



PAPAYA

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 teenager
spends
online in the UK

4.54 hrs

=

34.3 hrs

a week

=

75 days

a year

=

14.3 years

a lifetime

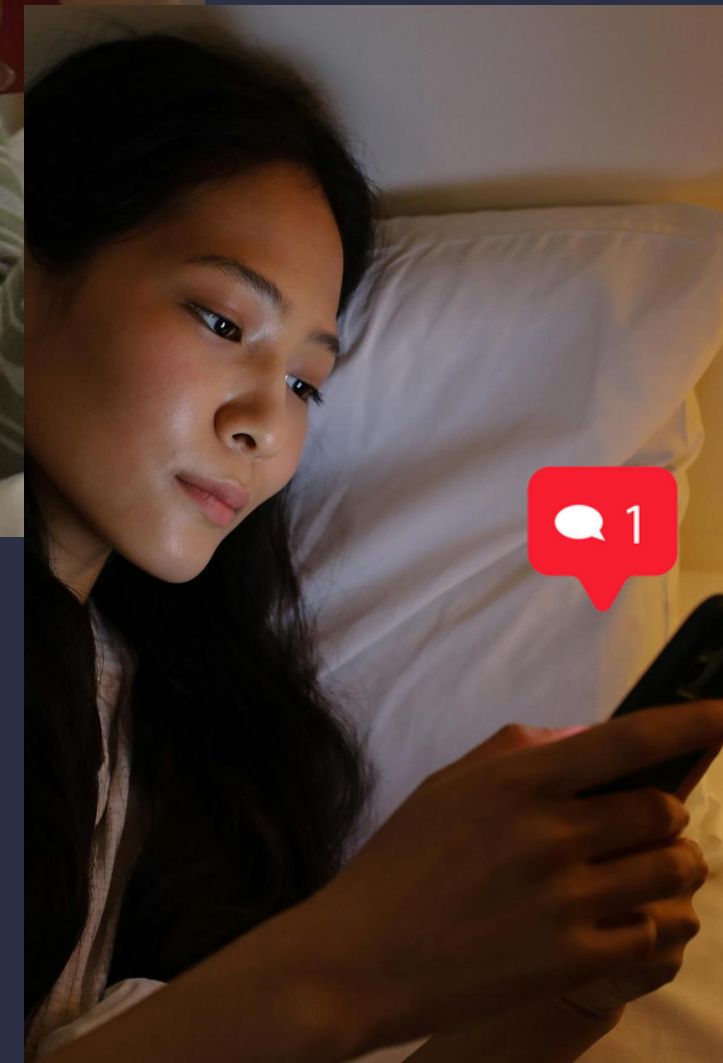
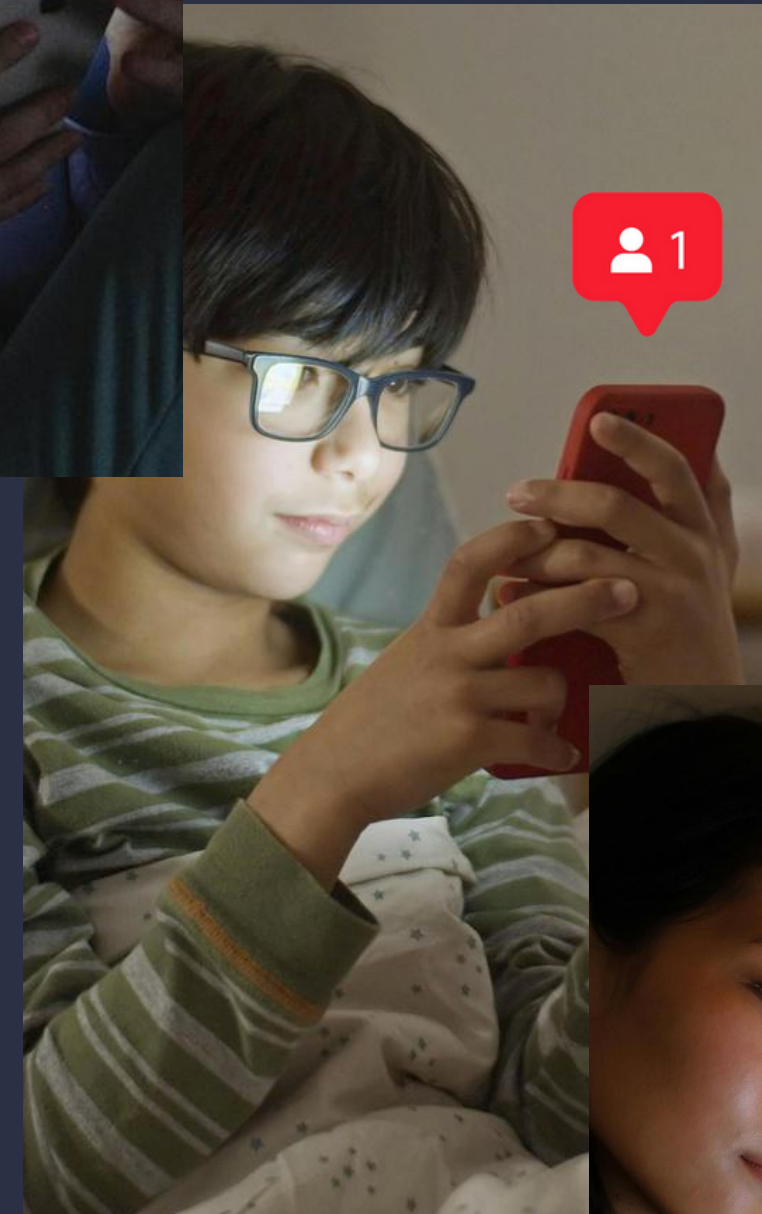
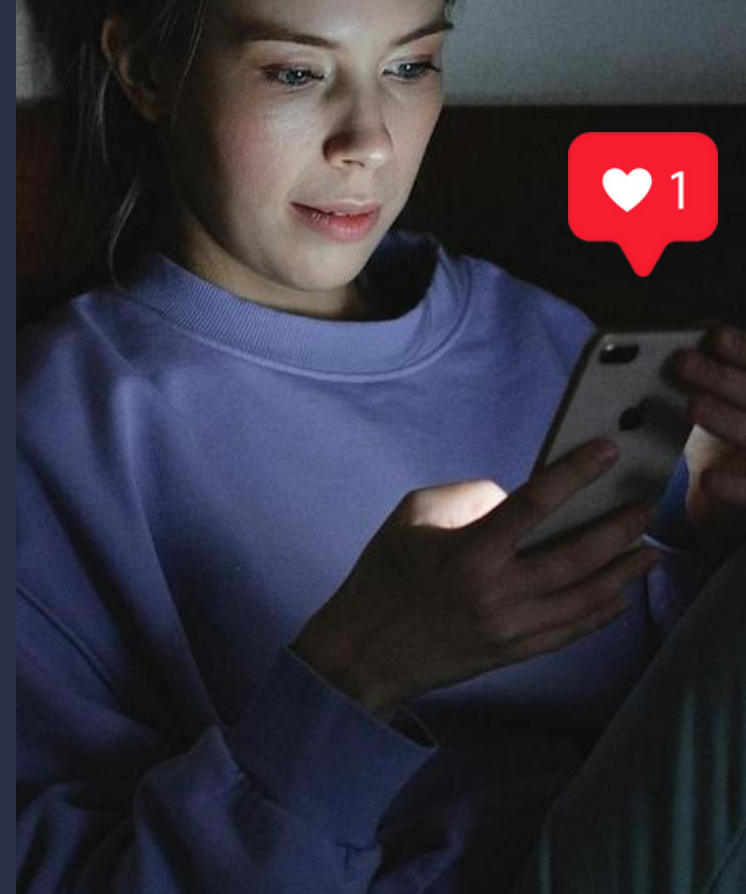
*Ofcom 2025

