

Let's talk about our kids and their tech

JENNIFER POWERS
PAPAYA

Choosing a different path for your family



01.

I'm not here to tell you what to do.

02.

It's not just smartphones.

03.

Causation is hard to prove.

04.

Some technology is good.



Screen time

The average amount of time a teanager spends online in the UK

4.54 hrs

34.3 hrs

a week

Е

75 days

a year

14.3 years

a lifetime

*Ofcom 2025

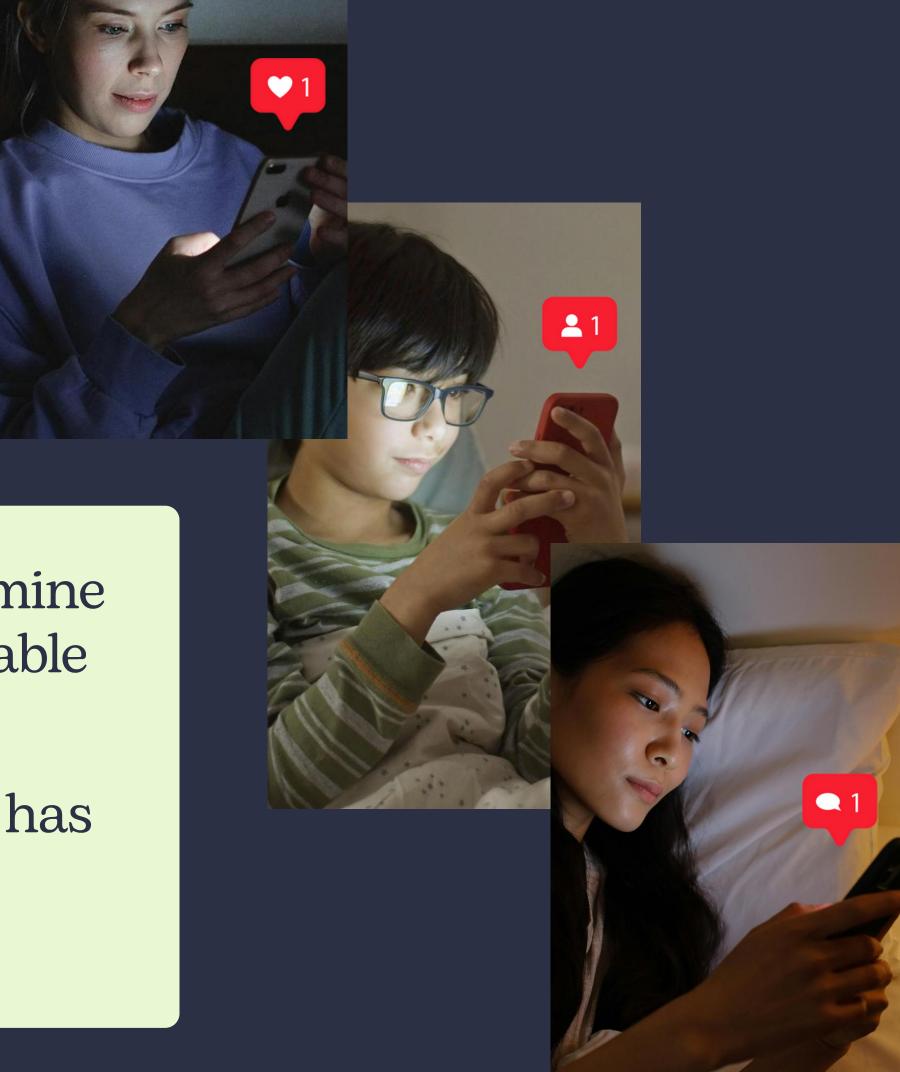
According to Jonathan Haidt, The Anxious Generation, the average teen spends between 6 to 8 hours a day engaged in screen-based activities, with approximately 4.8 hours dedicated specifically to social media.



Persuasive design

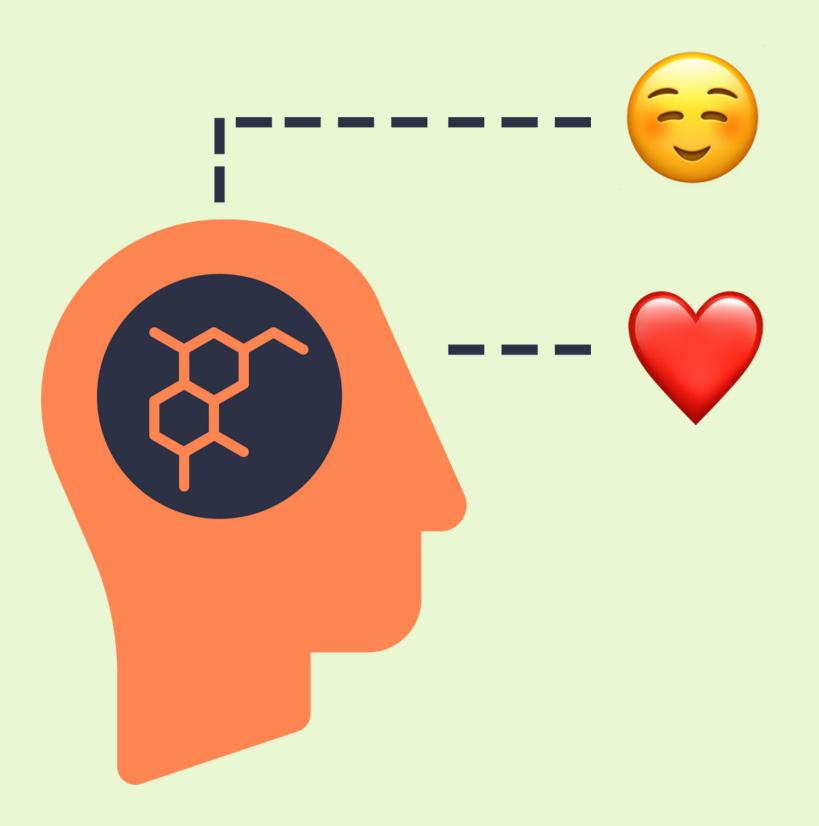
Smart technology taps into our dopamine reward pathway making us all vulnerable to overconsumption.

