talks

SAC

TOGETHER, SUPPORTING
OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ON
THEIR JOURNEY

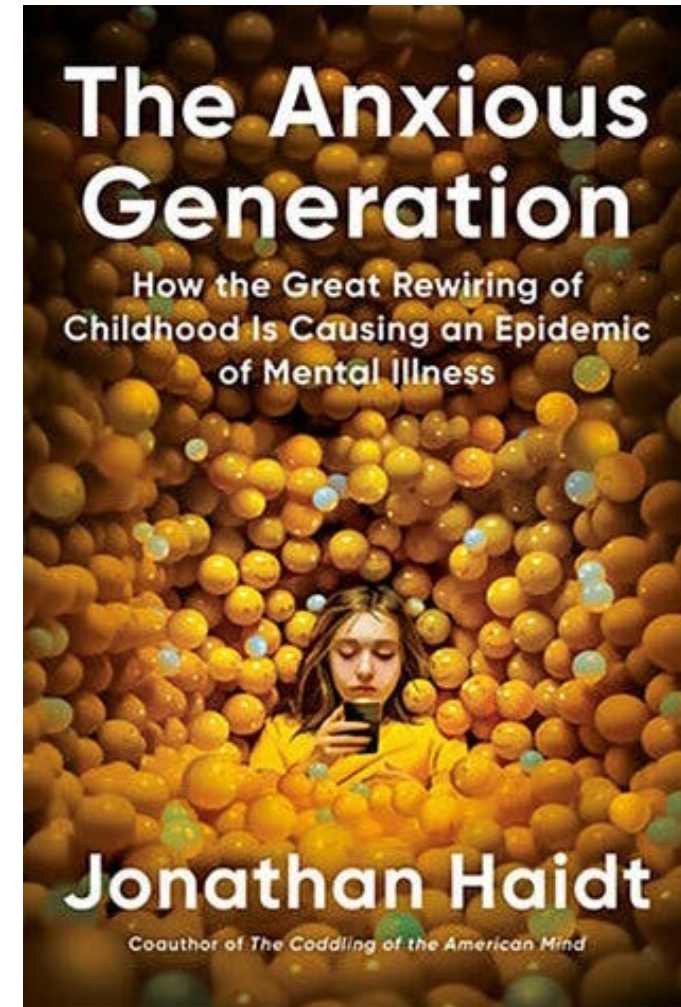**Smartphones, Social Media and Well-being**

Taking a Stand – Our Position

1. We want to continue to support a return to more '**free unstructured play**', which encourages more face to face socialising.

2. We want to support healthy **adult role modelling** of smart phone and social media use.

3. We want to develop a guided and informed introduction to social media for our children, **no social media until 16.**

4. We want to support families, in not giving smart phones to our children until at least Year 9. **Hold the Line 'til Year 9.**
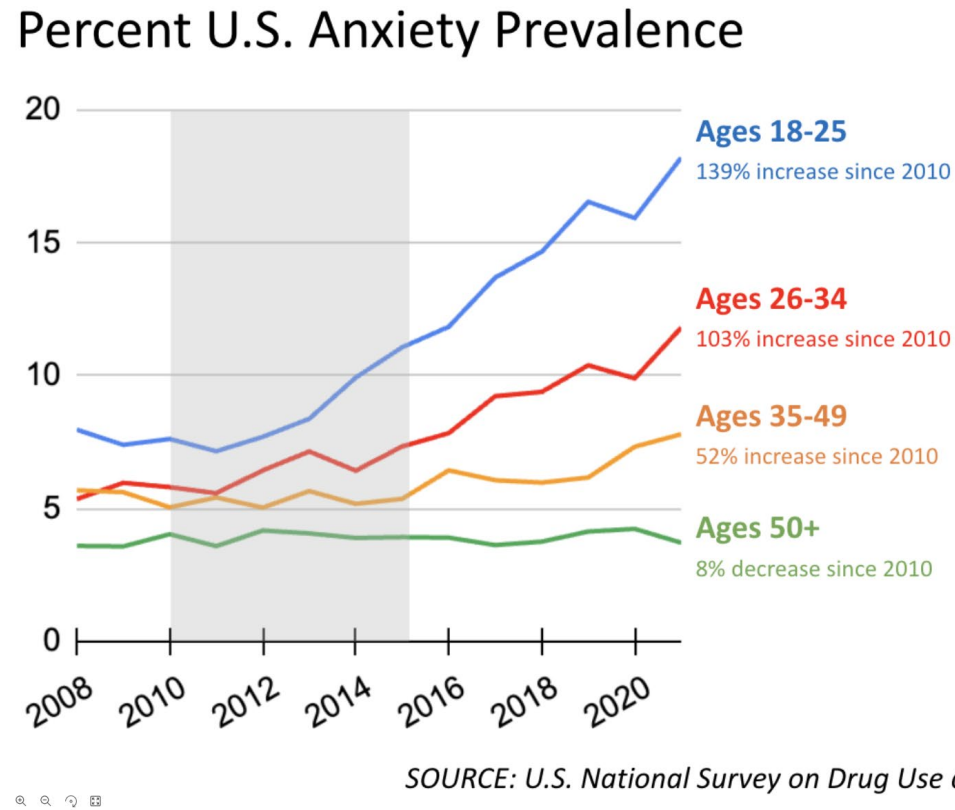
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Why?