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.

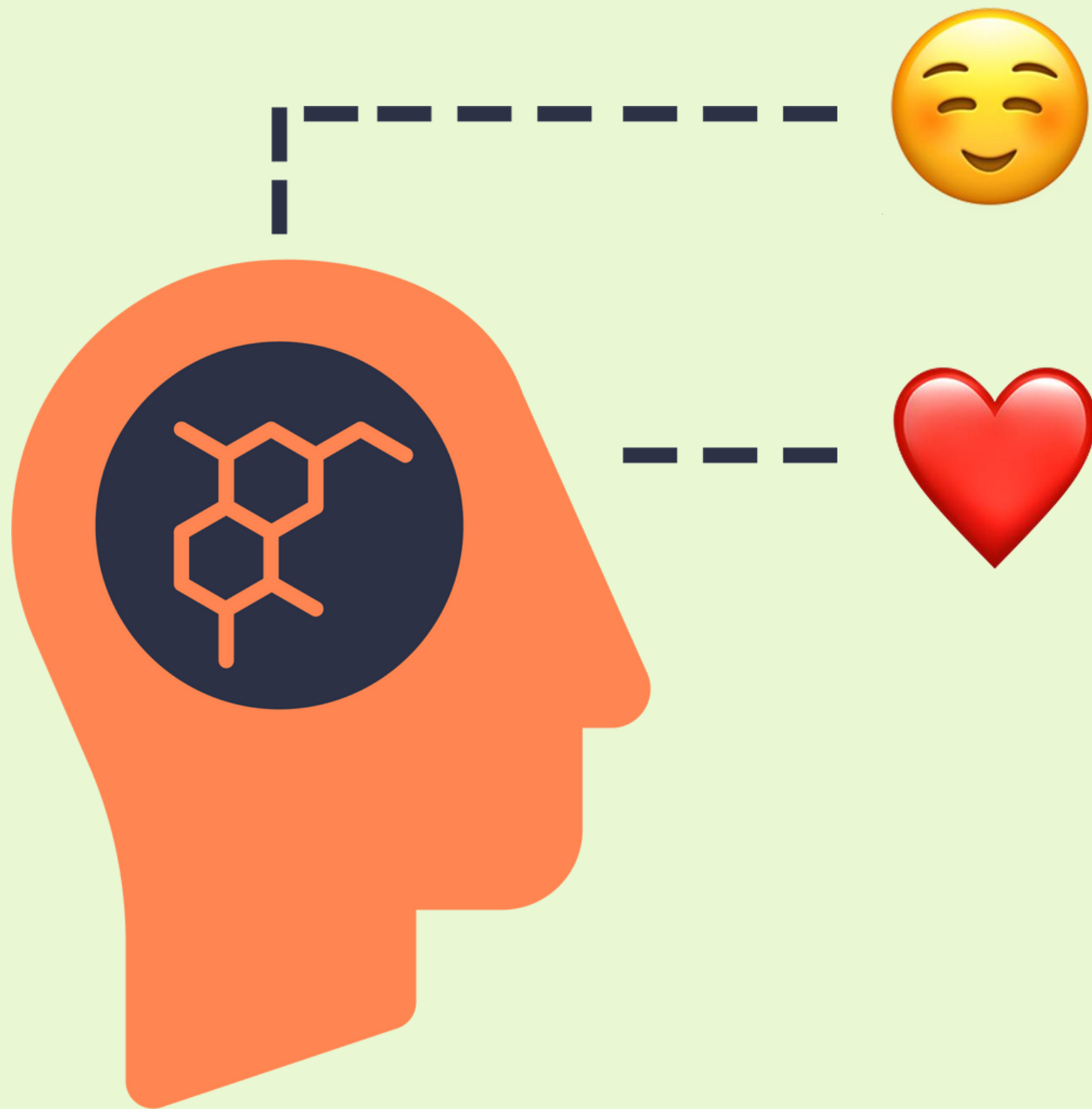
Persuasive design

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

So powerful is persuasive tech that it 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



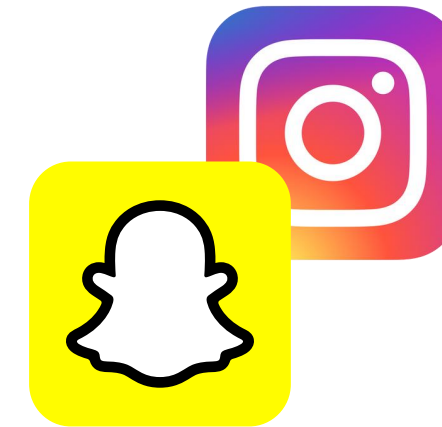
The iPhone 'touch screen'