So powerful is persuasive tech that is has been described as being akin to involuntary hypnotised.





Persuasive design



01.

Dopamine is released during a reward which provides a learning signal to the brain.

02.

The greater the 'unexpected' reward the greater the learning signal.

03.

The motivational aspect of dopamine means that it can motivate us to do things that are good for us as well as those that are not.



Timeline

EARLY 2000'S

2007-2008

2009-2010

2010-2014

2015-2025











Early 'Smartphones' & social giants begin

Facebook 2002 YouTube 2005

The iPhone 'touch screen'

Appstore 2008; 1st Android 2008

Tech behaviourists maximise engagement

The like button & retweet button, infinite scroll, push notifications, algorithms and front-facing cameras

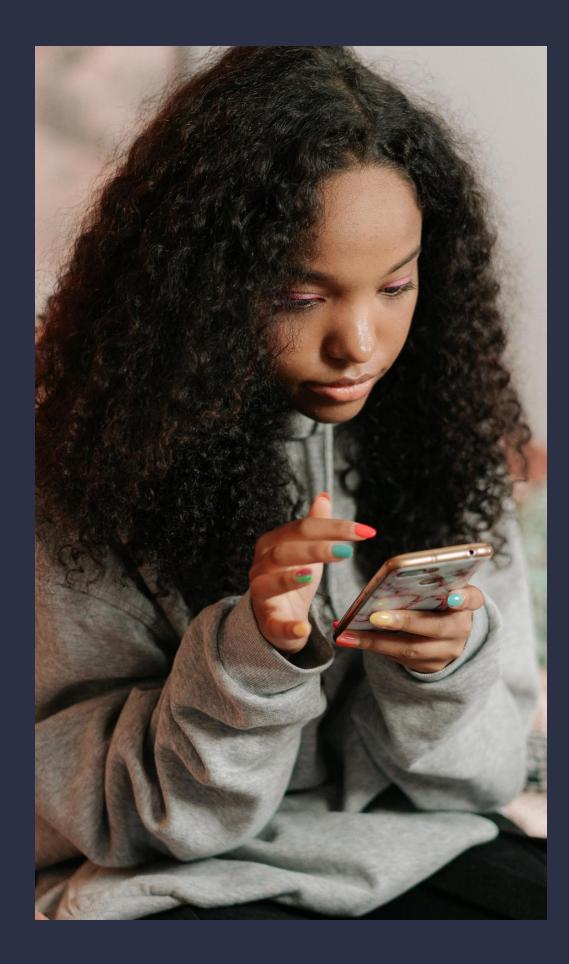
Internet everywhere -

Instagram Snapchat

97% of UK 12yr olds own a smartphone

2024: Social Media revenue >\$250B; TikTok hits 1.8B users in 8yrs





Children with Problematic Smartphone Usage (PSU) are twice as likely to experience anxiety and three times as likely to experience depression compared to children without PSU

*King's College London, 2024



Self Harm in UK teens

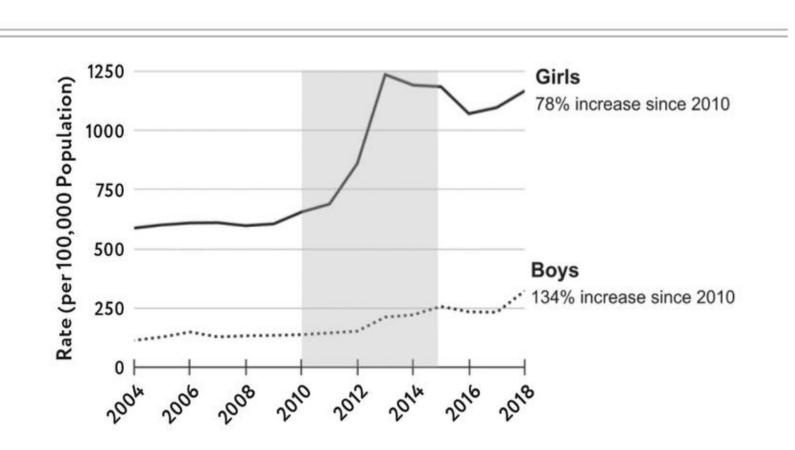


Figure 1.9. U.K. teens' (ages 13–16) self-harm episodes. (Source: Cybulski et al., 2021, drawing from two databases of

According to NHS data in the past decade childhood outdoor accidents have reduced:

J 70%

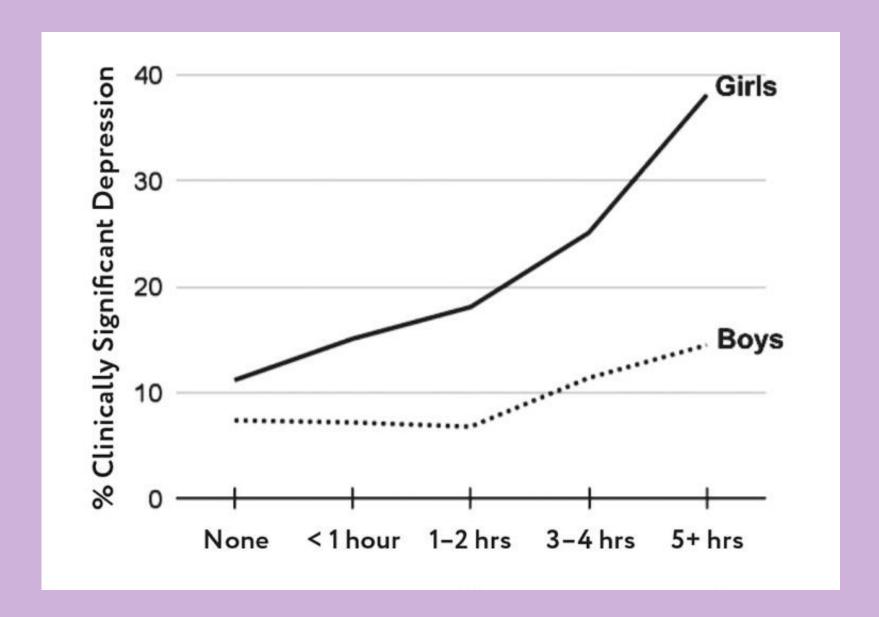
but self-harm has increased:

