



Smartphones: the new frontier in parenting

CONNECTED PARENT WORKSHOP
OCTOBER 2024



SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD

**150,000 parents in the UK (and growing)
supporting each other in delaying access to
smartphones and social media for their children.**



**We're not anti-tech,
we're pro-childhood**



**We're all trying
to do the best
for our kids**



IN TWO DECADES, EVERYTHING'S CHANGED

2004



2004
Nokias ruled



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

2024



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
negatively 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



**So what exactly
is the problem?**



When children first started getting smartphones in the early 2010s we didn't understand their impact.

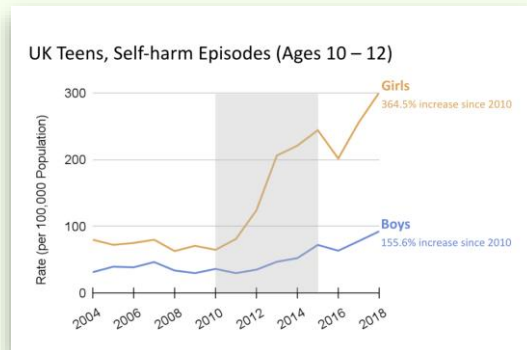
Now we do, and the evidence is overwhelming.



SMARTPHONES ARE FUELLING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

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

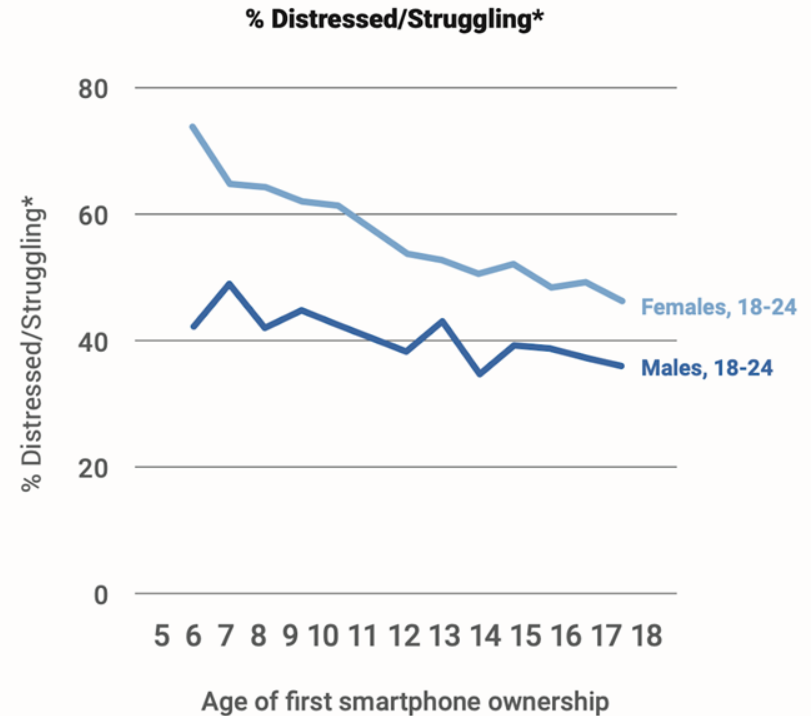
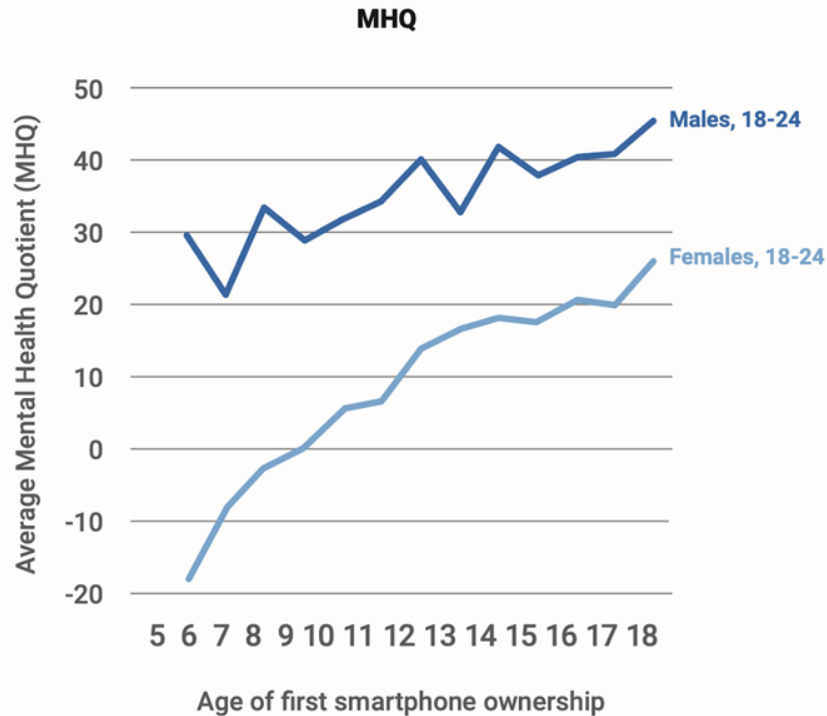
53%