Appstore 2008;
1st Android 2008



Tech behaviourists maximise engagement

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

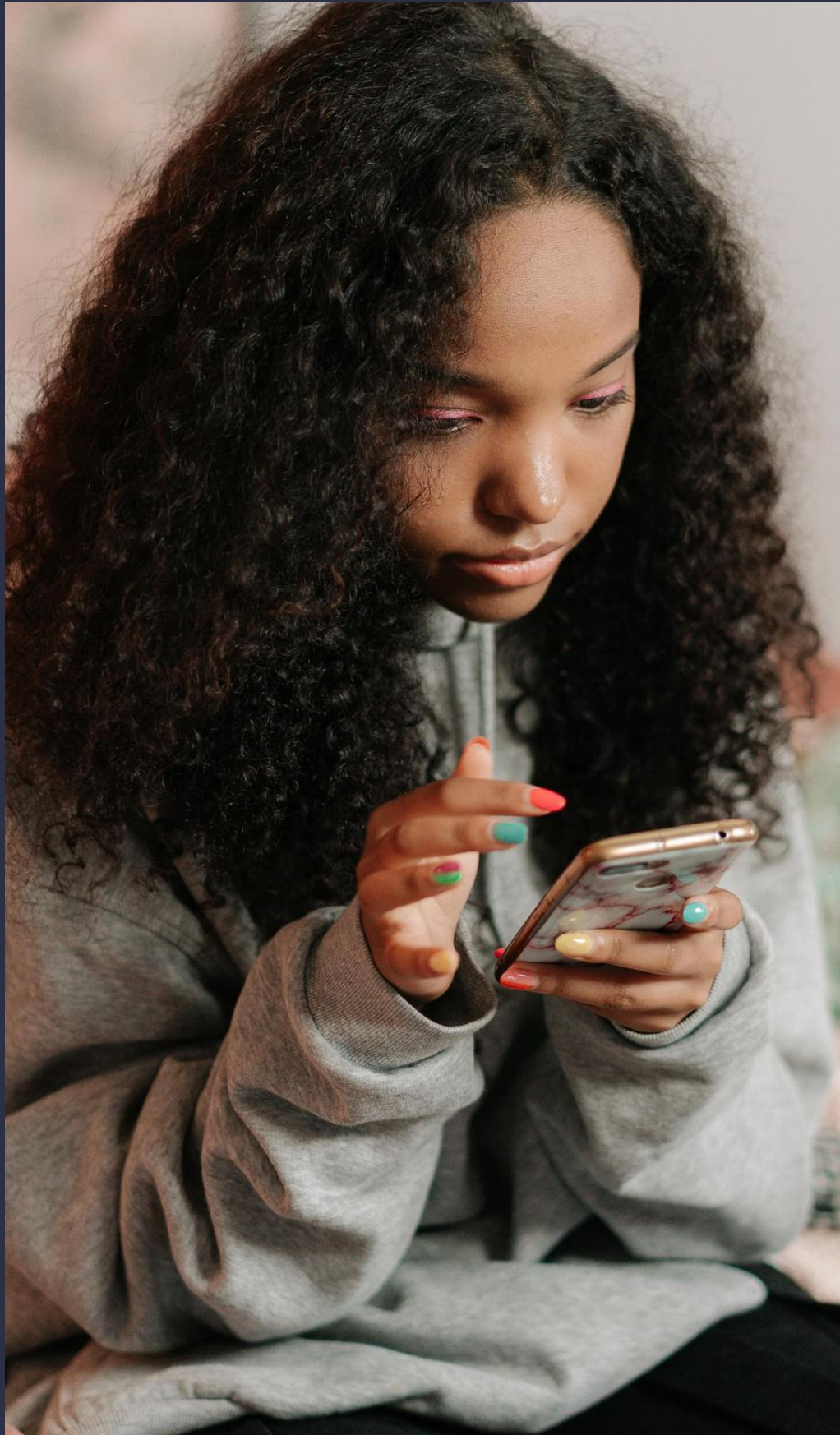


Internet everywhere - 4G
Instagram
Snapchat



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

Mental health

Self Harm in UK teens