- Better academic performance.

- Improved social skills.

- Better sleep patterns.

- Mental health benefits.

- Physical health benefits.

- Increased attention and behavioural outcomes.
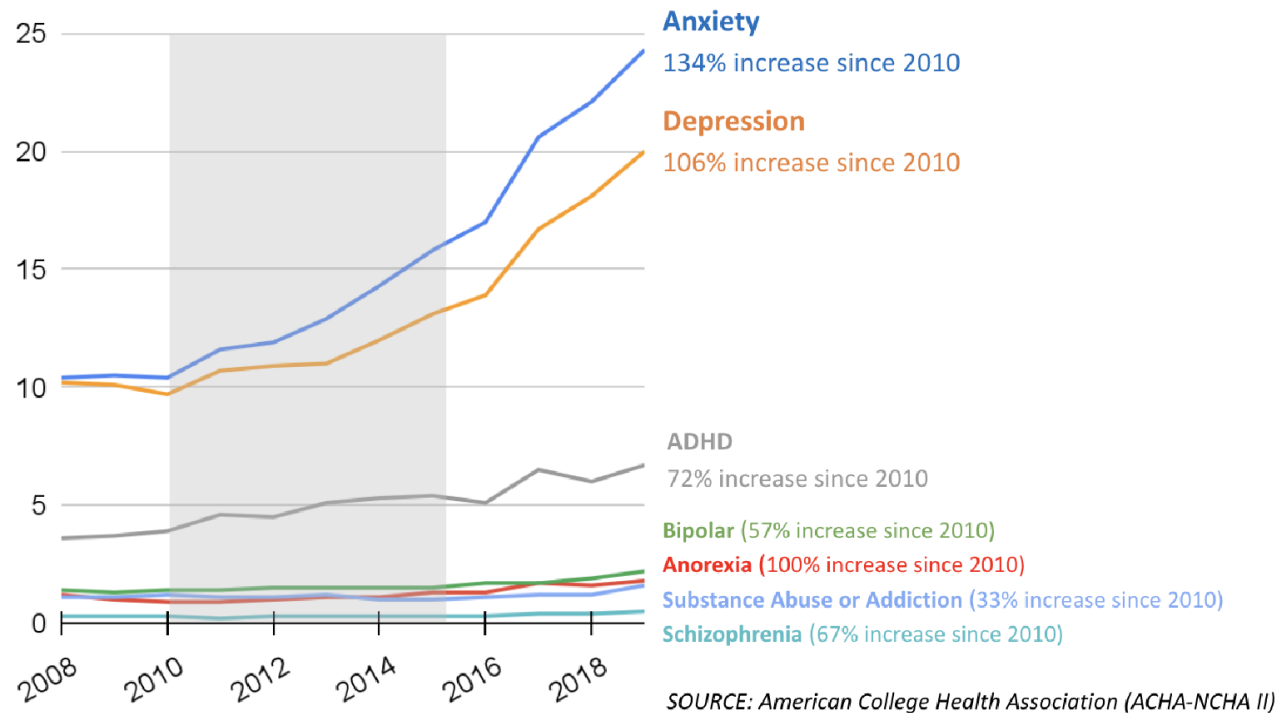
- Less exposure to harmful and sexual content.

