

FAMILY ONLINE SAFETY INSTITUTE



A Ban Briefing:

Children & Parents' Perceptions of Social Media and Classroom Smartphone Bans in the U.S. and Australia

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SURVEY REPORT**

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WHAT THIS BRIEFING EXAMINES

On December 10, 2025, Australia officially banned¹ certain social media platforms for children under the age of 16. Several tech platforms, including Meta, Snapchat, YouTube, and TikTok, must ensure that children under 16 do not hold accounts on their platforms, or they risk large fines from the Australian government. This ban follows a groundswell of advocacy from Australian parents, who fear that social media has affected their children's mental health, social skills, and more. Critics and proponents alike have their eyes on Australia as this unprecedented ban rolls out in the coming months².

As the ban continues to generate both positive and negative press on a global scale, the Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI)³ set out to survey those most affected by the ban: parents and children. As part of FOSI's bi-annual Online Safety Survey, children aged 10-17 and parents of children aged 10-17 in both Australia and the United States were asked to give their views on both social media bans and school smartphone restrictions. Clear patterns emerged in both countries, with some pronounced disparities between parents and children. This research briefing outlines these patterns, with the goal of creating a nuanced understanding of ban attitudes among parents and children in both the United States and Australia.

¹While the Australian government has recently referred to the Social Media Minimum Age Act as a social media “delay,” for the purposes of this brief we will refer to it as an under 16 “ban.”

²[Australia is banning social media for kids under 16. How will it work?](#) Helen Livingstone, BBC. November 24, 2025

³[Family Online Safety Institute](#)





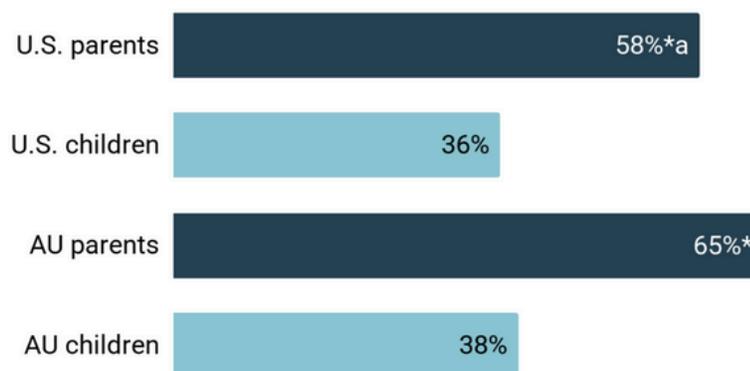
SOCIAL MEDIA BAN: SUPPORT VS. IMPLEMENTATION CONFIDENCE

Among parents, a social media ban for children under 16 is rather popular, **with more than half of both U.S. parents and Australian parents supporting a ban**. Specifically, 65% of Australian parents and 58% of U.S. parents are in support. While the majority of parents approve of this measure, popularity drops steeply among children. **Only 38% of Australian children and 36% of U.S. children support a social media ban for children under 16.**

38% of Australian children and 36% of U.S. children support a social media ban for children under 16.

It is important to note that majorities of children in both countries disagree with a social media ban, because they are the group most affected by it. This raises important questions: Will a social media ban benefit children as much as parents think it will? Will children attempt to circumvent this ban, due to its unpopularity?

Support for a social media ban for under 16s



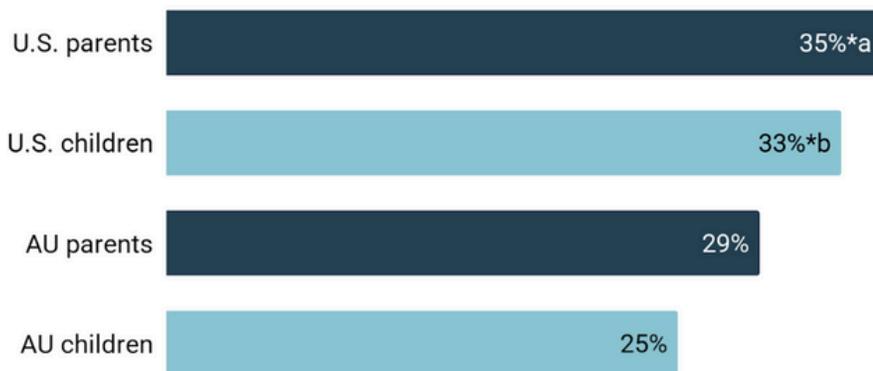
Graph represents answers to the agreement statement: "I support a social media ban for children under the age of 16." Bar with an asterisk (*) and the letter "a" differs significantly from from the light blue bars, U.S. children and AU children ($p < .05$). Bar with an asterisk (*) differs significantly from all other bars in graph ($p < .05$). Respondents are U.S. Parents (n=1,000), U.S. Children (n=1,000), Australian Parents (n=1,000), and Australian Children (n=1,000).