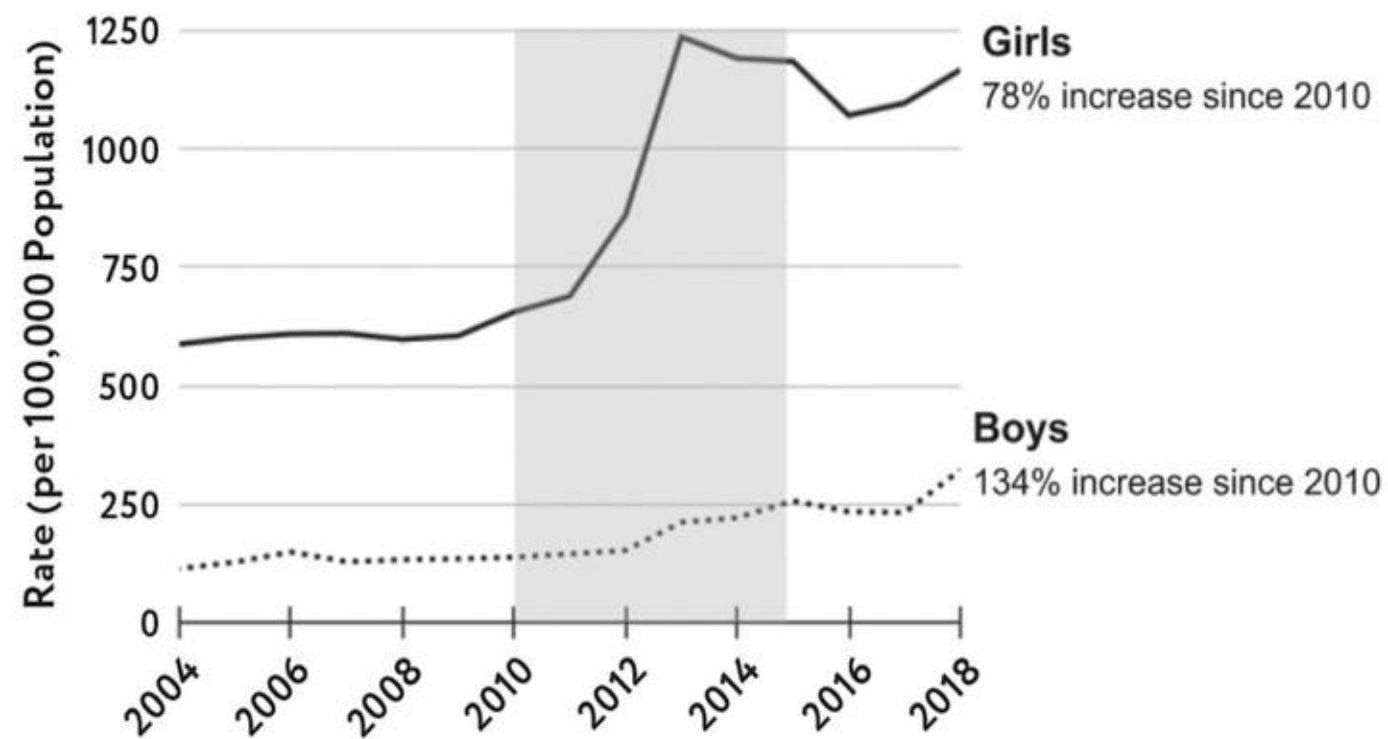


Figure 1.9. U.K. teens' (ages 13–16) self-harm episodes. (Source: Cybulski et al., 2021, drawing from two databases of

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

↓ 70%

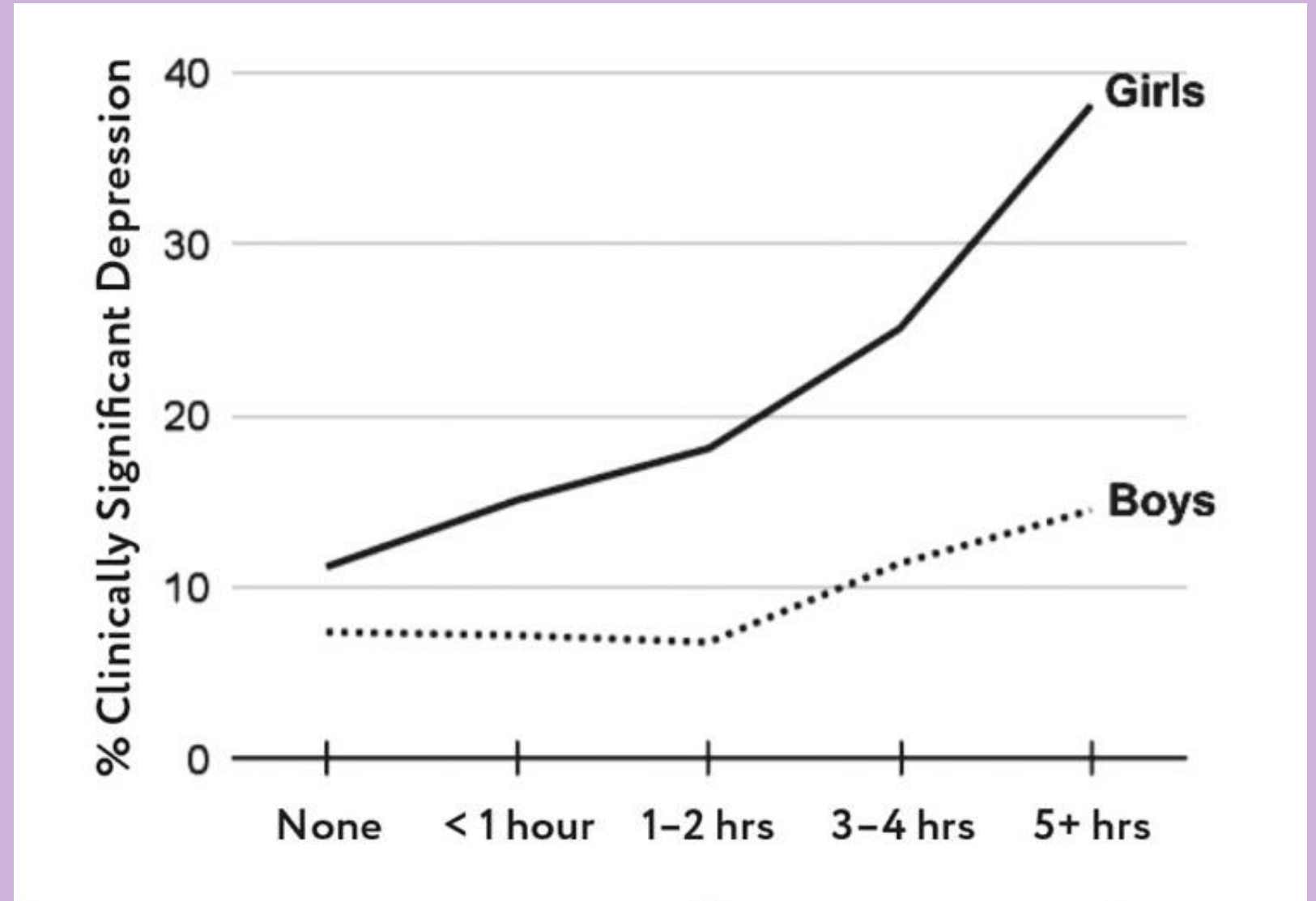
but self-harm has increased:

