

# SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

WITH DR SANDRA WISEMAN

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## What's new: Roblox introduces facial age checks for chat

The gaming/social-creation platform Roblox has announced a major update to how users' chat and communication features are accessed, starting with voluntary "age checks" now, and moving to mandatory verification early in 2026.

### Under the new system:

- Users who want to access chat must complete an age verification process, either by a facial age estimation (a "selfie check") or by submitting a valid ID.
- After verification, users are automatically assigned one of several age-bands: Under 9, 9-12, 13-15, 16-17, 18-20, or 21+. Chat and other communications are then restricted so users can generally only interact with others in the same (or similar) age-band.
- For younger children (under 9), experience-based chat is turned off by default unless a parent explicitly opts in.

Roblox describes this as a "new safety standard", aiming to reduce risk of inappropriate contact between younger users and adults, and keep communication age-appropriate.

### What this means for safeguarding in schools

As someone working in safeguarding and SEND/behavioural safeguarding, these changes are particularly relevant. Here's what schools and staff should know:

- **Greater protection against stranger contact:** The age-based chat means that, by default, children on Roblox should no longer be able to chat with adults they don't know unless there's an approved "Trusted Connection" (e.g. a verified family member). This may reduce risks like grooming or exposure to inappropriate content.
- **Still needs adult oversight and guidance:** The system isn't foolproof, facial-estimation technology can be imperfect, especially for younger children, or those whose appearance might fall outside norms. Schools and parents still need to support children around safe online use and reinforce good digital behaviours.
- **Opportunity for education/mediation:** These changes could be a timely trigger to refresh online-safety teaching in school. For example, lessons around "digital footprint," "who you talk to online," and "why age verification matters."
- **Need to inform parents and carers:** Many parents may not yet be aware of what's changing, or what the controls are. Schools might consider including information about the updates in newsletters to parents, encouraging them to update privacy/parental-control settings on children's devices, and talk with children about these changes.
- **Biometric data, handle with care:** While Roblox says images/videos used for age checks are "deleted immediately after processing," it's important that parents understand what biometric data is collected, how it is used, and what rights they have, something that schools' safeguarding leads or ICT leads might want to review when advising families.

### Read:

<https://swgfl.org.uk/magazine/roblox-announces-facial-age-checks-for-chat-features/>

### What is the Teacher Wellbeing Index, and why schools should care

The Teacher Wellbeing Index is Education Support's annual survey of the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and education staff across the UK.

- The 2025 edition, the ninth annual survey, paints a worrying picture: staff wellbeing has fallen to its lowest level since records began in 2019.
- More broadly, over the years the Index has consistently shown high levels of stress, anxiety, poor sleep, burnout and other mental-health pressures among education staff, including teachers, senior leaders and support staff.

Given the vital role that education staff (especially in schools working with SEND, safeguarding, behaviour/mental-health needs) play, the wellbeing of the workforce is not just a "nice to have", it's crucial for the quality, consistency and safety of the whole learning environment.

### Key findings from the 2024/2025 cycle and recent years

#### From the most recent reports and public summaries:

- **In the 2024 Index:** 78% of staff reported being stressed. For senior leaders the figure was 84%.
- Around half of all staff said their organisation's culture had a negative effect on their wellbeing.
- Many reported that their employer did not support staff with mental-health or wellbeing problems well.
- **In 2025, according to media summaries of the latest report:** 76% of staff feel stressed; 77% experienced symptoms of poor mental health linked to work; and 36% are at risk of probable clinical depression.
- **There's also a strong retention risk:** a significant percentage of staff have considered leaving their job because of pressures linked to mental health and wellbeing.

**In addition to personal consequences for staff, these findings also speak to deeper systemic stressors:** increased workload, emotional toll, lack of support from external public services, growing demands on teachers and school leaders, all adversely affecting wellbeing.

### What the findings mean for schools and staff

In a school, where you're already working on safeguarding, risk assessments, behaviour/mental-health support, and working with vulnerable pupils, these results raise several important implications:

- **Wellbeing of staff is a safeguarding issue in itself.** Overworked, stressed or burnt-out staff may be less able to respond effectively to complex pupil needs (mental health, behaviour, safeguarding), which could indirectly put pupils at risk or reduce the quality of care/support.
- **Staff retention and stability are threatened.** If a significant portion of staff are considering leaving the profession, this could affect consistency of support for vulnerable pupils, especially SEND, behaviour-challenging or mental-health vulnerable children.
- **School culture matters.** The fact that many staff feel their organisation's culture negatively affects them suggests that even where external pressures exist, internal culture (management practices; support structures; peer relationships) can either exacerbate or mitigate harm.
- **Support needs to be systemic, not tokenistic.** Given the scale of the problem, one-off "wellbeing events" aren't enough: staff need ongoing, embedded support, from leadership, from policy, from workload management.
- **Leaders and non-teaching staff also at risk.** Senior leaders often report even higher stress than classroom teachers. In a setting where you, your SENDCo, behaviour leads etc. have extra responsibilities, there's elevated risk of burnout and overload.

### Read:

<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-organisations/research/teacher-wellbeing-index/>

### What does the "Looked-After Children" report show and why it matters for schools

The DfE's 2024-25 "Children looked after" report provides an updated snapshot of children in care in England at 31st March 2025, including those in foster care, residential care, adopted, in supported accommodation, and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

For school communities, especially those working with vulnerable pupils, SEND, behavioural or safeguarding concerns, the data matters deeply. Many looked-after children (LAC) will be enrolled in mainstream or alternative provision schools at different points, so understanding the scale and characteristics of this group helps tailor support and safeguarding accordingly.

### Key findings (2024-2025): What's new

From the latest data release:

- As of 31st March 2025, the total number of looked-after children (including those adopted) remained high at 81,770 (reportedly a small drop of 2% from the previous year).
- **Rate per child population:** roughly 67 children per 10,000 are looked after, compared to 69 per 10,000 in 2024.
- **During 2024-2025:** 32,270 children started care (a 3% decrease from last year), while 34,450 children ceased being looked after, a 2% increase.
- The majority of looked-after children were under a care order (75%), with 19% under a voluntary agreement and 6% under a placement order (e.g. awaiting or undergoing adoption).
- **Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) remain a significant group:** 6,540 UASC were looked after on 31st March 2025, a 12% fall from the previous year. UASC make up around 8% of all looked-after children. They are mostly male (94%) and tend to be older (90% aged 16+), with "absent parenting" recorded as the primary need for 89%.
- **Regarding emotional and behavioural health (for looked-after children aged 5-16):** of the 43,220 children with a reported SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) score:
  - 45% had "normal" levels, but 42% had scores indicating emotional and behavioural difficulties (a slight increase from last year).
  - **There is a gender and age variance:** for younger children more males had concerning scores; but by ages 15-16, more females than males scored in the "cause for concern" range.
- **Missing episodes:** In 2025, about 11% of LAC (12,720 children) were reported missing or away from placement without authorisation at some point during the year, with a total of around 86,900 such incidents, an average of 6.8 incidents per child. Most incidents (91%) were short (2 days or less).

### Read:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2024-to-2025>

### Forthcoming free safeguarding webinars for Autumn term 2 2025

**County lines - Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December**

**Trauma - Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> December**

### Spring term 1 2026

**Knife crime - Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January**

**Neglect - Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January**

**FGM - Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> January**

**Eating disorders (Bitesize webinar) - Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February**

**Children with a family member in prison (Bitesize webinar) - Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> February**

### Reminder:

**The S4S Safeguarding office will be closed from Friday 19<sup>th</sup> December and re-open on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026. The Safeguarding update will be back on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2026.**

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