493%





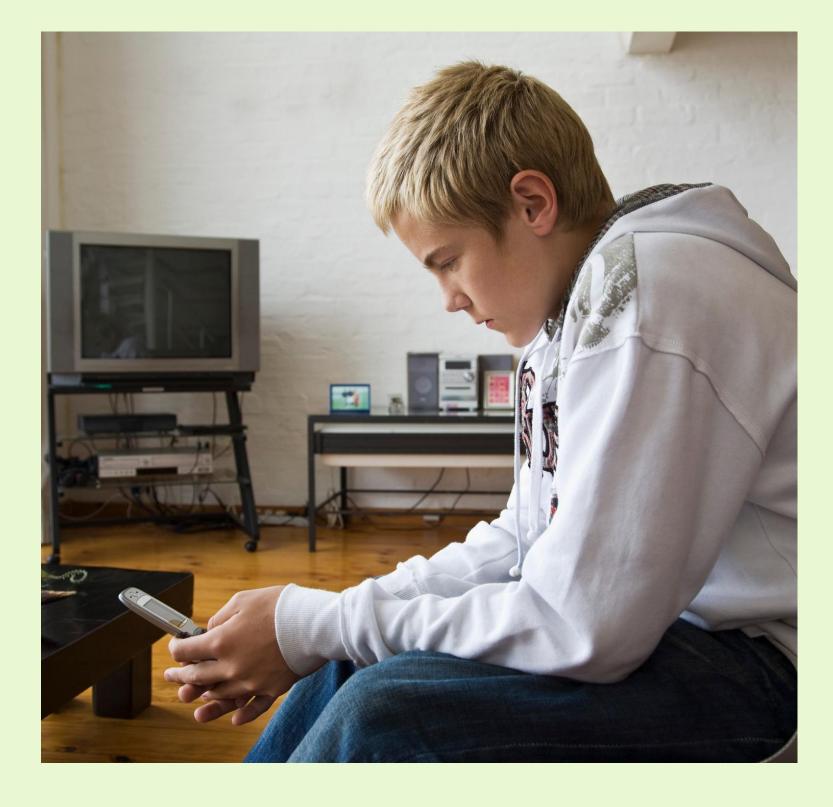
Depression by social media use, UK



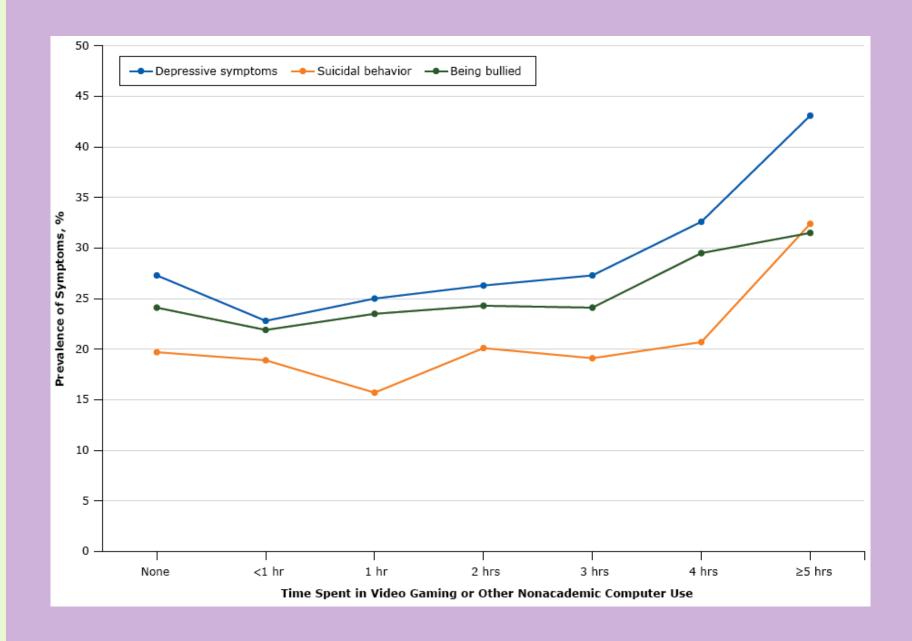
MILLENNIUM COHORT STUDY

Figures from The Anxious Generation, Jonathan Haidt





Depression use gaming, USA



aHogan H. Lee1; Jung Hye Sung, Sc.D.2; Ji-Young Lee, MSPH3; Jae Eun Lee, Differences by Sex in Association of Mental Health With Video Gaming or Other Nonacademic Computer Use Among US Adolescents. Prev Chronic Dis 2017;14:170151. DOI:



Why?