The Anxious Generation

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

Jonathan Haidt

Coauthor of *The Coddling of the American Mind*

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Our Data

Year 6	Year 7	Year 8
• 43% already have a smartphone and close to half of these charge their phone in their bedroom overnight. • A third of Year 6 students have seen violent, upsetting or adult content while online. • 80% use the internet to chat with friends. • 27% have been contacted by someone they don't know online.	• 53% have a smartphone. • 25% have access to TikTok and a third use Snapchat. • 16% have seen sexual or pornographic content. • 32% have seen violent content. • 62% talk to their parents about their online activity.	• 73% have a smartphone. • 15% report being bullied online . • 14% report having seen sexual or pornographic content. • 32% have seen violent content. • Year 8 students do know how to block someone and do talk to their parents about their online activity.

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Smartphones and Anxiety

Percent U.S. Anxiety Prevalence

Ages 18-25
139% increase since 2010

Ages 26-34
103% increase since 2010

Ages 35-49
52% increase since 2010

Ages 50+
8% decrease since 2010

SOURCE: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health

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Smart Phones and Mental Illness

Percent of U.S. Undergraduates Diagnosed with a Mental Illness

Anxiety
134% increase since 2010

Depression
106% increase since 2010

ADHD
72% increase since 2010

Bipolar (57% increase since 2010)
Anorexia (100% increase since 2010)
Substance Abuse or Addiction (33% increase since 2010)
Schizophrenia (67% increase since 2010)

SOURCE: American College Health Association (ACHA-NCHA II)

What the statistics show:

- Undergrads are 50% more likely to have depression than 20 years ago.
- Between 2010-2020 there has been a 40% increase suicidal thoughts.
- 1 in 53 teenagers attempts suicide, a 30% increase
  = A Mental Health Crisis

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Smartphones and Cyber bullying

1. Increased Exposure: Smartphones provide constant access to social media platforms, where cyberbullying can occur. This increased exposure makes it easier for bullies to target victims.

2. Anonymity: emboldens individuals to engage in cyberbullying without fear of immediate consequences. Operate outside value set.

3. Mental Health Impact: Victims of cyberbullying often experience significant mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

Definition: Online harassment or abuse where a person repeatedly causes harm to others using electronic devices and technologies.

Typically only 1 in 10 students tell their parents.

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Smartphones and Addictions

1. Increased Screen Time leads to:

- Increased addictive behaviours.

- A move up the dopamine ladder.

2. Mental Health Impact:

- Increased addictions equal increased anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

3. Behavioural Changes:

- Addicted pre-teens behavioural changes include irritability, restlessness, and difficulty concentrating when not on phones.

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Sexualised Content

- **Higher Incidence of Exposure**: Increased smartphone use correlates with higher incidences of exposure to sexual content and pornography.

- **Developmental Impact**: Early exposure to sexual content can lead to distorted views on relationships and sexuality.

- **Lack of Supervision**: The privacy of smartphone use makes it harder for parents to monitor their children's online activities.

40% of 11–13-year-olds accepted invitation from total strangers.
50% children play online games with people they don't know.

Pre-teens and teens are more worried about protecting info from parents than total strangers.

1 in 4
young NZ'ers first saw porn before the age of 12

71%
were not seeking out pornography when they first saw it

66%
haven't talked to a parent or caregiver about porn

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Smartphones and Relationship Development

Decreased Social Interaction:

- Higher smartphone use correlates with decreased face-to-face social interactions.

Lower Social Confidence:

- Increased social media use is linked to lower social confidence and self-esteem.

Fragmented Attention:

- Frequent smartphone use leads to fragmented attention, impacting the quality of social interactions.