While parental support for a ban is high, their confidence for successful government implementation is rather low. Just 35% of U.S. parents believe a social media ban for under 16s would be implemented properly by the government. Notably, **just 29% of Australian parents are confident that the government will successfully implement this ban.** Children and parents are much more aligned when it comes to government implementation, with 33% of U.S. children and 25% of Australian children believing this ban would be executed properly.

Just 29% of Australian parents are confident that the government will successfully implement this ban.

Confidence in government implementation of a social media ban for under 16s



Graph represents answers to the question: How confident are you that a national ban on social media for anyone under the age of 16 would be implemented successfully by the government? Bar with an asterisk () and the letter "a" differs significantly from bottom two bars, AU parents and AU children ($p < .05$). Bar with an asterisk (*) and the letter "b" differs significantly from bottom bar, AU children ($p < .05$). Respondents are U.S. Parents ($n=1,000$), U.S. Children ($n=1,000$), Australian Parents ($n=1,000$), and Australian Children ($n=1,000$).*



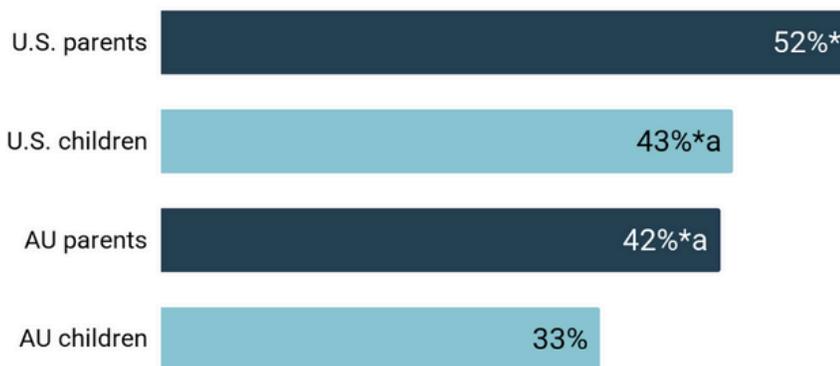
SOCIAL MEDIA BANS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Supporters of social media bans often reference social media’s potential negative impacts on youth mental health. While the evidence tying social media to poor mental health remains largely inconclusive⁴, this is a real concern for many parents that should not be ignored. With this in mind, it is important to investigate if parents and children think a social media ban will lead to better mental health outcomes. U.S. parents are the most likely to think a social media ban would lead to better mental health outcomes for children under 16, with just over half (52%) agreeing that a ban would help protect child mental health.

Australian parents, on the other hand, are less likely to agree with this sentiment, with about one-in-four (42%) believing that this ban will help child mental health. A similar number (43%) of U.S. children think a ban would support their mental health. Australian children are the least confident, with just one-third (33%) agreeing that a social media ban could lead to better mental health outcomes.

Conversations about youth mental health are incredibly important, especially within the context of our digital age. As the under 16s ban takes effect in Australia, tracking the mental health trends of the children affected should be a key component of further research.

Confidence in a social media ban for under 16s to protect the mental health of children



Graph represents answers to the question: How confident are you that a ban on social media will/would help protect the mental health of children under the age of 16? Bar with an asterisk () differs significantly from all other bars in graph ($p < .05$). Bars with an asterisk (*) and the letter “a” differ significantly from final bar, AU children, ($p < .05$). Respondents are U.S. Parents (n=1,000), U.S. Children (n=1,000), Australian Parents (n=1,000), and Australian Children (n=1,000).*

⁴[Everyone Says Social Media Is Bad for Teens. Proving It Is Another Thing.](#) Claire Cain Miller, New York Times. June 17, 2023.