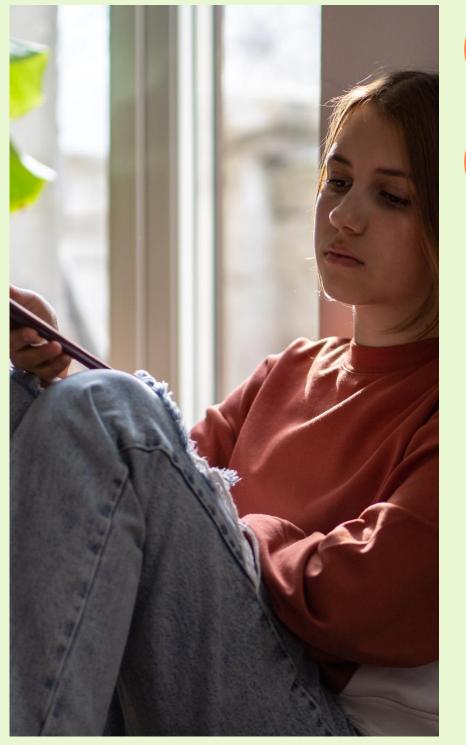
Social isolation and loneliness



Cyberbullying, grooming, inappropriate content



Opportunity costs, loss of other interests and sleep







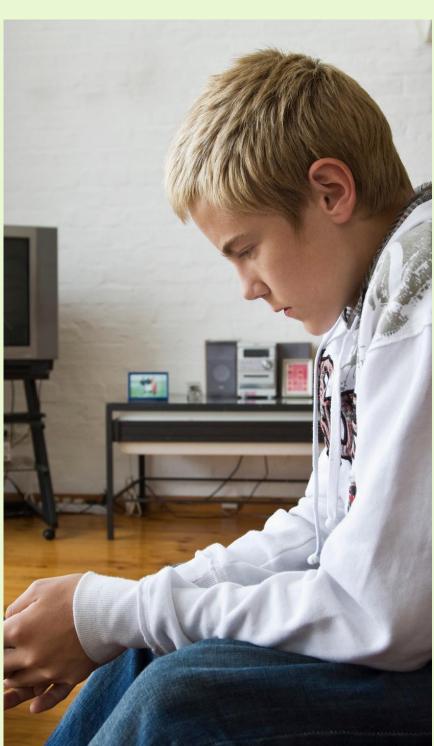
Comparison



Pornography



Gaming



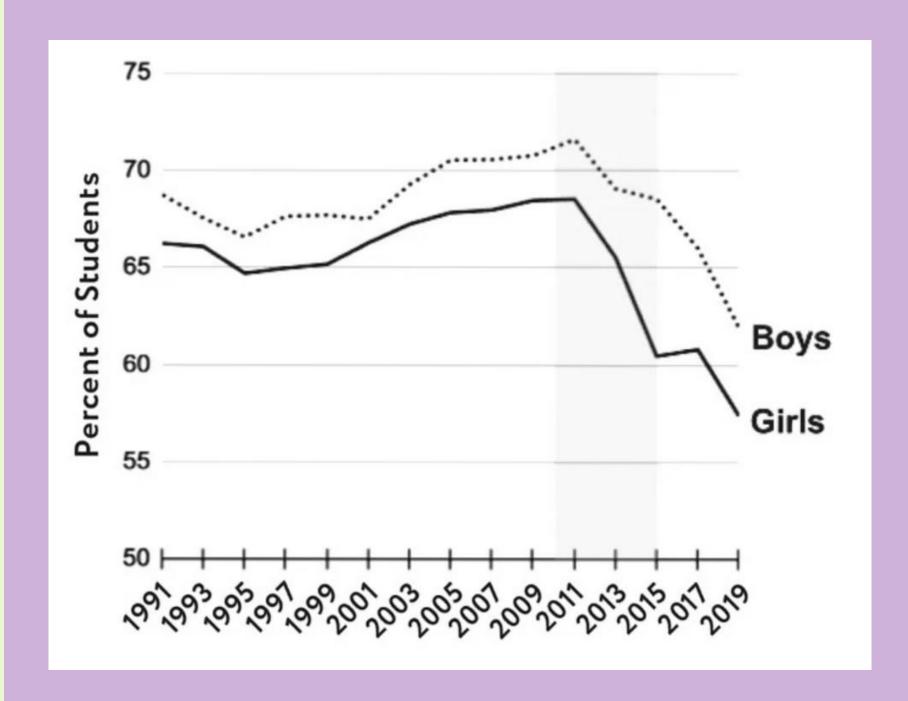


Comparison



Young people are comparing their real selves with other peoples' curated images and highlight reels.

Satisfied with Oneself

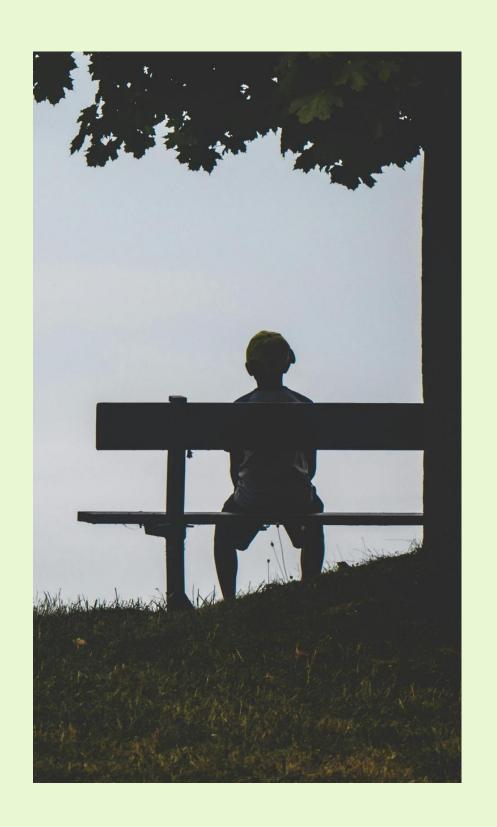


MONITORING THE FUTURE

Figure from The Anxious Generation, Jonathan Haidt



Loneliness



13-17 year olds are the loneliest group in society.

1 in 5 teens report feeling lonely, with significant negative impacts on health, education and well-being.

*W.H.O., From loneliness to social connection: charting a path to healthier societies 2025



What are they seeing?

The average first exposure to porn is 12 whilst doing their homework

Rothman, E. F. (2021). Pornography and public health. Oxford University Press

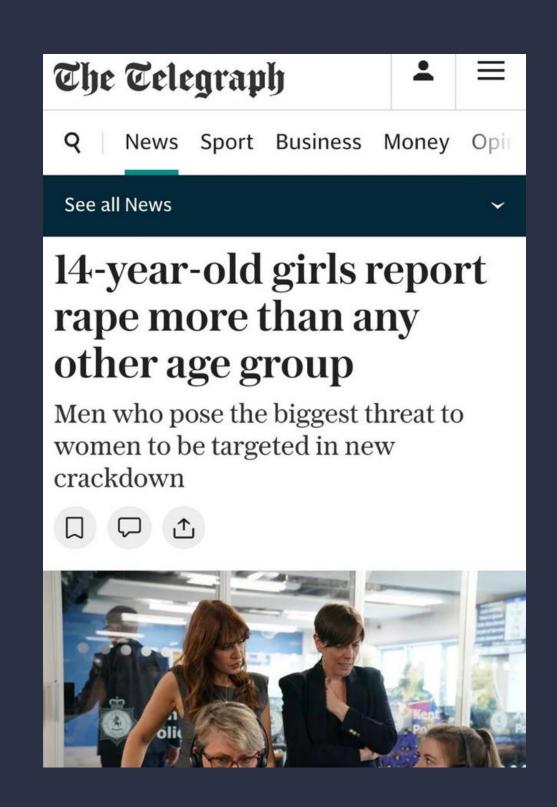
94% of children are exposed to porn by 14.

