

Investigating age limits for social media and restrictions on addictive functions

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Social media use has long been part of the everyday lives of most children and adolescents. Many of them exhibit risky, and in some cases even addictive, behavior. While social media use can certainly have

positive effects for young people, intensive use can negatively impact mental, emotional, and social well-being, leading to symptoms such as depression and anxiety, impaired attention, and sleep problems.

In a [discussion paper](#) published by the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, the researchers involved therefore recommend applying the precautionary principle. In the paper "Social Media and the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents," they give [policy recommendations](#) to protect children and adolescents from the negative effects of social media, for example by setting a minimum age for access or by restricting certain functions. The paper was published on 13 August 2025 and an English translation is now available.

The discussion paper provides insight into current research on the influence of social media on the mental health of children and adolescents. Most of the available evidence is correlative and of a non-causal nature. Cross-sectional studies show an association between social media use and increased mental health burdens. Some [longitudinal studies](#) also suggest that intensive social media use can be the cause of these burdens.

The authors therefore advocate using the [precautionary principle](#), according to which [preventive measures](#) should be undertaken when there are indications of potentially negative effects, even if the magnitude of the actual risk has not yet been scientifically established.

The authors claim that policies are needed to protect children and adolescents, because intensive social media use poses considerable risks. The researchers involved in the paper set out specific recommendations for action in order to protect children and adolescents from the risks posed by social media use, while simultaneously enabling them to engage with social media in a reflective and competent manner.

They recommend that children under 13 should not be permitted to open social media accounts, and 13- to 15-year-olds should only be allowed to use social media in accordance with legally required parental permission. In addition, social media for 13- to 17-year-olds should function in an age-appropriate way, for example with respect to algorithmic content suggestions, a ban on personalized advertising, and the prohibition of addictive functions such as push messages or infinite scrolling. The researchers also recommend banning smartphone use in daycare centers and schools up to and including grade 10.

The discussion paper also explains how age limits and age-appropriate restrictions could be implemented on social media, with regulation at the EU level being a key option. They recommend that the German government advocate for such regulation at the EU level.

One highly promising approach is the already planned introduction of the "EUDI wallet," which will enable a digital proof of age in line with data protection regulations. To promote an informed approach to social media, the authors suggest embedding a digital education curriculum in daycare centers and schools to prepare [children](#) and adolescents for challenges related to digital life.

Teaching and childcare staff should be trained to recognize and address risky or addictive behavior at an early stage. In addition, low-threshold public health campaigns should inform families about the impact of social media on mental health and possibilities to positively shape social media use. Further research is needed to better understand [social media use](#) among this age group and to evaluate the effectiveness of protective measures.

More information: Social Media and the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. www.leopoldina.org/en/socialmedia-children

Provided by Leopoldina

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