What is the Age-appropriate design code?

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The code, sometimes called the Children's code, was introduced by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in September 2020 with a 12 month transition period. Part of the Data Protection Act 2018, it contains 15 'standards' that online services likely to be accessed by children must follow, to protect children's data online.

Why is it important?

Children need specific protection online, just as they do in other areas of their lives. But at the moment, children are using an internet that was not designed for them.

The code aims to change this: providing better data privacy and protection for children, in a way that empowers everyone who uses the internet.

Who does it apply to?

It applies to any online service that is likely to be accessed by children and young people under the age of 18 – even if they are not the target audience.

This includes apps, games, connected toys and devices and social media services – even those based outside of the UK.

What will it change?

The 15 standards will encourage online services to make the best interests of children a primary consideration when designing and developing online services likely to be accessed by a child. They include things like:

• Setting privacy settings to 'high' by default.

• Switching geolocation and profiling settings to 'off' by default.

• Letting children know if they are being monitored or tracked using parental controls.

• Making information about data and privacy available in clear language that children can understand.

• Preventing 'nudge' techniques – function designs that encourage children to provide unnecessary data or relax their privacy settings.

How will it be implemented?

Some social media platforms have already implemented changes, ranging from default private accounts to limits on advertising and time cut-offs for push notifications.

Exactly how they implement the code is up to companies to decide – but those who do not conform to the code could be fined under the UK GDPR legislation. Parents and children can also complain to the ICO if they feel a platform, game or app has not responded appropriately when notified that their service is not meeting the standards.

To find out more:
Find more information about the Age-appropriate design code here.

About Parent Zone

Parent Zone are the experts in digital family life, providing parents, platforms and professionals with advice, knowledge and support to shape the best possible future for children as they embrace the online world. www.parentzone.org.uk

The ICO is the UK's independent authority set up to uphold information rights in the public interest, promoting openness by public bodies and data privacy for individuals