Middlesex University report for NSPCC and the children's Commissioner



The impact of Extreme Content?

"[The NCA] has seen a six-fold increase in reports of Child Online Abuse-related crimes in the last two years...We've seen thousands of users exchanging millions of messages around physical and sexual abuse online."







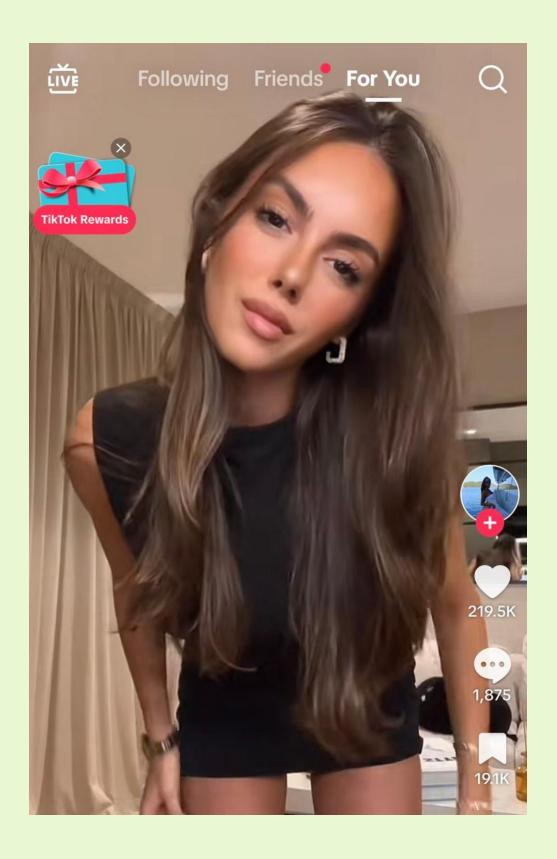
What are they seeing?

The Children's Commissioner Rachel de Souza spoke to a class of 15-year-olds:

Had seen a beheading video



The TikTok Experiment



01.

Dummy accounts set up for 13-year-old girls

02.

Content about suicide shown within 3 minutes

03.

Content about eating disorder content shown within 8 minutes

04.

TikTok's algorithm delivered content promoting self-harm and eating disorders every 39 seconds to vulnerable users

1 in 5 children are bullied online

*Online bullying in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk), 2023.

*Ditch the label, The Wireless report, 2017

Of those bullied:

were adversely affected

24%

Self harm as a result



Sleep

Pre-teens lose the equivalent of a nights sleep per week to social media

75%

of teenagers take their phone to bed with them



Gaming

01

Reward

02

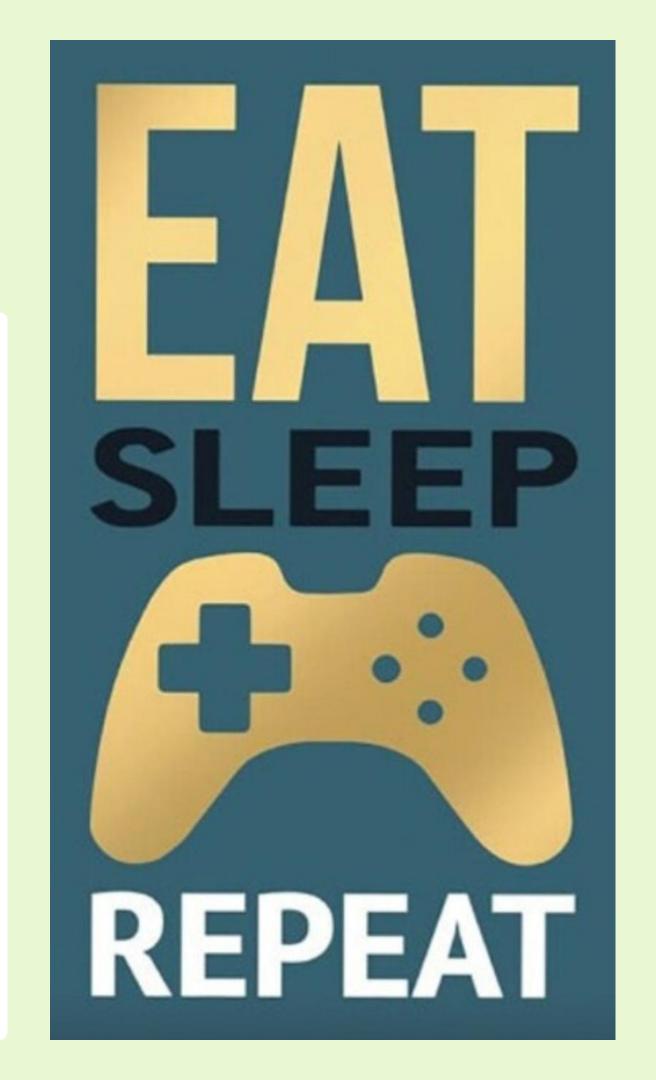
Purpose

03

Social connection

100%

Gaming can result in 100% increase in dopamine. Overtime, you can develop dopamine depletion making it harder to enjoy real life.