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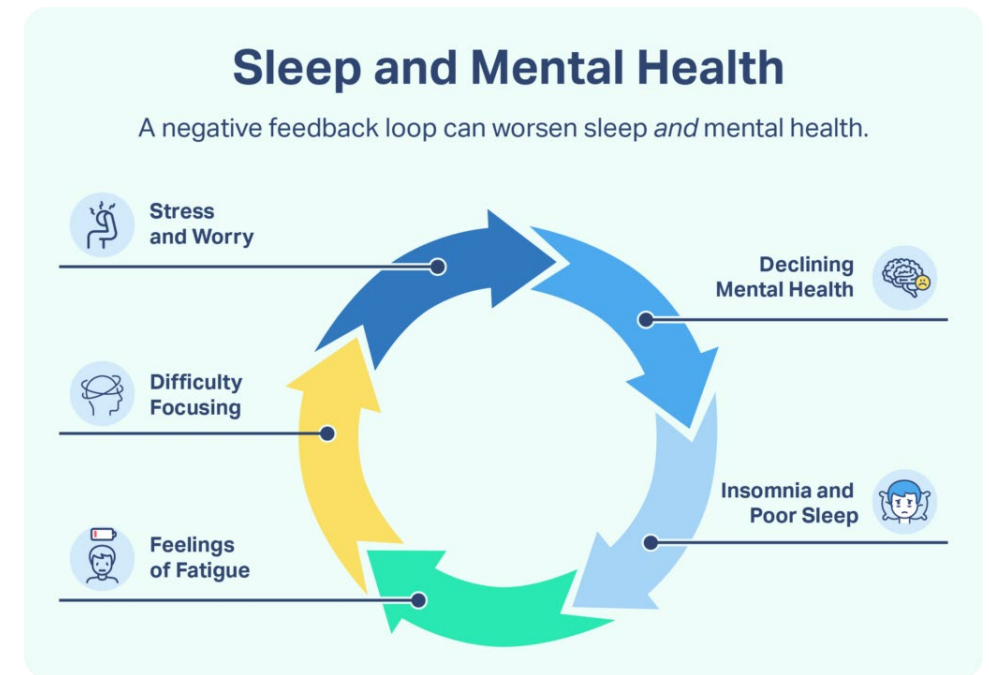# Smartphones and Sleep

Increased Screen Time:

- Higher screen time correlates with poorer sleep quality.

Sleep Duration:

- Adolescents who use smartphones extensively tend to have shorter sleep durations.

Sleep Interruptions:

- Frequent notifications and social media use are linked to more sleep interruptions.

Sleep and Mental Health

A negative feedback loop can worsen sleep *and* mental health.

- Stress and Worry
- Difficulty Focusing
- Feelings of Fatigue
- Declining Mental Health
- Insomnia and Poor Sleep

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What can we do?

1. Encourage free unstructured play.

2. Healthy adult role modelling.

3. A guided introduction to social media.

4. Delay smartphone ownership.

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Free Unstructured Play

Definition: *When children have the freedom to explore, create, and interact with their environment and peers without constant adult oversight*

- Builds development of social skills.

- Enhanced creativity and problem-solving skills.

- Improved emotional regulation.

- Promotes improved physical health.

- Builds independence and confidence.

