

Smartphone-Free Childhood's: the new frontier in parenting

What tonight is not about....

- ✗ A lecture
- ✗ Guilt or shaming
- ✗ Being - 'ANTI PHONES/TECH'
- ✗ Saying no access to screens/devices
- ✗ About 'things were better in my day' -isms



**SMARTPHONE
FREE CHILDHOOD**

What tonight is about....

- ✓ An opportunity for parents to be able to be in control of the conversation
- ✓ A chance to share what we are currently seeing
- ✓ A chance to set the course for future generations



SWIPED THE SCHOOL THAT BANNED SMARTPHONES

Emma and Matt Willis challenge a group of Year 8 pupils at the Stanway School in Colchester to give up their smartphones completely for 21 days



Sign in to play
Episode 1



My List



Go ad free

Molly Russell's dad warns UK 'going backwards' on online safety and urges PM to act



The Digital Landscape: In two decades everything's changed



2004



2004

Nokias ruled



2024



2007

The first iPhone
launches



2008

Apple app store
opens



2012

4G launches in the
UK, enabling internet
everywhere



2024

89% of 12-year-olds own a
smartphone, permanently
connected to the internet via
4g/5g



THEY'RE NOT REALLY 'PHONES' AT ALL



MOBILE PHONE

Make calls, send texts, play
Snake



POCKET SUPERCOMPUTER

24/7 access to the internet in your
pocket



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

YET SMARTPHONES HAVE BECOME THE NORM



25%
of 5-7 year olds
in the UK own their
own smartphone

89%
of 12 year-olds
in the UK own their
own smartphone



SOURCE: OFCOM Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes April 24



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

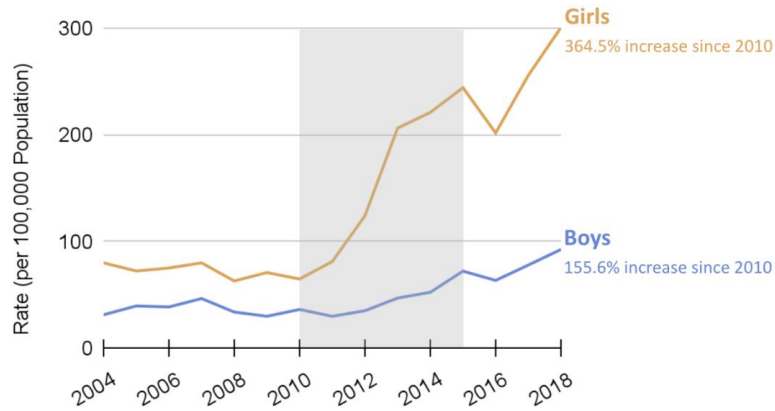


**So what exactly
is the problem?**



SMARTPHONES ARE FUELLING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

UK Teens, Self-harm Episodes (Ages 10 – 12)



Rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm and even suicide among teens have all dramatically spiked globally since 2010 – when children started getting smartphones.

A 2023 global study of 27,969 young adults from Sapiens Labs showed that the younger they got their first smartphone, the worse their mental health today.

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





“The mental health crisis among young people is an emergency. It is time to require a warning label on social media platforms.”



Dr Vivek Murthy
US Surgeon General

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



Aza Raskin: Co-inventor of ‘infinite scroll’, turned campaigner

“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



SMARTPHONES EXPOSE KIDS TO HARMFUL CONTENT

Having unrestricted access to the internet in your pocket creates a gateway to extreme content and viewpoints that we'd never dream of exposing children to in real life.

Hardcore pornography, extreme political views, sexualised and violent imagery, trolling and material promoting suicide, self-harm and eating disorders have become part of the fabric of modern childhood.



51%

of UK 11-13 year-olds
have seen adult content
online

75%

of UK 15 year olds
questioned had been
sent beheading videos

90%

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

SMARTPHONES APPS ARE ADDICTIVE BY DESIGN

Tech companies spend billions on making apps and devices as addictive as possible because ‘maximising engagement’ is the fundamental objective of their business model.

So it’s little wonder that many children are routinely ‘spending six, seven, eight hours a day on social media – often more’ (Ofcom, 2024).