Gaming

83%

of 12-15 years olds game online

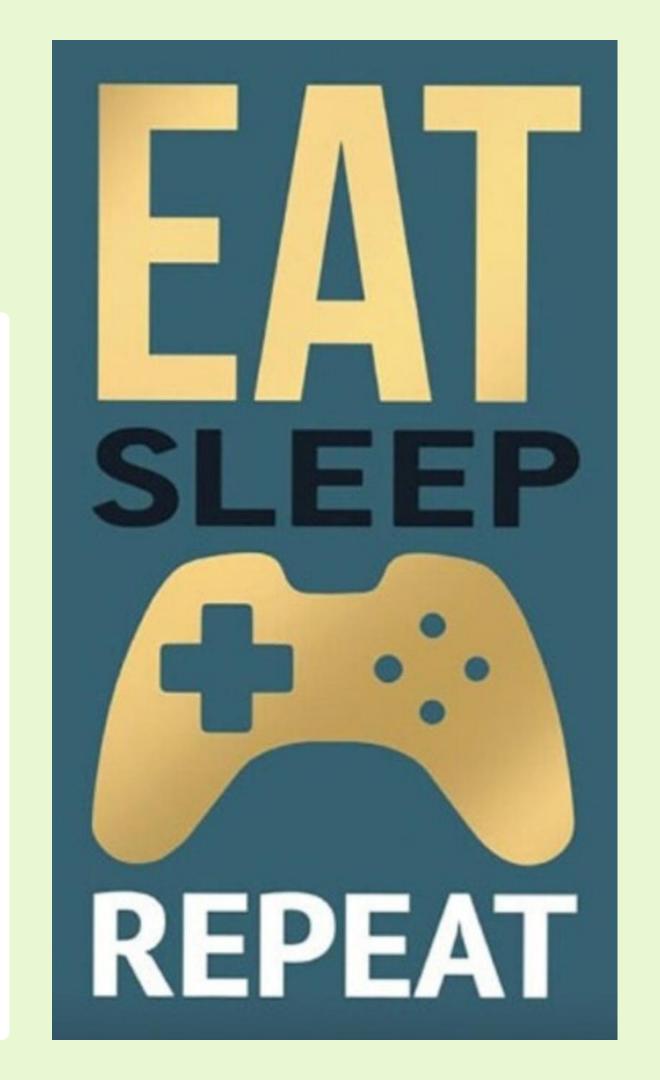
Uswitch 2024

3-4%

of gamers develop gaming disorder. 327,600-436,800 UK children.

Online Nation 2021 report (ofcom.org.uk)

Some heavy gamers can develop gaming disorder. This is when a gamer can't stop despite trying, has lost interest in other hobbies, and experiences negative impacts on their life due to gaming.





Physical health

*BMJ, 2023

*British Journal of Ophthalmology 2024

1/3

Almost a third of children who live in the most deprived areas of England have obesity by the time they leave primary school

30%

Childhood myopia has increased from 24% in 1990 to 36% in 2023. 30% higher risk of developing myopia from excessive screen time on smart devices



The opportunity costs

*Oxford Home Schooling and Tuition, 2022

*The Raising the Nation Play Commission, 2025

X2

Children spend twice as long looking at screens as playing outside 150%

Children's outdoor playtime has halved in a generation



We have overprotected our children in the real world while underprotecting them online

JONATHAN HAIDT





SOLUTIONS

What can we do?



Top tips



If you can, consider delaying the smartphone for as long as possible

If your child does have a phone, focus on healthy boundaries and staying safe online



Children without smart phones

Everyone else in my class has a phone...

Delay the smartphone

Consider a more basic device

Talk to other parents

This is your superpower! Just because your child says everyone else has x doesn't mean they do

Model good habits

Our relationship with our phones influences children's view of healthy phone use



Young adolescents

My elder son/ daughter already has a phone...

 \rightarrow

We know so much more about the harms now it's ok to do thing differently

We live in a digital age, children need to be able to use technology...

 \rightarrow

No child is learning meaningful skills for the future on social media or group chat

But my child needs a smartphone for train tickets and bus tickets...

 \rightarrow

You can still buy tickets in person. Debit cards for kids: Rooster, Go Henry, etc.

I need a smartphone to track my child...

 \rightarrow

You can use an air tag (or similar) to track your child

Can't we just use a stripped back iPhone with parental controls?

 \rightarrow

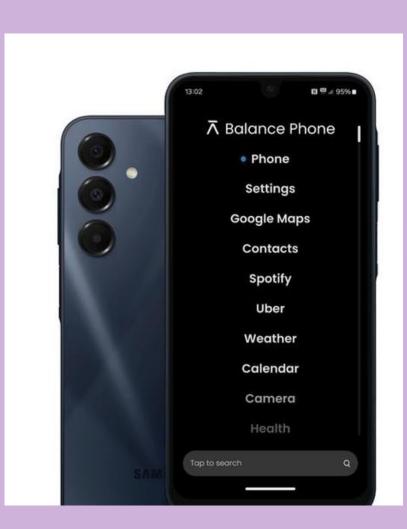
You can, but most parental control settings are easy to bypass



Basic phones & kids smartwatches allow children to connect with others via text and calls

New models all the time





Alternatives

Pin wheel phone

The Light phone

The Phone

The Balance Phone

Karri

alternatives — Smartphone Free Childhood







AGE APPROPRIATE APPS



What is the age limit for social media apps?







Kids with smartphones: Reduce exposure



Delay apps & screentime limits

Delay social media use. Set app limits and schedule downtime. Encourage the use of Do Not Disturb modes. Try the Forest app.

Reduce distraction

Reduce push notifications. Try using a flip cover, delete or hide distracting apps and turn it off.

Create screen-free times & spaces

Keep all internet-connected devices out of bedrooms. Avoid devices during meals and discourage multi-screening.



Top tips: Preventative Action



Control downloads & apps

Control software and app downloads with a password. Use InternetMatters.org to review and set up apps. Increase privacy settings.

Block adult content

Turn off explicit material (in apps, broadband, and data plans). Watch out for VPNs, relays, and private browsers.