SOCIAL MEDIA BANS AND SCREEN TIME

Beyond mental health, parents and advocates are also concerned about high levels of screen time among youth, and how this could impact their off-screen lives. An oft-cited argument in favor of a social media ban is the assumption that it will cut down on kids' screen time. Ultimately, around half of parents and children do believe that a ban would do just that. **Specifically, 55% of U.S. parents and 47% of Australian parents think a social media ban for under 16s would cut down on their kids' screen time.** U.S. and Australian kids agree with this sentiment at a rate of 53% and 48% respectively.

55% of U.S. parents and 47% of Australian parents think a social media ban for under 16s would cut down on their kids' screen time.

Social media bans for under 16s and screen time reduction



Graph represents answers to the agreement statement: A social media ban for children under 16s would/will decrease my child's/my screen time. Bars with an asterisk () and an "a" differ significantly from third and fourth bars, AU parents and AU children, (p < .05). Respondents are U.S. Parents (n=1,000), U.S. Children (n=1,000), Australian Parents (n=1,000), and Australian Children (n=1,000).*



It is important to note that not all screen time is equal, and not all screen time is harmful. There are tangible benefits to social media, such as connecting with people who have similar interests, or identity exploration. That being said, if one goal of a social media ban for children under 16 is to reduce screen time, then large shares of both parents and children feel that it would do so.

However, many children, 64% in the U.S. and 59% in Australia, say that with a social media ban in place, they would spend more time on other digital platforms, including video games or text messaging. This could indicate that total screen time could remain the same, just with a shift to different digital platforms.

Percent of children who claim that they would spend more time on other digital platforms in the event of a social media ban for under 16s



Graph represents answers to the following agreement statement: A social media ban for children under 16 would cause me to spend more time on other digital platforms (i.e., video games, text messaging). Bar with an asterisk (*) differs significantly from other response option ($p < .05$). Respondents are U.S. Children ($n=1,000$) and Australian Children ($n=1,000$).



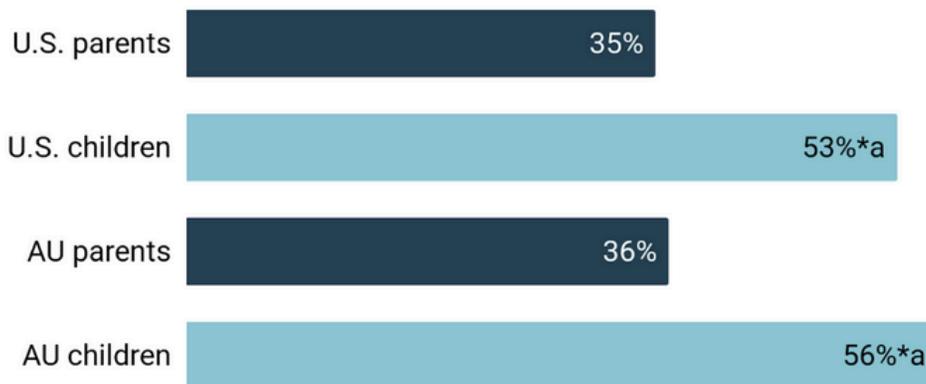
SOCIAL MEDIA BANS AND KIDS' CONNECTIONS

While an improvement in youth mental health and a decrease in screen time have been highlighted as key reasons for Australia's ban, a central concern has also come to the surface: what might a ban do to kids' connections with friends and family who do not live close by? This concern has especially come to the forefront in rural areas of Australia, where it can be more difficult to form and maintain in-person connections⁵. While this ban is more of an abstract concept in the U.S., this would potentially be cause for concern in rural or unwalkable parts of the country.

Ultimately, children are much more likely to be concerned about losing important connections due to a social media ban than parents are.

Australian and U.S. parents share similar levels of concern, with 35% of U.S. parents and 36% of Australian parents agreeing with the statement: "I am concerned that a social media ban will/would mean that my child will lose important connections and support they can't get elsewhere." For children, these numbers are quite different – 53% of U.S. children and 56% of Australian children are worried that a ban on social media would lead them to lose connections they cannot get elsewhere.

