

“When you are ready for your child to stop being a child, give them a smartphone”

A smartphone-free childhood does not mean a phone-free one.

# SMARTPHONE-FREE CHILDHOOD



(Click on banners to go to the websites)

# Objectives of this meeting

- Continue to promote the nationwide movement for a SMARTPHONE-FREE CHILDHOOD
- Share evidence from research around the impact of smartphones on children
- Share concerns that parents have around the use of smartphones
- Share alternatives for smartphones
- Provide details of how parents can work together to support the movement collaboratively - Parent Ambassadors
- Share the progress that has been made over the past 12 months

# Smartphone-Free Childhood is a parent-led movement on a mission to protect millions of children from the dangers of using smartphones too young.

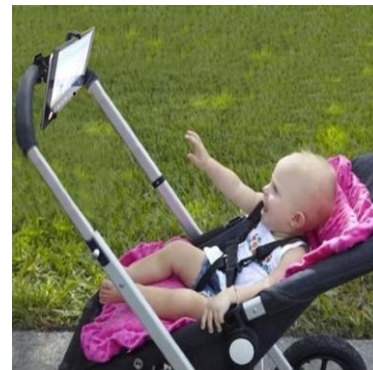
The goals for this campaign :

- A nationwide ban on smartphones in schools\* with phone lockers and pouches so they are not accessible during the day.
- Ban of social media for children under 16 years old.
- Ban of smartphones for children under 14 years old.\*



JONATHAN  
HAIDT  
The Anxious  
Generation

How the Great Rewiring  
of Childhood Is Causing  
an Epidemic of Mental Illness



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### St Albans school heads call for under-14s smartphone ban

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St Albans bids to become the first smartphone-free city for children under 14 - with headteachers begging pupils' parents to delay buying mobiles for them

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### St Albans set to be first smartphone-free UK city for under-14s

Consortium of head teachers urged parents to delay children's device access over fears of mental health impact

Steve Bird

Related Topics  
St. Albans, Primary Schools, Children, Children's health, Mobile phones, Billie Eilish



### St Albans wants to be first smartphone-free city for under-14s

Head teachers in the city plead with parents of primary pupils to swap smartphones for simple 'dumbphone' handsets



IN DEPTH

### 'We wouldn't sell a child alcohol, so why give them smartphones?'

Mobiles have been blamed for a rise in anxiety, anorexia and attention disorders. Schools in St Albans plan to take action

### St Albans headteachers call for smartphone-free childhoods

22nd May

EDUCATION ST ALBANS



### Children could be banned from using smartphones in a UK city

Jasper King

Published May 22, 2024, 4:09pm | Updated May 22, 2024, 6:29pm



Comment



Headteachers from different primary schools across St Albans have written a joint letter (Picture: Andrew Lawrence)

## Group of 17 London secondary schools join up to go smartphone-free

Measures will impact more than 13,000 pupils in Southwark, and include confiscating phones used at school



THE STANDARD

### More than 100 schools across Barnet to go smartphone-free

Noah Vickers

17 February 2025 · 3-min read



Labour MP Dan Tomlinson says smartphones pose 'a huge risk' to young people's mental health (PA Wire)

More than 100 schools across Barnet will go 'smartphone-free' from September, in a bid to help the borough's young people 'learn, socialise and grow, free from addictive algorithms'.

## Academy chain with 35,000 pupils to be first in England to go phone-free

Exclusive: Ormiston academies trust says impact of phones on learning and mental health has been 'catastrophic'

● How going phone-free taught pupils 'to socialise, old school'



### Eton set to give 'brick' phones to first years



## Australia approves social media ban on under-16s

## 'Digital pause': France pilots s ban

Paris (AFP) – Tens of thousands of pupils in France are going through a slightly different return to school this autumn, deprived of their mobile phones.

THE SAFER  
PHONES BILL

## A Bill to make smartphones less addictive to support healthier, happier childhoods

Josh MacAlister OBE MP (Labour - Whitehaven and Workington)



# Swiped: The School that Banned Smartphones



N SERIES  
**ADOLESCENCE**

### Adolescence

2025 | 15 | 1 Season | Drama

When a 13-year-old is accused of the murder of a classmate, his family, therapist and the detective in charge are all left asking: what really happened?