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Our Community's Ideas

- **Sports & Physical Play**: Football, swimming, biking, gymnastics, and more.
- **Reading & Learning**: Books, puzzles, board games, and library visits.
- **Family Time**: Shared chores, outings, meals, and tech-free play.
- **Outdoor Adventures**: Hiking, trampolining, parks, and backyard fun.
- **Social Connections**: Friends, playdates, games, and community events.
- **STEM & Tech**: Robotics, science experiments, and building games.
- **Travel & Exploration**: Holidays, tramping, skiing, and adventures.
- **Creative Arts**: Drawing, painting, Lego, and crafts.
- **Music & Drama**: Singing, instruments, dance, and theatre.
- **Cooking Fun**: Helping with baking and meal prep.
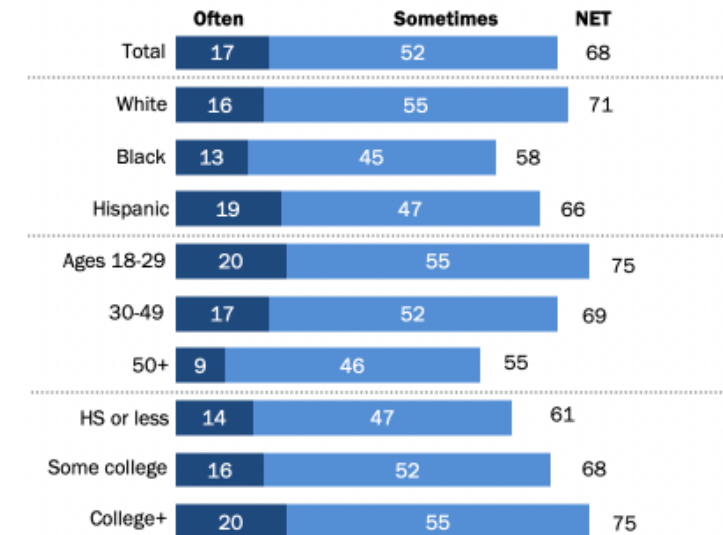
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Healthy Adult Role Modelling

Most of us have our own sneaky addictions.

What could we as adults be doing better?

68% of parents say they at least sometimes feel distracted by their phone when spending time with their kids

% of U.S. parents who say they ___ feel distracted by their smartphone while they are spending time with their children ...

|	Often	Sometimes	NET
Total	17	52	68
White	16	55	71
Black	13	45	58
Hispanic	19	47	66
Ages 18-29	20	55	75
30-49	17	52	69
50+	9	46	55
HS or less	14	47	61
Some college	16	52	68
College+	20	55	75

Note: Based on parents who have at least one child under the age of 18 but may also have an adult child or children. This item was only asked among those who use a smartphone but is presented here among all parents. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Those who did not give an answer or who gave other responses are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted March 2-15, 2020.
"Parenting Children in the Age of Screens"

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Our Community's Ideas

- **Set Screen Time Limits**: Monitor and manage daily use.

- **Use "Do Not Disturb"**: Reduce after-hours interruptions.

- **Stay Active**: Replace screen time with hobbies and exercise.

- **No Devices at Meals**: Prioritize quality family time.

- **Limit Notifications**: Minimize distractions.

- **Device-Free Zones**: Keep tech out of bedrooms.

- **Talk About Tech**: Encourage open family discussions.

- **Be Intentional**: Use devices with purpose.

- **Set Boundaries**: Create personal tech-free rules.

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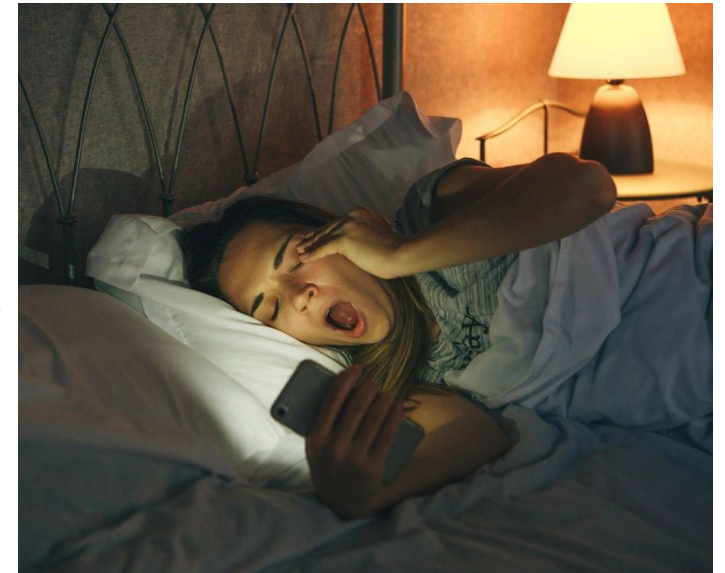
A Guided Introduction to Social Media

Do we wait for government and tech companies, or:

- Discuss what aligns with your values and hopes.

- Outline these values in conversations.

- Put the outcomes into an agreement .