Connection concerns surrounding a social media ban for under 16s



Graph represents answers to the agreement statement: I am concerned that a social media ban will mean that my child/I will lose important connections and support they can't get elsewhere. Bars with an asterisk () and an "a" differ significantly from the first and third bars, U.S. parents and AU parents, ($p < .05$). Respondents are U.S. Parents ($n=1,000$), U.S. Children ($n=1,000$), Australian Parents ($n=1,000$), and Australian Children ($n=1,000$).*

⁵[Concerns teenagers in regional West Australia face further isolation as social media ban looms. Madigan Landry and Kate Forrester, ABC News Australia. October 14, 2025.](#)



This gap is incredibly important, as it shows that social media plays a role in children's lives that parents may not be fully grasping. To many children, social media is not just memes and games, it's a key part of their connection and communication with the outside world. In the open-ended response section, a 13-year-old Australian girl summed up her feelings, in all capital letters, this way:

"I THINK IT [The social media ban for under 16s] SUX [sic], THE AGE SHOULD BE LOWER. MY SOCIALS ARE ALL I HAVE, MY BEST FRIEND GOES TO A DIFFERENT HIGH SCHOOL AND I WONT EVEN GET TO SNAP WITH HER ANYMORE. WHY CANT [sic] THE PLATFORM STOP BAD PEOPLE USING IT."

“IT’S A GOOD IDEA BUT A LOT OF KIDS WILL GET AROUND IT.” - AUSTRALIAN DAD VIA OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE

The younger generations are often viewed as tech-savvy digital natives, and teens are at a developmental stage when it is natural to test set boundaries⁶. The Australian eSafety Commissioner has laid out a plan to prevent under 16s from accessing social media, with a specific focus on age assurance measures such as facial age analysis and scans of users' content and feeds⁷. However, this survey shows that parents still have their doubts, and some children are feeling up to the challenge.

⁶The boundaries between: Parental involvement in a teen's online world. Lee B. Erickson et al. Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology. May 6, 2016.

⁷Social media 'ban' or delay FAQs. "How will under-16s be stopped from finding a way around the age restrictions?" Australian eSafety Commissioner. October 17, 2025.





While there is a lot of disparity between the parents and children surveyed, they are aligned when it comes to under 16's ability to get around a social media ban. **Around half of all groups agree that children could get around a ban.** Specifically, 53% of U.S. parents and 54% of Australian parents think their child could get around a ban; and 53% of U.S. kids and 45% of Australian kids aged 10 to 15 (those who will/would be affected by a ban) claim that they could get around it. This finding paired with low government implementation confidence is cause for concern for Australian enforcement as well as any future ban attempts in the U.S.

53% of U.S. parents and 54% of Australian parents think their child could get around a ban.

Confidence in children's' ability to circumvent a social media ban for under 16s



Graph represents answers to the question: When/If a ban on social media for children under 16s is/was implemented by the government, how confident are you that your child/you would find a way to get around it? Bars with asterisks (*) differ significantly from other bar ($p < .05$). Respondents are U.S. Parents (n=1,000), U.S. Children ages 10-15 (n=736), Australian Parents (n=1,000), and Australian Children ages 10-15 (n=756).



A TECH COMPANY ALTERNATIVE?

While bans are often controversial, the survey shows a popular area of agreement: teen accounts. Vast majorities of all groups agree that social media companies should create special accounts with additional protections for teenagers. For parents, 77% of U.S. parents and 74% of Australian parents agree that tech companies should create such accounts.

Notably, children's percentages are slightly higher, with four-in-five (80%) of U.S. kids and 77% of Australian kids expressing a desire for such accounts.

Tech companies are just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to online safety. There is a strong argument to be made that self-regulation is not enough. That said, creating, maintaining, and promoting teen accounts is incredibly popular among both kids and parents, and could be a tangible next step for tech companies and regulators alike.

Social media companies and teen accounts



Graph represents answers to the agreement statement: Social media companies should create special accounts with additional protections for teenagers. Bar with an asterisk (*) and an "a" differs significantly from the third bar, AU parents, ($p < .05$). Respondents are U.S. Parents ($n=1,000$), U.S. Children ($n=1,000$), Australian Parents ($n=1,000$), and Australian Children ($n=1,000$).