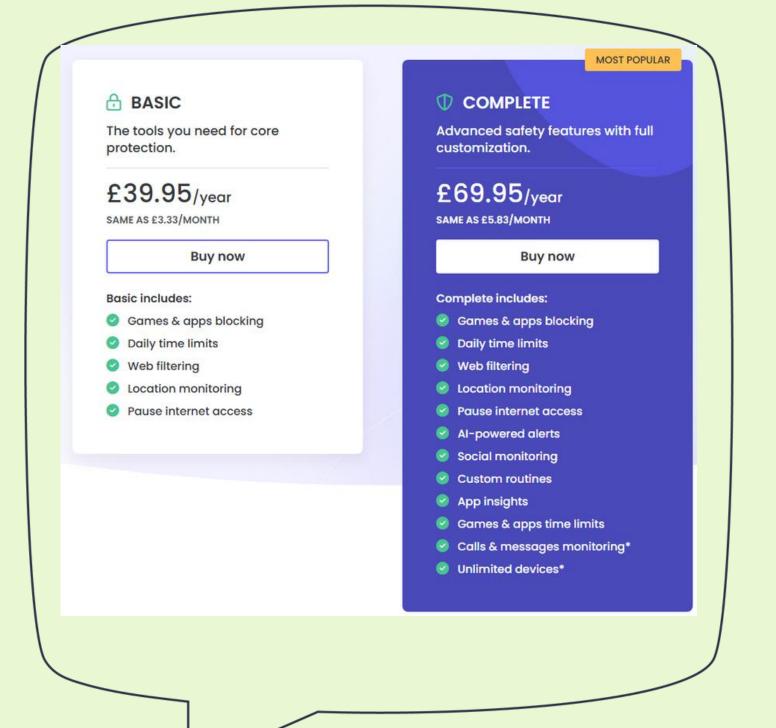
Parental controls & monitoring

Use parental control software (e.g., Google Family Link, Norton Family, or Qustodio).





Parental Control Software



Free

Apple Screentime & Google Family Link

Mid

e.g. Norton Family

Expensive

e.g. Qustodio

Qustodio is the premium product using a VPN for extensive controls.



Step wise progression



O1. Delay the first phone.

Consider a basic phone first.

o2. 14+ Consider a smartphone phone with strict controls.

o3. 16+ A cautious trial of selected social media with private settings and time limits.

O4. Greater responsibility and freedom online.



We have the power



The more of you that decide something, whether that's delaying or which apps to allow, the easier it becomes.

When a minority group pushing change was below 25% of the total group, its efforts failed.

But when the committed minority reached 25%, there was an abrupt change in the group dynamic, and very quickly the majority of the population adopted the new norm.

Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2023



Want to do more? PAPA × SMARTPHO





o1. Talk to your child and other parents.

⁰². Join your local Smartphone Free Childhood WhatsApp group.

smartphonefreechildhood.org/find-your-community

⁰³. Sign the Parent Pact



<<<<<<<< Scan to sign





Connaught Junior School

23

Children signed up

Year / Age Pacts Year 1 (5 - 6) 1 Year 3 (7 - 8) 4 Year 4 (8 - 9) 4 Year 5 (9 - 10) 4 Year 6 (10 - 11) 7 Year 7 (11 - 12) 3

SURREY SCHOOL LEADERBOARD

South Farnham School >	239
St Peter's CofE Primary School ↗	201
Potters Gate CofE Primary School >	185
Cobham Free School ↗	185
St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School	172
St Polycarp's Catholic Primary School >	167
St Anne's Catholic Primary School >	161
Claygate Primary School >	129
Holy Trinity Pewley Down Infant School ↗	129
Greenfield School >	118
St Lawrence CofE Aided Junior School, East Molesey >	117
St George's College Weybridge >	116
St Martins Church of England Junior School >	115
The Mead Infant and Nursery School >	106







O1. Tips for talking to kids about smartphones & social media



O2. Smartphone alternatives; brick phones, flip phones & sims



Organiser to build momentum with other parents

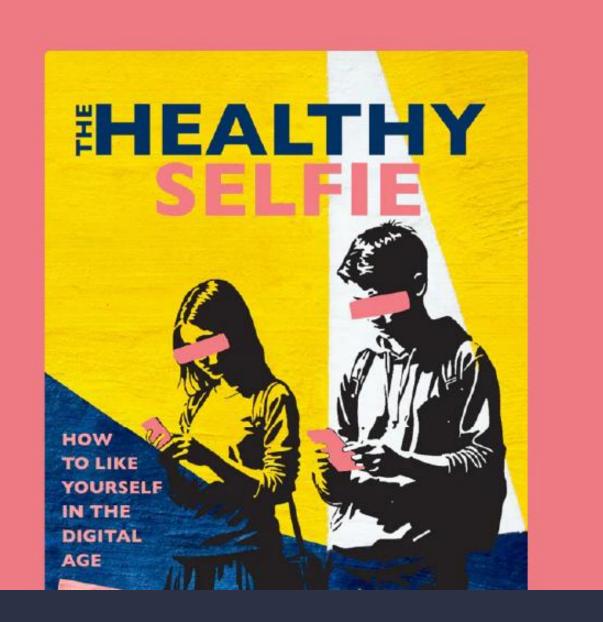


O4. Explore the issue: curated videos, podcasts, books and films



The Healthy Selfie





You can buy a copy of The Healthy Selfie at www.thehealthyselfie.co.uk via the QR code or on Amazon



Donate

www.papayatalks.com/donate



Extra resources

The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt

The Healthy Selfie by Dr Susie Davies

papayatalks.com

smartphonefreechildhood.org

teched-off.com

internetmatters.org



Encourage your school to register for the Smartphone Free Schools rating.

smartphonefreerating.org

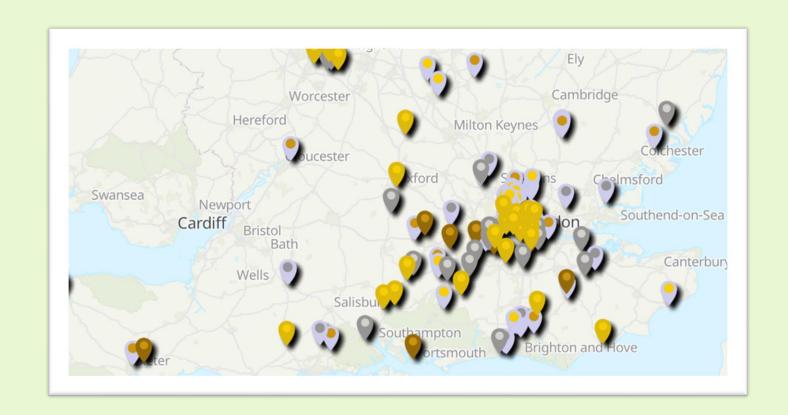


SMARTPHØNE FREE SCHOOLS RATING



No smartphones on site (basic or brick phones may be allowed)

Encourage your school to register – it's free! smartphonefreerating.org







Smartphones are handed in or locked away

Smartphones are never used, but stay with pupil



If your child has a phone

01

Talk to your child and other parents

02.