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

Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2024

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.





“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, 2024



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 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



**“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 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



“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

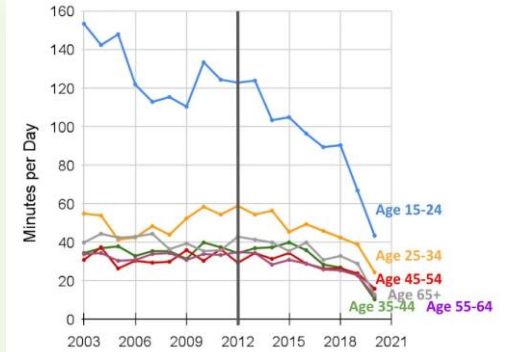


SMARTPHONES ARE FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGING CHILDHOOD

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.

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



“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



~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

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



SADLY, WE COULD GO ON



SLEEP

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



BULLYING

84% of bullying now takes place on a device



DISTRACTIONS

On average teens are bombarded by 237 smartphone notifications a day



ARGUMENTS

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



ROAD SAFETY

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



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





Nip in
the Bud

A Stolen Childhood

Smartphone Free Childhood



PARENTS ARE IN AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION... ...BECAUSE OUR 'CHOICE' ISN'T REALLY A CHOICE AT ALL



Either we...

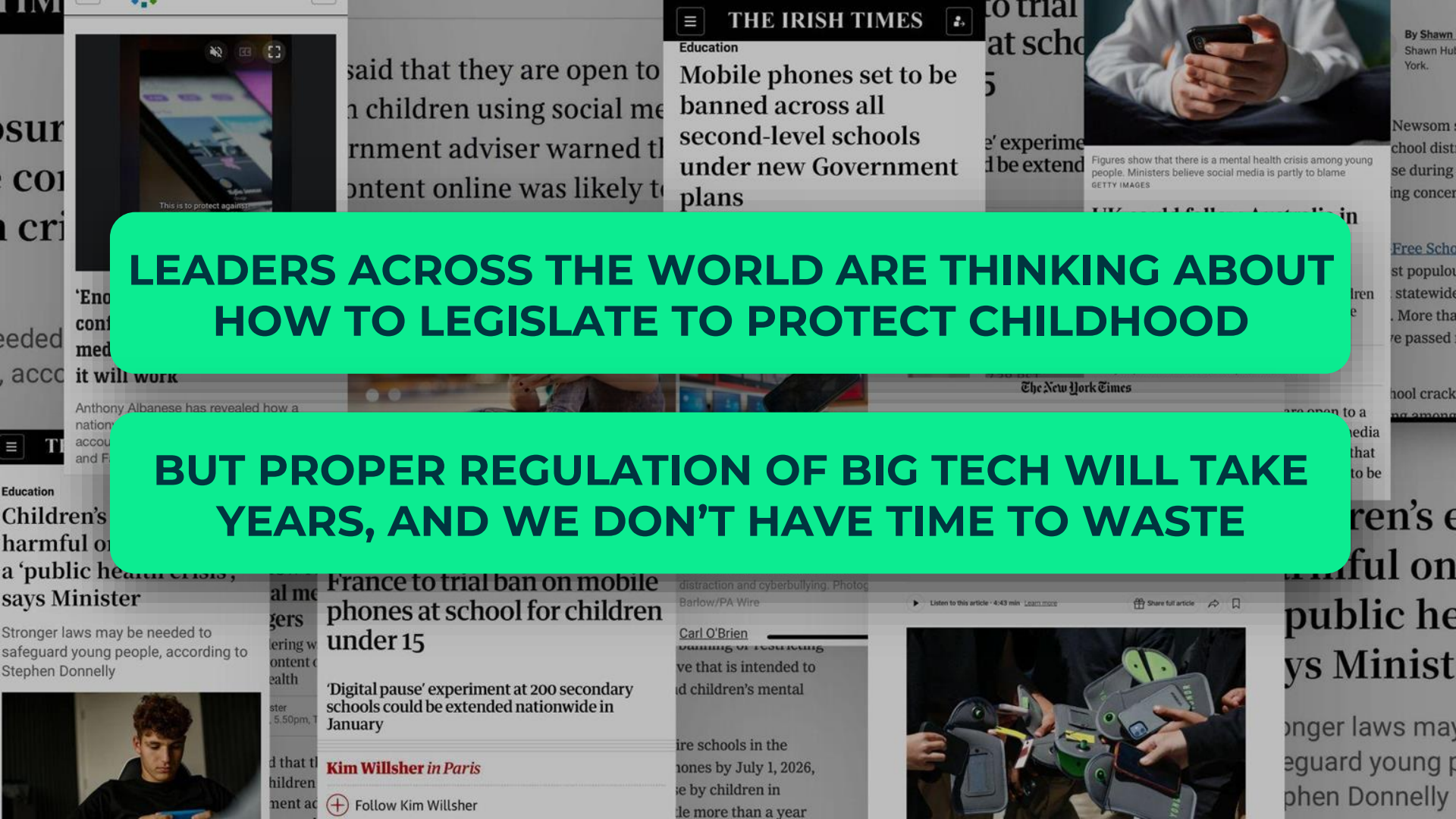
Give our children access to a product
that we know to be harmful.



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**



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 solution is to
work together**



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.



A 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



THE PARENT PACT makes collective action simple



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**



Select your region



Select school



Select school year



Name

Step 02.

**Sign the Pact to delay until
the end of Year 9**



Sign the pact >

Step 03.

**View results for your
region, school & class**



National (UK)

61,700

CHILDREN

8,734

SCHOOLS



THE MOVEMENT IS GROWING ACROSS THE UK

66,361

Parent Pacts have been signed since launching in September





IT'S HAPPENING IN HAMPSHIRE

2,995

**Parent Pacts have been
signed in Hampshire**

23

**Parent Pacts have been
signed in Hiltingbury Junior
School**

YEAR	PACTS
Year 1	3
Year 3	7
Year 4	2
Year 5	6
Year 6	5



JOIN THE HILTINGBURY SCHOOLS SFC COMMUNITY



Hiltingbury Schools

WhatsApp group



56

Parents

(Admin approval is
required to join –
only to stop the bots!)



What do you think?



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Now that you've seen the survey results and some context, how has it landed with you?

What would you like to see as next steps from the school?

**What ideas do you have for an evening information event for parents? E.g.
Content?
Speakers?
Activities?**

Let's keep talking



SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD

www.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk

@smartphonefreechildhood





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