AUSTRALIANS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA BAN

All research aside, one simple thing remains true: the Australian social media ban for children under 16 is here. It will likely cause significant shifts for many Australian children and parents.

That said, do Australian parents and children understand how the ban works? Just over half of Australian parents (53%) say they do. This number dips for Australian children, with 47% claiming to understand the ban.

Just over half of Australian parents (53%) say they understand the social media ban for children under 16.

It is important that those who are most affected by the new measures are able to clearly understand how they work, and what they will change about their lives. As the ban rollout continues, it is of the utmost importance that the Australian government continues to focus on education of both parents and children.

Australians' understanding of the social media ban for under 16s



Graph represents answers to the agreement statement: I understand how the Australian Government's social media ban for children under the age of 16 works. Bar with an asterisk (*) differs significantly from other response option ($p < .05$). Respondents are Australian Parents ($n=1,000$), and Australian Children ($n=1,000$).

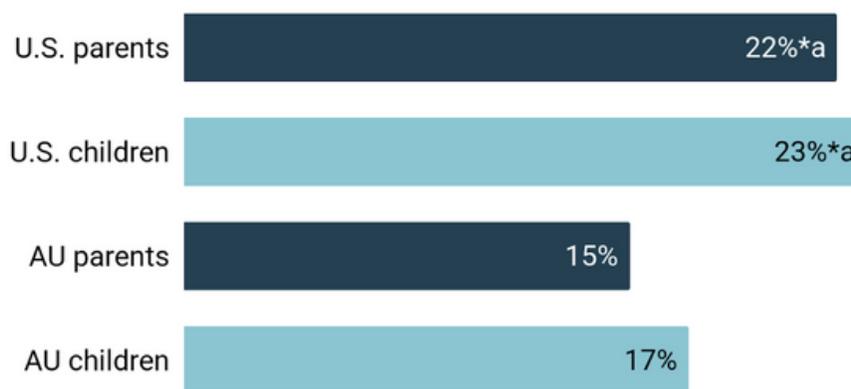


CLASSROOM SMARTPHONE ACCESSIBILITY

While the social media ban goes into effect in Australia, it is, as of this writing, a mere hypothetical in the United States. An attempt was made to ban social media for minors in the state of Utah, but it was ultimately blocked by a federal judge⁸. However, removing smartphones from schools is a tangible ban movement that has taken hold in the U.S., Australia, and several other parts of the world. These bans are also able to take effect in the U.S. without legal maneuvering, and in many states, are decided on by the school district.

As school phone bans grow in popularity, it is important to understand the opinions of parents and children. In this survey, researchers broke down smartphone access popularity by school building location, asking respondents to indicate how they would feel about a child using their smartphone in: the parking lot, the cafeteria, restrooms, hallways, the library, study hall, and classrooms. **Using smartphones in the classroom is widely unpopular among parents and children in both countries**, with less than a quarter of any group agreeing that kids should be able to do so. Only 22% of parents and 23% of children support using smartphones in the classroom. In Australia, those numbers are even lower, at 15% and 17% respectively.

Support for classroom smartphone access



Graph represents answers to the question: In which locations should students be permitted to use smartphones during the school day? Bars with an asterisk (*) and an "a" differ significantly from the third and fourth bar, AU parents and AU children ($p < .05$). Respondents are U.S. Parents ($n=1,000$), U.S. Children ($n=1,000$), Australian Parents ($n=1,000$), and Australian Children ($n=1,000$).