Starring: Stephen Graham, Ashley Walters, Erin Doherty  
Creators: Jack Thorne, Stephen Graham

# Concerns about delaying smartphones

"That's how they communicate now!"

"They can't be the only ones without one or they'll be left out!"

"But they need independence, this is part of growing up"

"But they will miss out on WhatsApp groups with their friends"

"But we promised them..."

"But their older siblings have them"

"For children with divorced parents, aren't smartphones a necessity?"

Kids can communicate with each parent on a simple phone and use an iPad for Facetime calls if required.

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

"But my child needs a smartphone for train tickets and bus trackers!"

"This will never work, smartphones are essential in our lives now."

<https://delaysmartphones.org.uk/evidence/>



## EVERYONE'S GOT ONE BECAUSE EVERYONE'S GOT ONE



Most parents believe smartphones are harmful, yet almost all children have them by Year 7



Because resisting peer pressure becomes almost impossible when children's social lives migrate online

*The powerful network effects of smartphones and social media mean parents and young people feel like they have no choice*



## PARENTS WISH THINGS WERE DIFFERENT

**94%**

of primary school  
parents think  
smartphones  
are harmful

Parentkind nationwide poll of 2,496  
people, April 24

**70%**

of parents believe  
smartphones  
negatives impact  
family life

HMD poll of 10,000 parents, June 24

**33%**

of parents of children  
with smartphones have  
cried over their child's  
phone obsession

HMD poll of 10,000 parents, June 24



## YOUNG PEOPLE WISH THINGS WERE DIFFERENT

**67%**

of 16-18 year olds  
think smartphones  
are harmful

Parentkind poll, 2024

**1 in 5**

of 16-18 year olds  
have felt "life is not  
worth living" due to  
social media

Parentkind poll, 2024

**50%**

of teens say they are  
"addicted" to social  
media

Millennium Cohort Study, 2024

...addictive



FOCUS AND BRAIN CHANGES

46%

of teens say they use their phones "almost constantly"

Pew Research Centre, Aug 2022

29 hours

Per week is the average British 12-year-old now spends on their smartphone

Childwise Monitor Report, 2021

2 in 3

of 11-17 year olds 'often' or 'sometimes' find it difficult to put down their phone

Common Sense Media, 2023

46% of teens say they use the internet **"almost constantly"**

23% of young people have a dysfunctional relationship with their smartphones

READ MORE



**"Behind every screen on your phone, a thousand engineers have worked to make it maximally addictive. Children are particularly susceptible to this kind of manipulative design."**



Aza Raskin

Co-inventor of 'infinite scroll', turned campaigner

Back



Aza Raskin

@aza

One of my lessons from infinite scroll: that optimizing something for ease-of-use does not mean best for the user or humanity.



Nishant Chaturvedi 🇮🇳 @nishantchat · Jun 7, 2019

#SocialMediaAddiction

The creator of the infinite scrolling feature, Aza Raskin, had a noble intention when he went about designing this feature.

# Exposure to Harmful Content

...exposing  
children to sexual  
and offensive  
content

18+

SEXUAL CONTENT & BEHAVIOUR

WhatsApp  
Tik-Tok  
YouTube  
Snapchat  
Instagram

**"We'll look back in 20 years  
and be horrified by what our  
children were exposed to"**



**Dame Rachel de Souza**  
Children's Commissioner for England, 2022

**51%**

of UK 11-13 year-olds  
have seen hardcore  
pornography online

British Board of Film Classification Report, March 2022

**75%**

of UK 15 year olds  
questioned had been  
sent beheading videos

Digital Childhoods, children's commissioner report, 2022

**90%**

of girls and 50% of boys  
say they are sent  
unwanted explicit content

Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools, 2021

...making children  
more likely to self  
harm



MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

**3x**

Teens with problematic  
smartphone-use are twice as  
likely to have anxiety and three  
times as likely to have  
depression

King's College London, 2024

**1 in 5**

UK 16 to 18 years olds say that their  
social media has made them feel that  
'life is not worth living'

Parentkind Poll, 2024

**53%**

The number of children referred  
to emergency mental healthcare  
in England has soared by 53% in  
three years

Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2024

...increasing  
depression and  
anxiety in  
children



MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

~Susie

In the last decade there have been 70% less outdoor  
accidents and 93% more incidents of self harm in  
children... as a GP I can promise you it's much easier  
to mend a broken bone than a broken mind.