↑ 93%

Mental health



Depression by social media use, UK



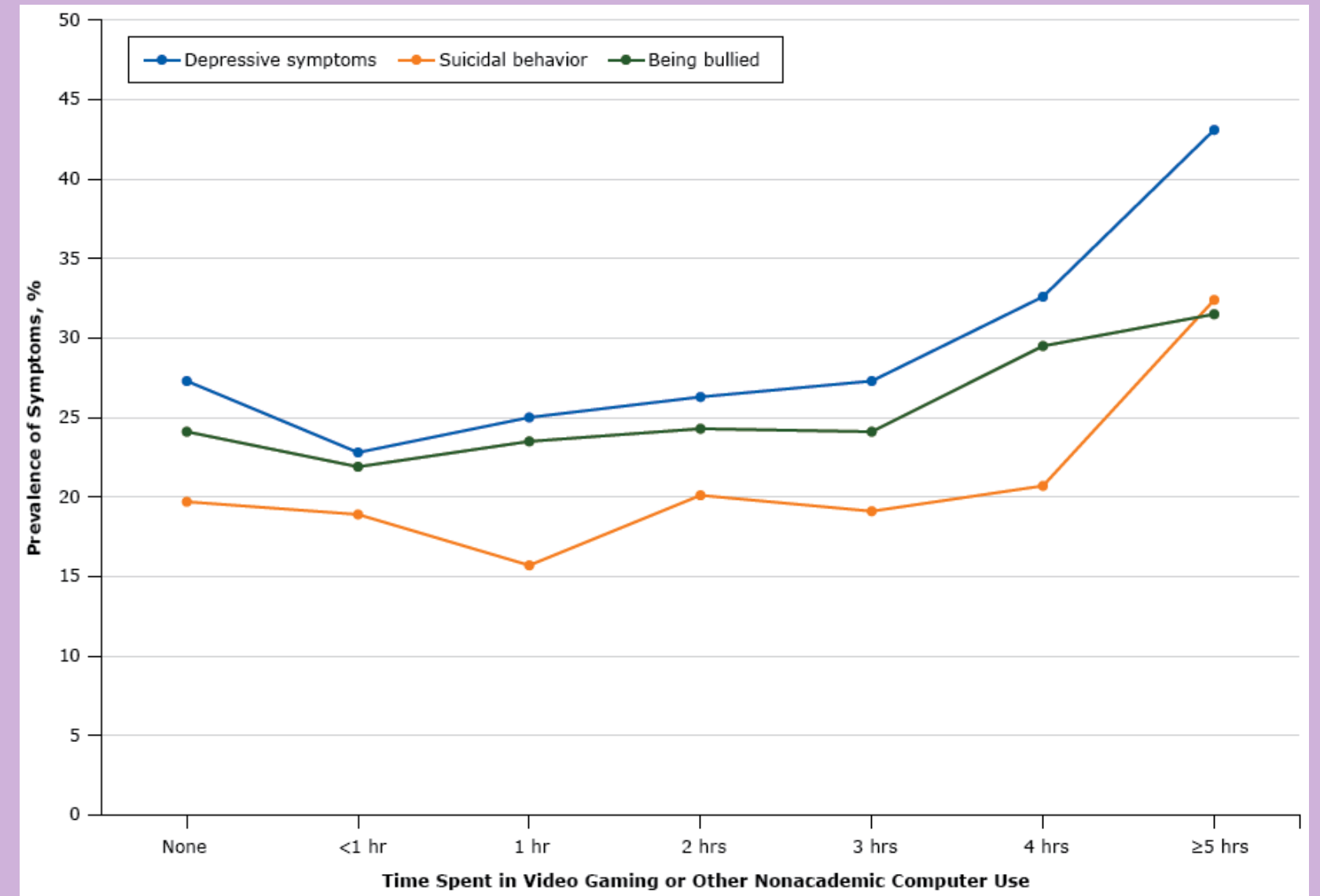
MILLENNIUM COHORT STUDY

Figures from The Anxious