- Use or adapt the StAC Family Smartphone Agreement.
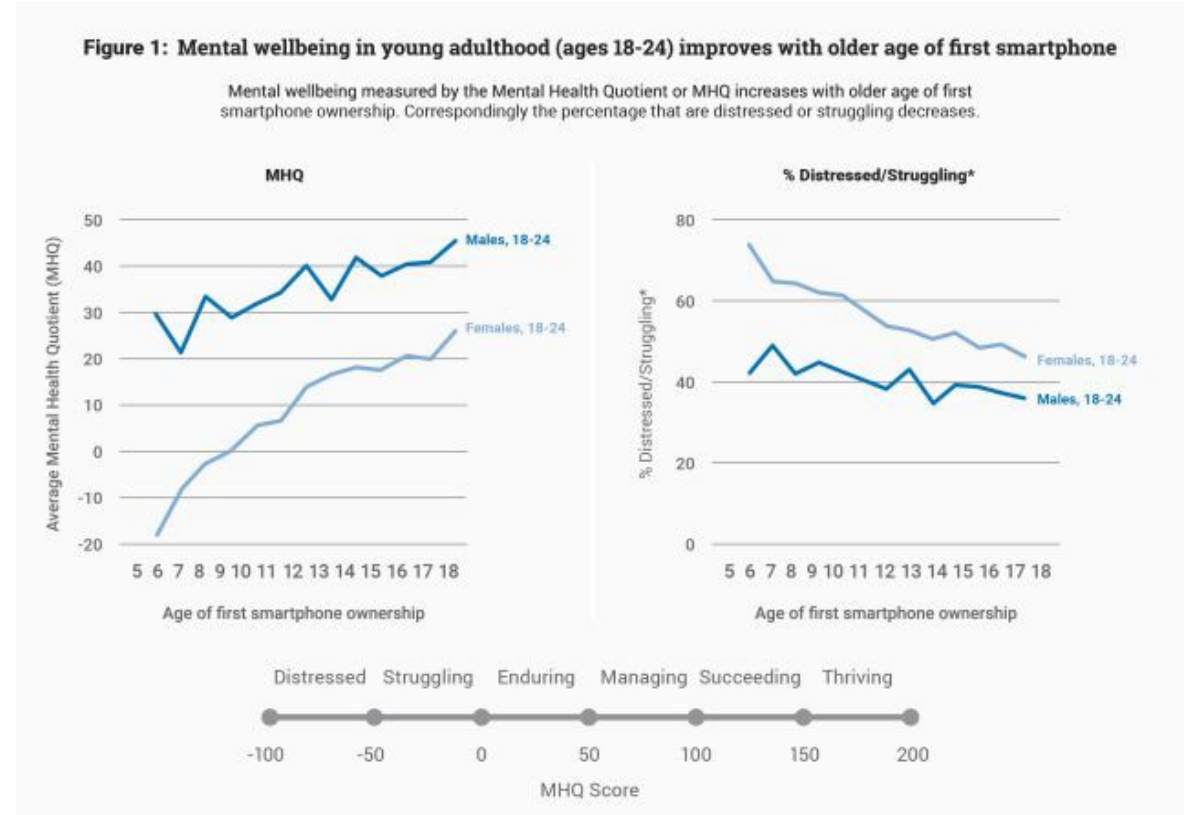
- *What other support is needed?*

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Our Community's Ideas

- **Delay Access**: No smartphones or social media before age 16.
- **Parental Monitoring**: Use monitoring tools and link devices.
- **Set Time Limits**: Restrict screen time, especially on weekends.
- **Talk Openly**: Discuss online safety, filters, and algorithms.
- **Limit Platforms**: Avoid social media; allow safe, basic apps.
- **Establish Rules**: No phones overnight; shared passcodes.
- **Use Filters**: Block social media access on all devices.
- **Encourage Direct Contact**: Promote calls and messages over apps.
- **Teach Media Literacy**: Explain fake content and online bullying.
- **Lead by Example**: Model healthy, responsible tech use.