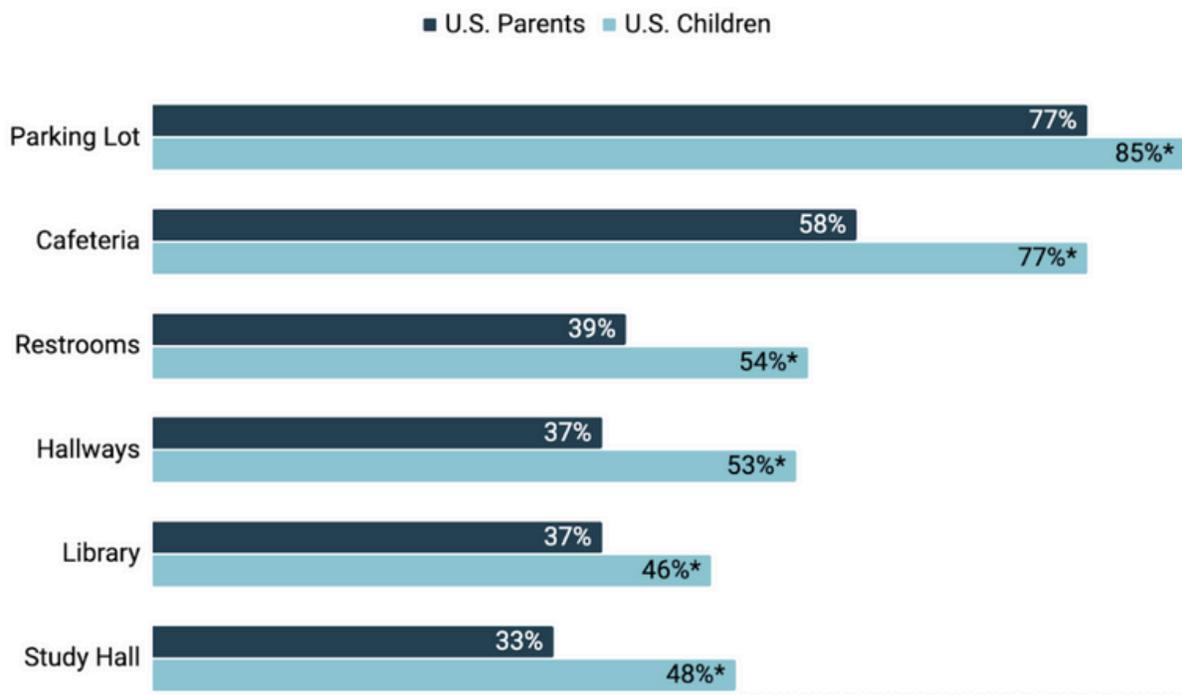
⁸[Utah law restricting youth social media use blocked by judge](#). Nate Raymond, Reuters. September 11, 2024.



More acceptable areas for smartphone use among parents and children are the school parking lot and the cafeteria (though cafeteria smartphone use acceptability dips significantly for Australian parents).

Less acceptable locations include the restroom, hallways, the library, and study hall. It should be noted that U.S. children are much more likely to find it acceptable to use smartphones in most of these locations when compared to the other groups.