24

### Self-Harm Episodes, U.K. Teens

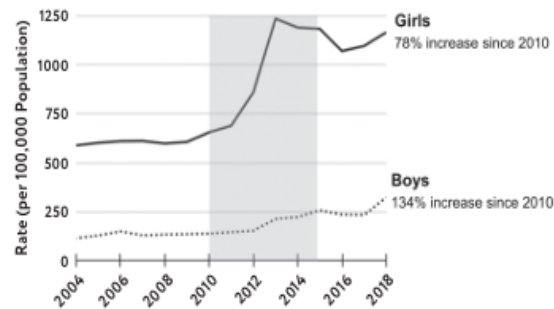


Figure 1.9. U.K. teens' (ages 13–16) self-harm episodes. (Source: Cybulski et al., 2021, drawing from two databases of anonymized British medical records.)<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 1: Mental wellbeing in young adulthood (ages 18-24) improves with older age of first smartphone**

Mental wellbeing measured by the Mental Health Quotient or MHQ increases with older age of first smartphone ownership. Correspondingly the percentage that are distressed or struggling decreases.



# What can parents do?



**SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD  
PARENT PACT**

## Sign the Hertfordshire Parent Pact

By signing this Pact, you're joining a growing community of parents in Hertfordshire choosing to wait to give their child a smartphone until at least the end of Year 9.

The Pact is anonymous (we'll never share your name publicly), but the more of us who sign, the more powerful it becomes in shifting the social norm in our community.

Plus we'll use the data to show the Government how much this matters to parents across the country, so that they take urgent action to protect children from the harms of smartphones and social media.

Your choice – and your voice – really is powerful ⚡ ⚡ ⚡

Select school (start typing your school's name to find it) \*

Select child's school year (choose all that apply) \*

Acting in the best interests of my child and our community, I will wait until at least the end of Year 9 before getting them a smartphone

'Parents know they are not alone': UK pact to withhold smartphones until 14 gathers pace

Signatories to online pledge say it offers support in family reckonings over phone usage



The change can only be implemented by parents at home!

# Alternatives to Smartphones

## Internet Free Phones

When you do want to get a phone for your child make sure:

- **The phone does not support WI-FI**
- No 4G/5G
- No selfie camera
- **Use a SIM card with NO DATA**, calls and texts only
- Give it with a contract/boundaries (see below)

### Sim Cards:

**IMPORTANT** – When you get a SIM card for your child's phone, make sure that it has NO DATA roaming, only calls and texts so that there is no chance that they can access the internet. Currently Asda are the only company that are offering this.

[Asda Unlimited calls and Texts £4 per month](#)



[XPLORA GO X2](#) – £99



[Imoo Z1 Smartwatch for Kids](#) – £99



[Nokia 5710 Express Audio](#) – £75



[Nokia 105](#) – £25



[Nokia 3310](#) – £60



[The Phone](#)  
£100 - £105 (€100)



[Tile](#) – £25



[Apple Airtag](#) – £30

# Modelling good behaviour



Parents make a pact with groups of families  
to delay smartphones until 14

St Albans School  
agreed policy to  
delay smartphones  
until children are 14

Parent  
Ambassadors  
help build  
support within  
their year  
groups

Parents make pacts in bigger groups  
within class and year group whatsapp  
groups to delay smartphones until 14

Parents connect with friends across St.  
Albans to drive change across the city

Make meaningful change nationwide by  
delaying smartphones until 14

# Parent Blueprint for Smartphone Free Childhood

## Our Goals

1. Ban use of smartphones in all St Albans schools in line with government guidance, seeking commitment to policy b on page 7 ("Mobile phone handed in on arrival")
2. Withhold smartphones from children under 14 across St Albans
3. To ensure that all schools to have a clear policy that lessons must not require students to have use of a smartphone, and must ensure that a smartphone is not required to participate in school life

## Milestones/Targets

1. (School) Demonstrate >50% support from school's parents, via Second Survey
2. (School) Create a Parent Pact, signed by >50% of school's parents
3. (St Albans) Write a letter to secondary schools from primary parents, signed by >50% of primary parents
  - Include a table of all primaries and data on volume of support
4. (St Albans) Write a letter to local MP from primary and secondary school parents, signed by >50% of parents
  - Include a table of all schools and data on volume of support
5. (St Albans) Create a city-wide Parent Pact