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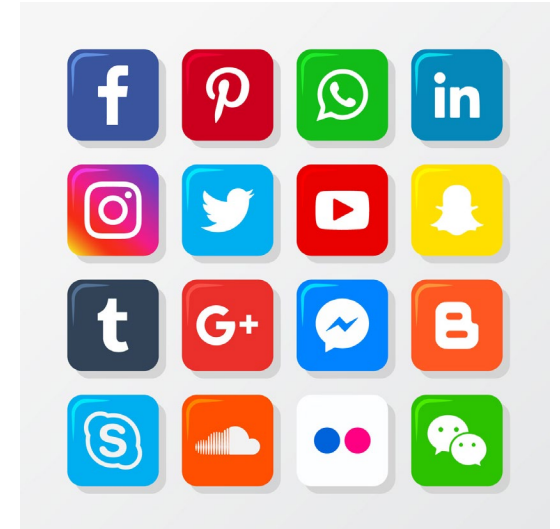
Delay Smartphone Ownership

- The longer the delay the better the outcome.
- There will be a fight.
- Test and create community momentum.
- Develop critical mass = classroom pledge.
- *What other ideas?*

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.

Age of first smartphone/tablet use and later mental health
Source: Sapien Labs, Age of First Smartphone/Tablet and Mental Wellbeing Outcomes, May 15, 2023

Smartphones, Social Media and Well-being

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Our Community's Ideas

- **No Phones**: Delay ownership; use shared or basic phones.
- **Set Clear Boundaries**: Use family rules and screen time contracts.
- **Model Good Habits**: Demonstrate balanced screen use.
- **Use Parental Controls**: Monitor with apps like Bark or Family Link.
- **Keep Communication Open**: Talk regularly about tech and its impact.
- **Shared Device Use**: Keep consoles and devices in common areas.
- **Promote Alternatives**: Encourage outdoor play, reading, and hobbies.
- **No Devices in Bedrooms**: Especially overnight.
- **Enforce Time Limits**: Set and stick to daily screen schedules.
- **Monitor & Adjust**: Review usage and update rules as needed.

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Hold the Line 'til Year 9 – at StAC

- Parents use the online form to sign up to the pledge.

- Once 10 families in a class sign, the pledge becomes activated.

- Parents who sign up are then notified by email and receive a list of other participating families.

- Families are encouraged to connect and support each other.

- If a family choses a basic (txt and calls only) phone they can still sign the pledge.

- Our Family Smartphone Agreement is a good starting point for discussion when introducing a basic phone.

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- Keep relationship positive.

- Have a conversation.

- Core issue is Core values.

- Read **The Anxious Generation** by Jonathan Haidt.
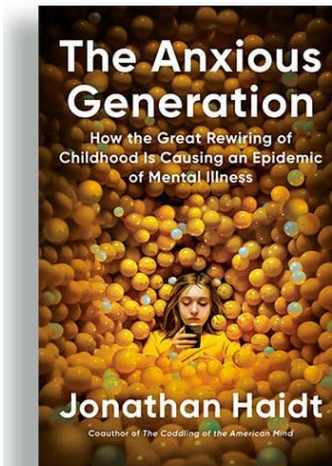
Suggested Readings And References

- *American College of Paediatricians* – Media Use and Screen Time – Its Impact on Children, Adolescents, and Families.

- Frequent Social Media Use and Experiences with Bullying Victimization, Persistent Feelings of Sadness or Hopelessness, and Suicide Risk Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, United States, 2023.

- Social Media and Suicide Risk in Youth Psychiatry, October 25, 2024.

- PEW Research Centre. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/07/28/kids-and-screens-methodology/

- The Dark Side of Smartphones | Psychology Today.

- Frontiers | Profiles of Mobile Phone Problem Use in Bullying and Cyberbullying Among Adolescents.

- *Teen mental health problems on the rise. Are phones to blame?.*

- Social Media and Teens' Mental Health: What Teens and Their Parents Say | Pew Research Center.

- Jason M. Nagata et al, Bedtime Screen Use Behaviors and Sleep Outcomes in Early Adolescents: A Prospective Cohort Study, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2024).

- Brain Wave Trust: Recommendations for the use of digital technologies: schools, kura and early childhood education.

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