Support for smartphone access by campus location

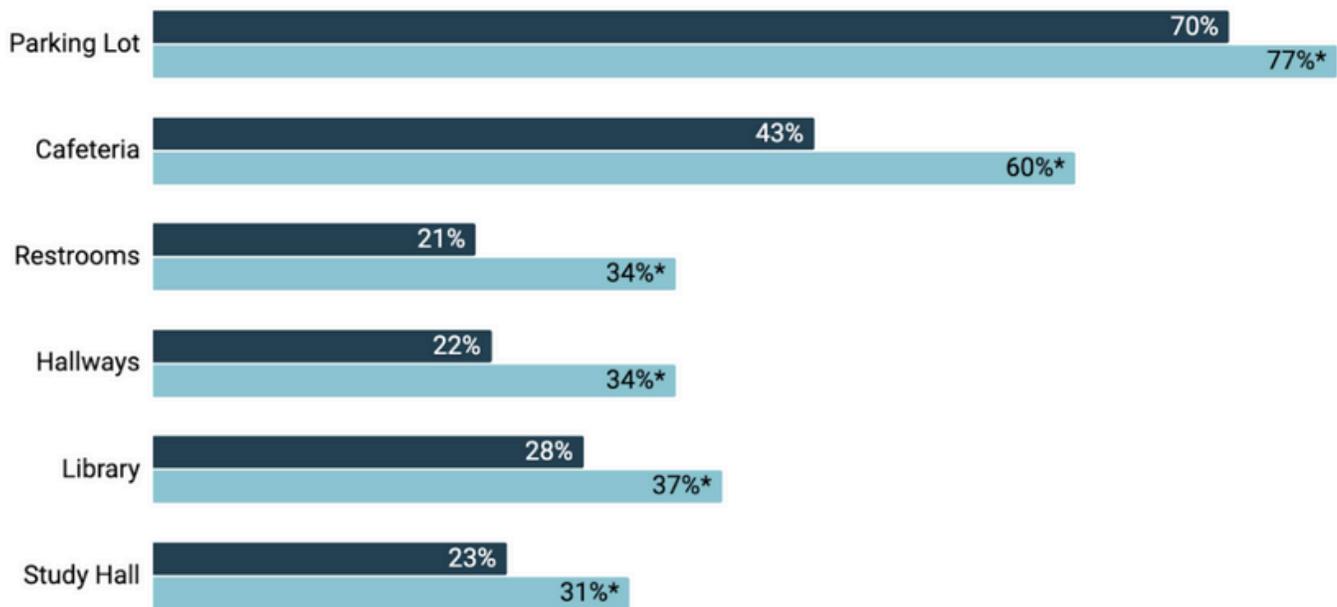


Graph represents answers to the question: In which locations should students be permitted to use smartphones during the school day? Bars with an asterisk (*) differ significantly from other bars in the same category ($p < .05$). Respondents are U.S. Parents ($n=1,000$) and U.S. Children ($n=1,000$).



Support for smartphone access by campus location

■ AU Parents ■ AU Children



Graph represents answers to the question: In which locations should students be permitted to use smartphones during the school day? Bars with an asterisk (*) differ significantly from other bars in the same category ($p < .05$). Respondents are Australian Parents ($n=1,000$) and Australian Children ($n=1,000$).



HOW TO INTERPRET THESE FINDINGS

The idea of social media bans has become more pronounced in recent years. In Australia, these once abstract conversations led to regulation. In the United States, these conversations remain hypothetical. However, in both nations, questions about bans still remain. How does it work? Can it be enforced? What might children gain from a social media ban? What might they lose?

This brief outlines parents' and children's thoughts about these significant questions. While there is relatively broad parental support for such bans, children are more skeptical. There is hope from both groups that a ban would lower screen time, but there are also concerns about children's ability to get around such rules. Children specifically are worried about the loss of connections that could occur without social media.

Interestingly, there is not overwhelming confidence in a social media bans' positive impact on children's mental health, with only the majority of one group, U.S. parents (52%), believing a ban would protect the mental health of children.

While there is a lot of disagreement between parents and children, two areas of consensus stand out: (1) that tech companies should provide teen accounts with special privacy protections and (2) that smartphones should not be accessed in classrooms.

As with most social issues, it can be easy to argue that parents know best, and kids will just have to deal. However, it is dangerous to ignore young peoples' feelings and opinions, especially when it comes to something that will impact many of their day-to-day lives, like a social media ban. These data show that children have questions and concerns, and they should not be ignored. It is of the utmost importance to understand how young people feel about regulations that will directly affect their lives.

Social media and smartphone bans are just a part of the online safety conversation. It is important to approach online safety research with a holistic lens, while always involving those primarily affected –parents and children. FOSI's Online Safety Survey aims to do just that, and more data will be available in the coming months.



DATA COLLECTION & SAMPLE

The data in this brief is part of a larger research project titled the “Online Safety Survey.” This data was collected by Ipsos, a leading market research firm. The survey involved 4,000 respondents, evenly split between the United States and Australia, including 1,000 parents and 1,000 children aged 10-17 in each country. U.S. data is representative by parent and child age and race. Australian data is representative by parent and child age. Data was collected from Thursday, October 2, 2025 to Monday, October 20, 2025. Participants qualified if they or their children used the internet for at least three hours weekly.

Data was analyzed via SPSS. No post-hoc weights were applied to this study, and the findings reflect the opinion of survey respondents only.





About FOSI: The Family Online Safety Institute is an international, non-profit organization that works to make the online world safer for kids and their families. FOSI convenes leaders in industry, government, and the non-profit sectors to collaborate and innovate new solutions and policies in the field of online safety. Through research, resources, events, and special projects, FOSI promotes a culture of responsibility online and encourages a sense of digital citizenship for all. FOSI's membership includes many of the leading internet and telecommunications companies around the world.