Generation, Jonathan Haidt

Mental health



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



Self-esteem



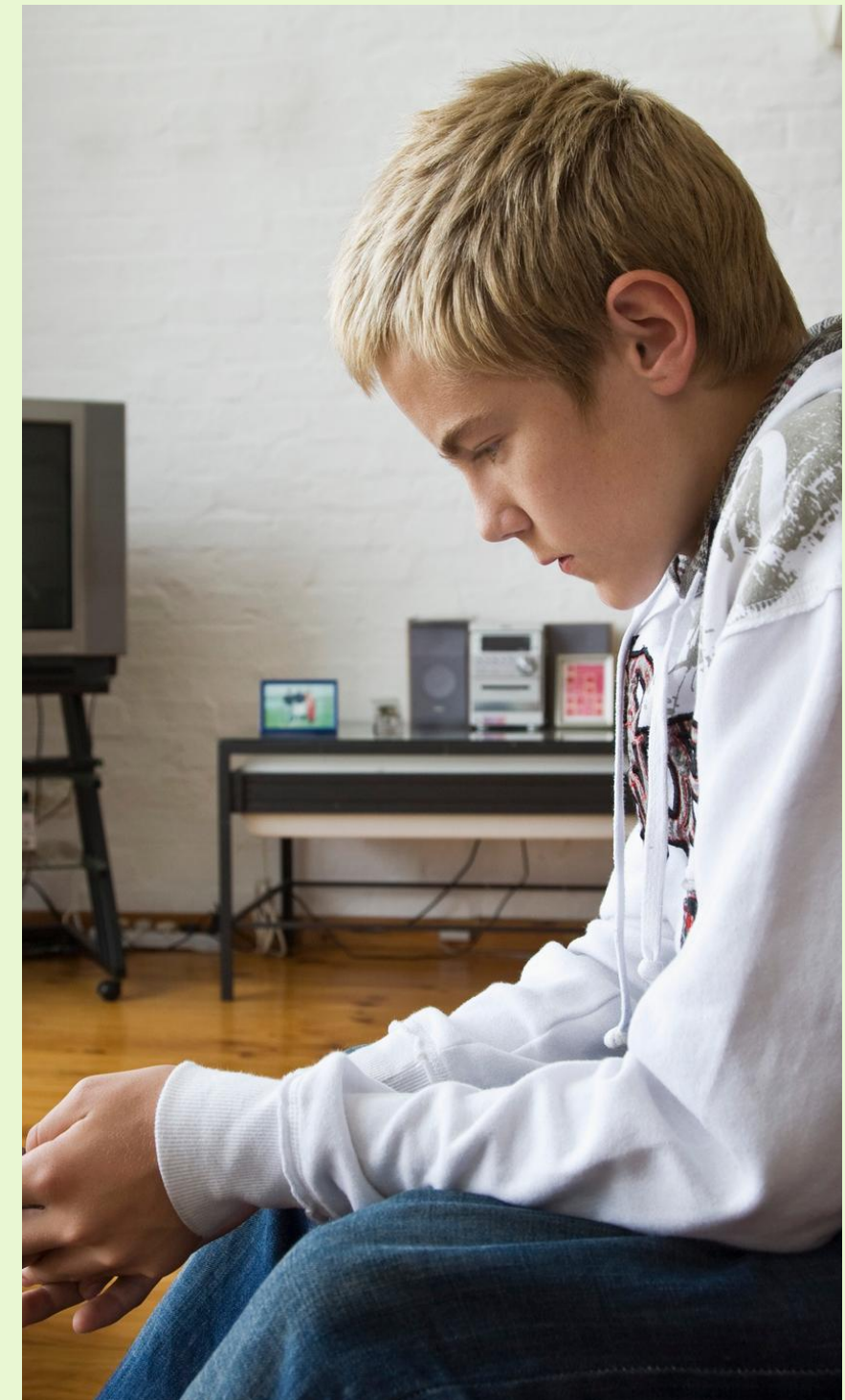