46%

of teens say they
use the 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

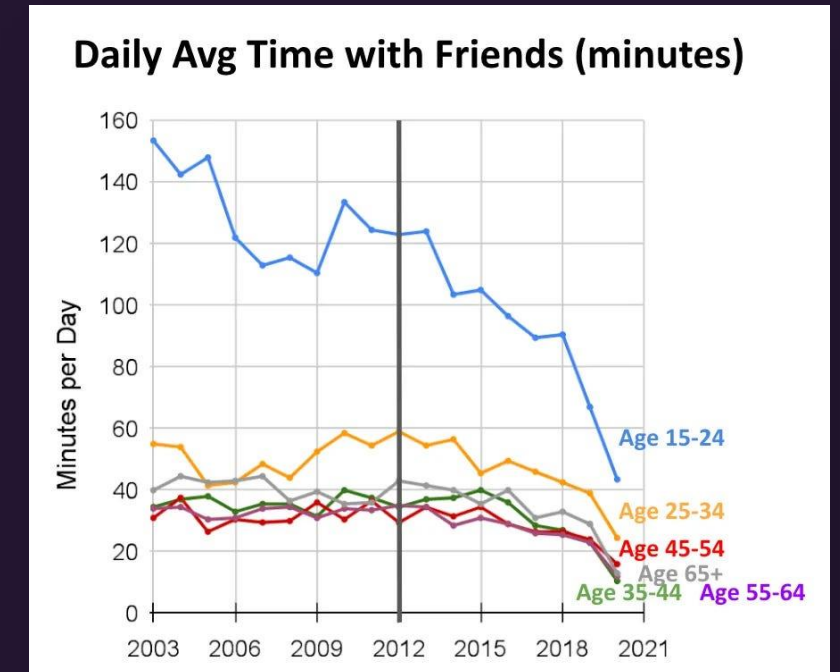
Common Sense Media, 2023



SMARTPHONES ARE FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGING CHILDHOOD

Smartphones are experience blockers, distracting children from engaging in the real world activities and connections that are crucial to healthy childhood development.

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.



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

“When kids are on their phones all day, it’s not just what they're doing on the phone that matters — it’s what they’re not doing. They’re missing out on crucial experiences that help them grow into healthy adults.”



Dr Jonathan Haidt
Professor of Social Psychology, NYU

Dr Susie Davies, founder of Papaya Parents, citing NHS DATA

~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.



Sadly we could go on...



SLEEP

Bedtime use of smartphones doubles children's risk of poor sleep



ARGUMENTS

55% of parents say their child's smartphone use causes big family arguments



BULLYING

84% of bullying now takes place on a device



ROAD SAFETY

Mobile phone distraction is a major cause of road accidents involving children



DISTRACTIONS

On average teens are bombarded by 237 smartphone notifications a day



CRIME

500 children a day were mugged in 2020 in the UK, almost all for smartphones





It's little wonder that many of the people who created this technology keep it away from their kids

STEVE JOBS

“We don’t allow the iPad in the home. We think it’s too dangerous for them”



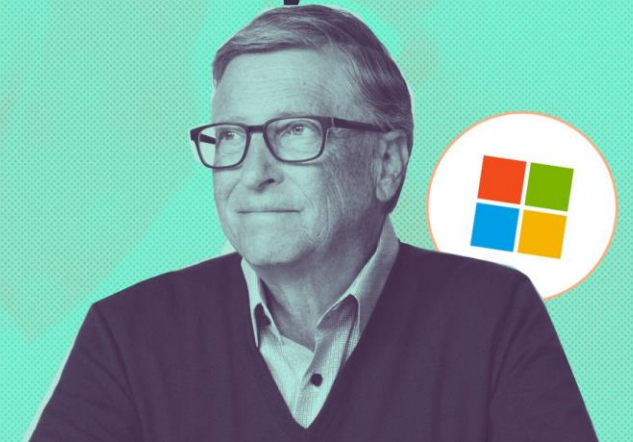
EVAN SPIEGEL

Grew up without a TV and credits his own success on that tech restriction. Limits his kid to 1.5 hours screen time per week



BILL GATES

Didn’t allow his 4 children smartphones or their own computers until they were 14





Parents are in an *impossible* position



BECAUSE OUR 'CHOICE' ISN'T REALLY A CHOICE AT ALL



Either we...

Give our children access to a product that we know to be harmful.



Or we...

Risk alienating them from their peers at a crucial stage of their development.

IT'S A LOSE-LOSE; FOR PARENTS, FOR CHILDREN & FOR SOCIETY

**LEADERS ACROSS THE WORLD ARE THINKING ABOUT
HOW TO LEGISLATE TO PROTECT CHILDHOOD**

**BUT PROPER REGULATION OF BIG TECH WILL TAKE
YEARS, AND WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE**



**The solution is to
work together**



THE PARENT PACT

- It's a growing movement of 150,000 parents in the UK who are coming together to support each other in delaying access to smartphones and social media for their children.

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.
- It's coordinated via a national network of WhatsApp communities where parents can learn more about the issue, find other like-minded parents and support one another.

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WE'RE NOT ANTI-TECH, WE'RE PRO-CHILDHOOD

Technology has immense benefits, and young people should be able to enjoy the opportunities it creates – when they're ready and when it's safe to do so.

But childhood is precious and fleeting. All children should have the opportunity to learn, develop and grow free from the addictive-by-design algorithms and age-inappropriate content of social media and smartphones.