Set time and place boundaries (i.e. bedrooms)

03.

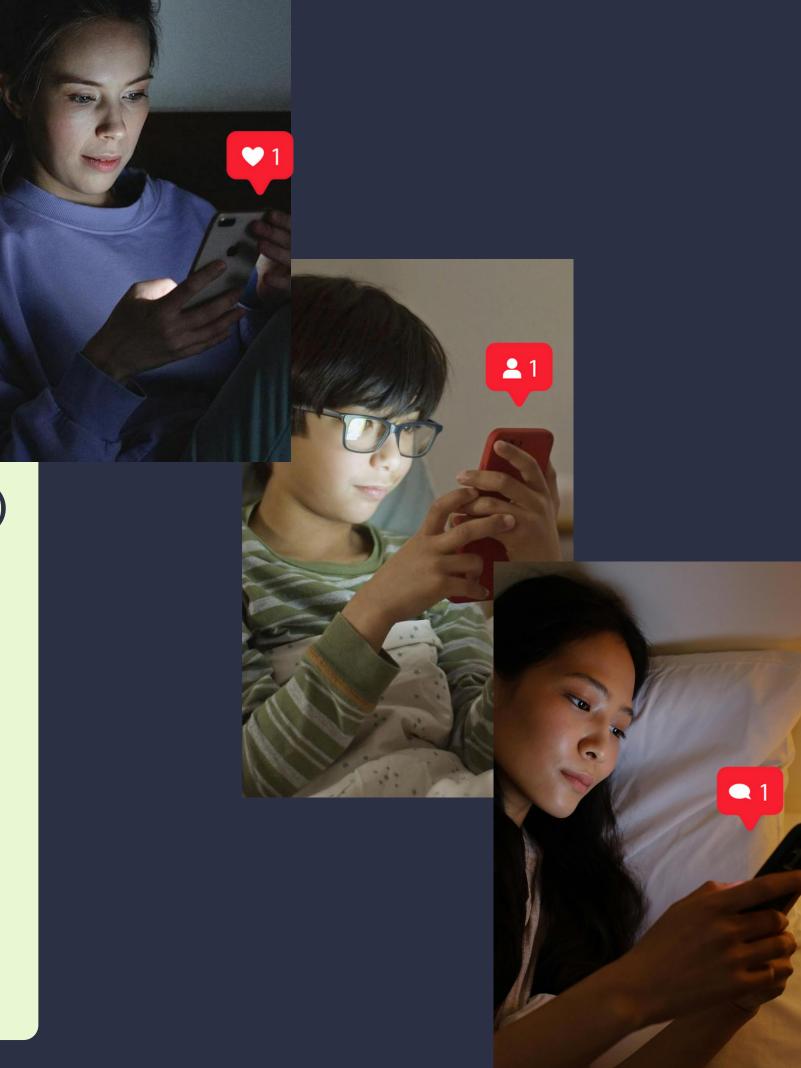
Use filters and parental control apps

04

Encourage more things that help your child/teen forget about their phone

05.

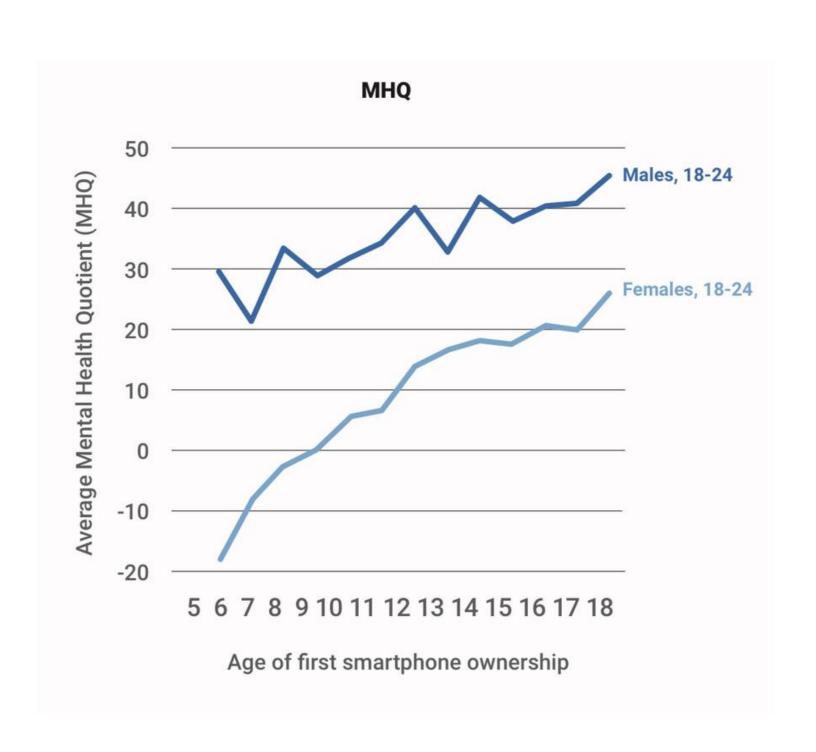
Consider changing your mind....





Mental wellbeing improved with the older age of smartphone ownership.

The younger the age of first smartphone ownership the lower the mental health outcomes.



AGE OF FIRST SMARTPHONE/TABLET AND MENTAL WELLBEING OUTCOMES.
Sapien Labs, May 15, 2023



You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.

C.S. LEWIS