DSM Foundation responds to government announcement of a social media ban for under 16s

Monday 15 June, 2026

Drug education charity the DSM Foundation, which has been involved in research into the availability of illegal drugs online, has issued a response to today's government announcement of a social media ban for under 16s.

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE, who founded the drug education charity that works with tens of thousands of young people every year, said: "Despite now many years of engaging positively with big tech, and battling alongside many others to make social media safe for young people, and despite the Online Safety Act being brought in for just such a purpose – despite all this, we have collectively been unable to protect our children. They remain exposed to harmful, illegal content online – including drugs - and manipulated through algorithms, influencers, and people of ill intent.

"However, a blanket ban is a blunt instrument. The online world also brings much that's good into all of our lives, especially some of the most isolated and vulnerable young people. But most importantly, a ban is an admission that we have failed to bring the platforms into line, and they have shown they are either unwilling, or unable to do this themselves, and that we will not accept.

"So, we are not in favour of a ban for under 16s, but we are wholly in favour of bringing all our collective and legislative powers to bear on the tech companies, to do what they should always have done, and make their online spaces safe, for our children to enjoy together. And in the meantime we'll continue to work with young people, parents, carers and professionals to support young people to make safer choices, online and off."

The charity Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE heads up which is named for her son Daniel – who lost his life as a result of an accidental overdose of ecstasy in 2014 – was heavily involved in related research conducted by University College London. Published in 2025, this showed that 60 per cent of 13-18 year olds had seen drug-related content online, much on social media, with TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram the most mentioned platforms. Nearly a third had seen advertisements for illicit drugs on their social media feeds, with the vast majority appearing organically, as opposed to as a result of the young person actively seeking them out.

Fiona Spargo-Mabbs OBE has worked tirelessly on the issue of the availability of drugs online to young people, and has spoken on the topic on many occasions, including being quoted in a 2017 article in the Guardian titled "Youth workers warn of rise in drugs purchases through social media", and being on the advisory panel for research conducted by Volteface in 2018-19 that led to the article 'DM for Details: Selling drugs in the age of social media' and was followed by a BBC Radio 1 Newsbeat piece called 'Dealers in your DMs'. She also led on a 2021 survey that preceded the more formal UCL research on young people's exposure to drug-related content online, which featured in the Independent.

The government plans echo those already implemented in Australia, and relate to user-to-user platforms that enable social interaction and allow users to post materials, and algorithms. As such the government has stated that the ban will include platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and X, but not services that are predominantly focused on messaging such as WhatsApp and Signal. Overnight curfews and restrictions in the amount of time people can scroll are also being considered, and it has been announced that functions such as livestreaming and stranger communications for under 16s will be blocked. The changes will be implemented by default for under 16s and under 17s to prevent a "cliff edge".

Information for editors:

The DSM Foundation is a drug education charity established in 2014 following the death of 16 year old Daniel Spargo-Mabbs from an accidental overdose of ecstasy. His family felt that he simply hadn't known enough to be able to make decisions that would keep him safe, and realized there was a huge gap in the resources and support available to schools, so set up the charity in order to spare other families going through what they had experienced.

The aim of the DSM Foundation is to provide young people with relevant, age-appropriate, up to date and evidence-based information about drugs so they develop the skills to make choices that will keep themselves and their friends as safe as possible. To this end, the charity is currently working in hundreds

Related Sectors:

Charities & non-profits :: Children & Teenagers :: Computing & Telecoms :: Education & Human Resources :: Health :: Leisure & Hobbies :: Lifestyle & Relationships :: Medical & Pharmaceutical :: Opinion Article :: Public Sector & Legal ::

Related Keywords:

Drugs :: Social Media :: Online :: Internet :: Safety :: Children :: Young People :: Parents :: Teenagers ::

Scan Me:

of schools, colleges and community organisations with children and young people, and also provides workshops for parents and caregivers, and training for school and college staff – the two groups shown by NHS survey data as the most likely sources of information about drugs and alcohol sought out by 11-15 year olds. Educational settings are also able to access “I Love You Mum, I Promise I Won’t Die”, a verbatim play by Mark Wheeller that was commissioned by the charity to tell Dan’s story in the words of his family and friends, through studying the work itself (sometimes due to it being a GCSE Drama set text on the Eduqas syllabus), or booking a Theatre in Education performance. Schools and colleges can also download age-appropriate, relevant, up to date and evidence-based drugs education lesson resources free of charge from the DSM Foundation website for delivery by teachers through PSHE/PSE provision.

For more information about the DSM Foundation, go to https://www.dsmfoundation.org.uk/.

Media enquiries about this press release or the work of the DSM Foundation should be sent to media@dsmfoundation.org.uk.

Company Contact:

_

The Daniel Spargo-Mabbs Foundation

T.
E. media@dsmfoundation.org.uk
W. https://www.dsmfoundation.org.uk/

Additional Contact(s):
Asha Fowells, media@dsmfoundation.org.uk

View Online

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.dsmf.pressat.co.uk