THE RECOMMENDED APPROACH

- Simple phone until at least the end of Year 9
- Delay social media until 16
- Internet & WhatsApp access via a shared family computer
- Track with an Airtag if you want to know where they are



SMARTPHONE



SOCIAL MEDIA



SIMPLE PHONE



FAMILY COMPUTER



PARENTAL CONTROLS AREN'T THE SOLUTION

- Even the most tech-savvy parents struggle to manage parental controls
- Some apps require updates to hundreds of settings to make them age appropriate
- Even if your child's phone has parental controls, their friends may not so they may be sent inappropriate content regardless

58%

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

(Parentkind poll, May 2024)

47%

of teens with controls in place say they have bypassed them

(Parentkind poll, May 2024)

And teens find multiple ways to bypass controls:

Performing a factory reset

Using VPN software

Hacking the WiFi router

Memorising your passcode



The Parent Pact is an online tool that helps parents agree to delay with others in your community. The more of us who sign, the more powerful it becomes.

Step 01.

Select your region & child's school

SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD
PARENT PACT

Select your region ▾

Select school ▾

Select school year ▾

Name

Step 02.

Sign the Pact to delay until the end of Year 9

SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD
PARENT PACT

Sign the pact >

Step 03.

View results for your region, school & class

SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD
PARENT PACT

National (UK)

61,700
CHILDREN

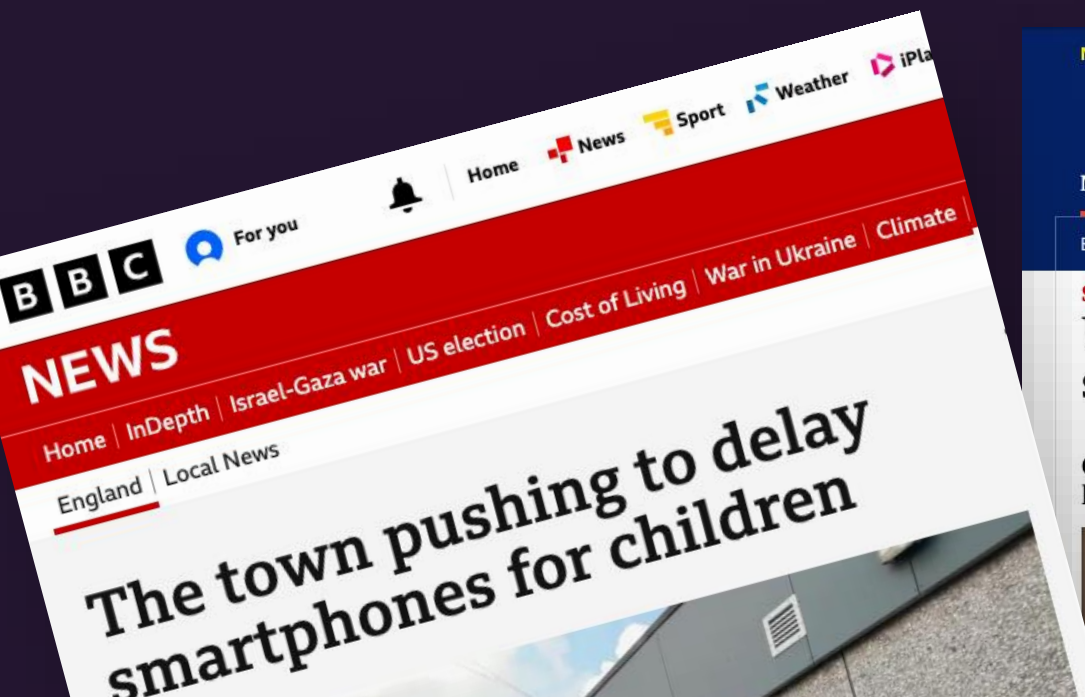
8,734
SCHOOLS



THE MOVEMENT IS GROWING ACROSS THE UK

85,829

Parent Pacts have been signed since launching





IT'S HAPPENING IN [ENTER YOUR COUNTY NAME]

1393

Parent Pacts have been
signed in Berkshire

29

Parent Pacts have been
signed across our
Federation

Sort by:

Leaderboard

Region name

REGION	PACTS
Bedfordshire ↗	540
Berkshire ↗	1393
Bristol ↗	1768
Buckinghamshire ↗	1320
Cambridgeshire ↗	2039

We are in this together

**An opportunity to put ourselves as
parents back in the driving seat!**



Our Goals across the Federation

2024-2025 and onwards - Encourage parents to delay buying smartphones

We are encouraging parents and asking you to consider encouraging others not to buy a smartphone until your children are at least 14. There is guidance on this issue, and your support for the school and other parents would help parents to say “no” with confidence. We would like you to help us - to become a broader school-wide group by letting parents know about the Smartphone Free Childhood Parent Pact. We will also have links via the school newsletter. This is a simple digital tool that enables parents to come together and delay with others in their school community.

From September 2025 - Ensuring our school is a genuinely smartphone free school environment.

We will not allow smartphones on the premises from 2025. Many of our children use the time in transit between home and school and this leads to significant opportunities to engage with online content and often an opportunity for inappropriate behaviours.

