F NG
4. The writer suggests the policy would look like a failure if people expected it to end all contact with social-media content. T F NG
5. The writer treats precise wording about the policy as a minor concern. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

complacency	dissuade	incentives	obscures	outlaw	pedantry	sustain	vindication

1. A headline that boasts of millions of closed accounts often _____ the more important question of whether anyone is safer.
2. Few governments could _____ every form of online contact between teenagers without also silencing ordinary conversation.
3. With so little evidence, it is hard to _____ the claim that the policy has transformed teenage behaviour.
4. For ministers, the falling number of accounts offered welcome _____ of a policy many experts had doubted.
5. Tech firms will redesign their products only if the commercial _____ to do so outweigh the costs.
6. Pointing out that a word is being misused is not mere _____ when the misuse changes who gets the blame.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The minister's _____ that every platform would comply proved naive. **(ASSUME)**
2. Critics noted the regulator's _____ to share fuller figures. **(RELUCTANT)**
3. The rules were _____ applied in the first weeks, with some platforms acting far faster than others. **(CONSISTENT)**
4. The study's findings are, at best, _____ because the sample was small. **(CONCLUDE)**
5. Nobody should underestimate the _____ of teenagers who are determined to get online. **(RESOURCEFUL)**

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Look at what follows the gap: an adjective, a noun phrase, a full clause, an inverted clause or an -ing form. Each word takes a different structure.

albeit	conversely	nor	notwithstanding	provided	thereby	whereas

1. The early figures are encouraging, _____ incomplete.
2. _____ the sheer number of closed accounts, nobody can yet say that teenagers are happier.
3. Supporters see a necessary pause, _____ critics see a severed lifeline.
4. _____ is there any control group against which to compare the results.
5. Removing accounts in bulk may satisfy the regulator, _____ leaving the design of the apps untouched.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What should a platform fix besides checking someone's age?
2. Would a ban help someone whose friends organised everything online?
3. What would make a social-media rule feel fair to the teenagers affected?

9 Role-play: can I keep my account?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the parent

Your 15-year-old wants to keep using a messaging app. You like the new rules because they stop the arguments at home. Ask at least two questions before you decide. You can say yes, no, or yes with a condition.

Student B · the teenager

Your best friends live far away and you only talk to them on one app. Explain why it matters to you and suggest a way to use it safely.

Useful phrases

I'd really like to stay in touch with my friends.

It's not just for fun, it's how we talk.

How much time would you spend on it?

I'm worried about what you might see.

We could try it for a month and then talk again.

That's fair, I'll agree to that.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the parent say yes, and was it a fair decision?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 F · 3 C · 4 D · 5 E · 6 B · 7 A · 8 H

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 obscures · 2 outlaw · 3 sustain · 4 vindication · 5 incentives · 6 pedantry

6 Word forms

1 assumption · 2 reluctance · 3 inconsistently · 4 inconclusive · 5 resourcefulness

7 Language focus

1 albeit · 2 Notwithstanding · 3 whereas · 4 Nor · 5 thereby

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