# Parent Challenges

1. Target a reduction in your own screen time, e.g. by 10% a week over the course of a month
2. No phones in a specific area of the house, e.g. the living room, bedrooms
3. No phones after a specific time, e.g. 6pm until the kids are in bed
4. Have a lockable box where you store your phones during "down time"
5. Smartphone free Sundays



## Why parental controls are a big tech cop out

58%

of teens say they've never had controls put on their phone by parents

47%

of teens with controls in place say they have bypassed them

(Parentkind poll, May 2024)



If your child has a smartphone, we'd recommend using parental controls – but ultimately they're not the solution to this problem



Many parents don't have the tech-knowledge or headspace to set them up (or to hold fast in the face of a teen lobbying for more)



And teens find multiple ways to bypass controls:

Performing a factory reset

Using VPN software

Hacking the WiFi router

Memorising your passcode

Even if your kid's phone has controls, their friends may not – so they may see or be sent inappropriate content anyway



Yet big tech lobby government not to regulate them further by arguing that their parental controls are sufficient – that 'parents just need to educate themselves'



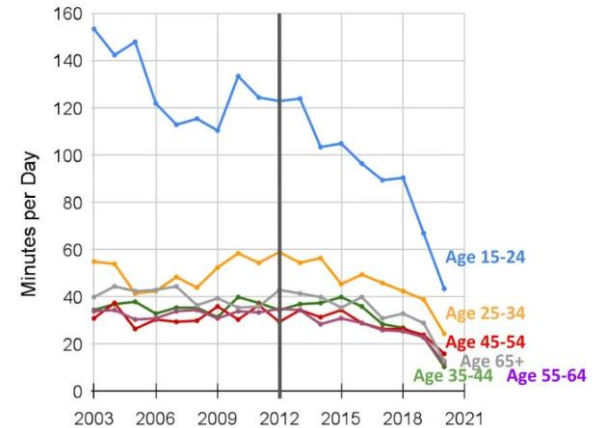
Parental controls have been around since the dawn of the iPhone – and we are where we are. Teens across the globe are experiencing an explosion in mental illness.



# Are we as parents providing our children with the childhood that they need?

The opportunity cost to childhood is profound. The average UK 12 year-old now spends over four hours per day on their smartphone, displacing the kinds of activities that have shaped childhood for millennia.

Daily Avg Time with Friends (minutes)



**43%**

of US teenagers waking minutes are spent on screens

Gitnux Marketdata Report, Jan 2024

**30%**

Since 1975, the daily average time children spend playing outdoors has fallen by 30%, while screen-based activities have risen 23%

Zach Rausch - Mullan 2019

**65%**

The daily average time that teenagers spend with friends has plummeted by 65% since 2010

American Time Use Study

# ROBLOX

- 80 million plays a day – 60% by over 13 year olds
- Encourages players to communicate online – filtered but not perfect
- Public servers – most games are open to everybody (can limit with VIP servers which you have to pay extra for)
- Relys on creator ratings for games
- Content of games can be adult or inappropriate themes
- Experience blocker – what else could they be doing?



"My first message would be, if you're not comfortable, don't let your kids be on Roblox."  
"That sounds a little counter-intuitive, but I would always trust parents to make their own decisions,"

David Baszucki – CEO of Roblox

# Is there a better alternative?

4. More independence, free play, and responsibility in the real world. That's the way children naturally develop social skills, overcome anxiety, and become self-governing young adults.

- **Jonathan Haidt**, *Anxious Generation*

#**IRL** REVOLUTION



# Smartphone Free Childhood is a grassroots movement on a mission to challenge Big Tech's colonisation of childhood



Join the growing movement. It takes 30secs - and could change the world!

[SIGN OUR PACT](#)

Find tools, template letters and guides to help navigate the issue.

[RESOURCES](#)

Join an international SFC group, or find out how to start one.

[GLOBAL GROUPS](#)

Activate Windows  
Go to Settings to activate Windows.



If we all agree to delay giving our children smartphones, and instead gave them brick phones until at least the end of Year 9, the peer pressure instantly reduces.

Saying no can feel impossible when you're acting alone. Acting collectively makes it infinitely easier.

# We are stronger together

- Anonymous to the school
  - just year group
- Not legally-binding
- A statement of intent
- Sign up for all your children

Parent Pact