Comparison



Pornography



Gaming

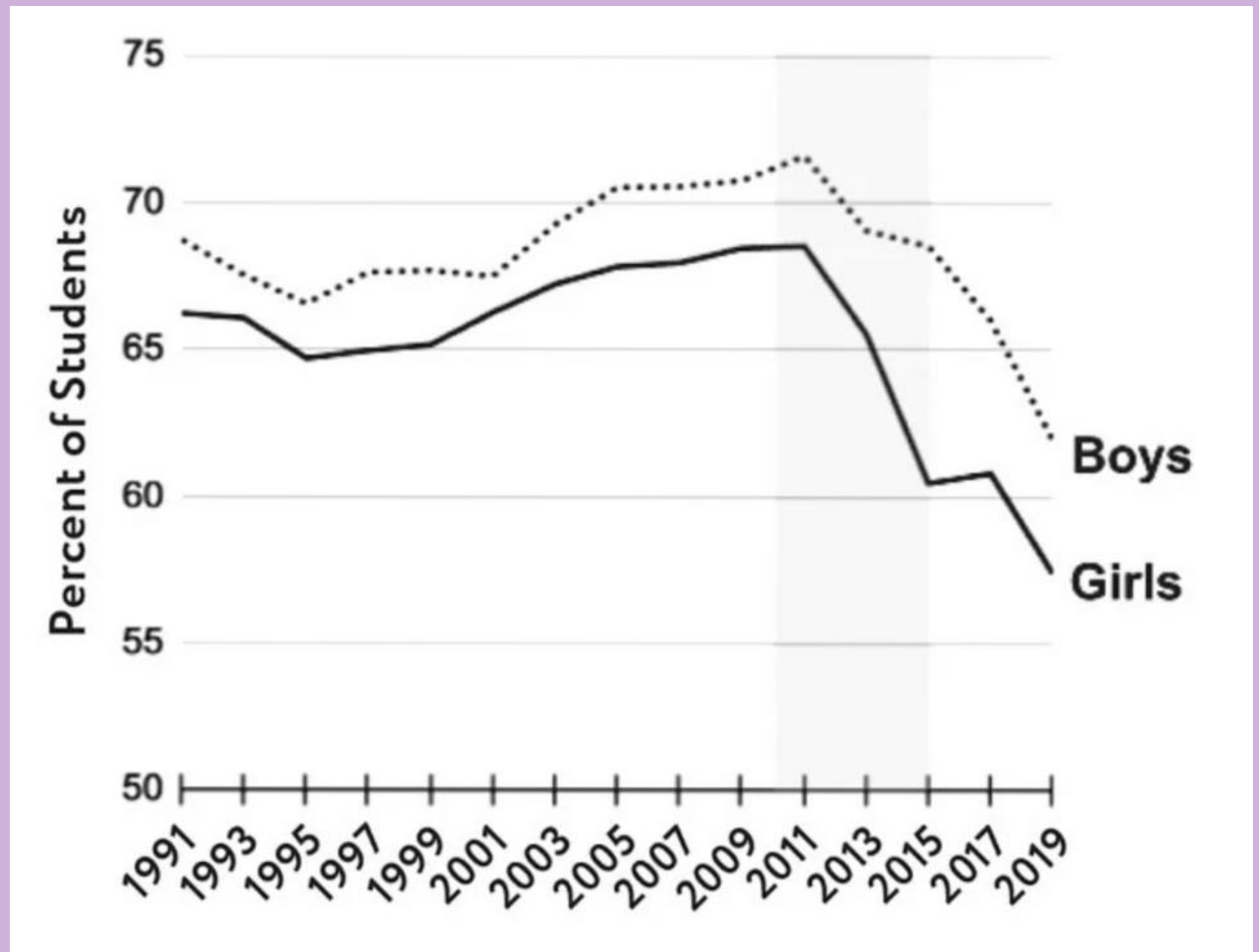


Comparison

“

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

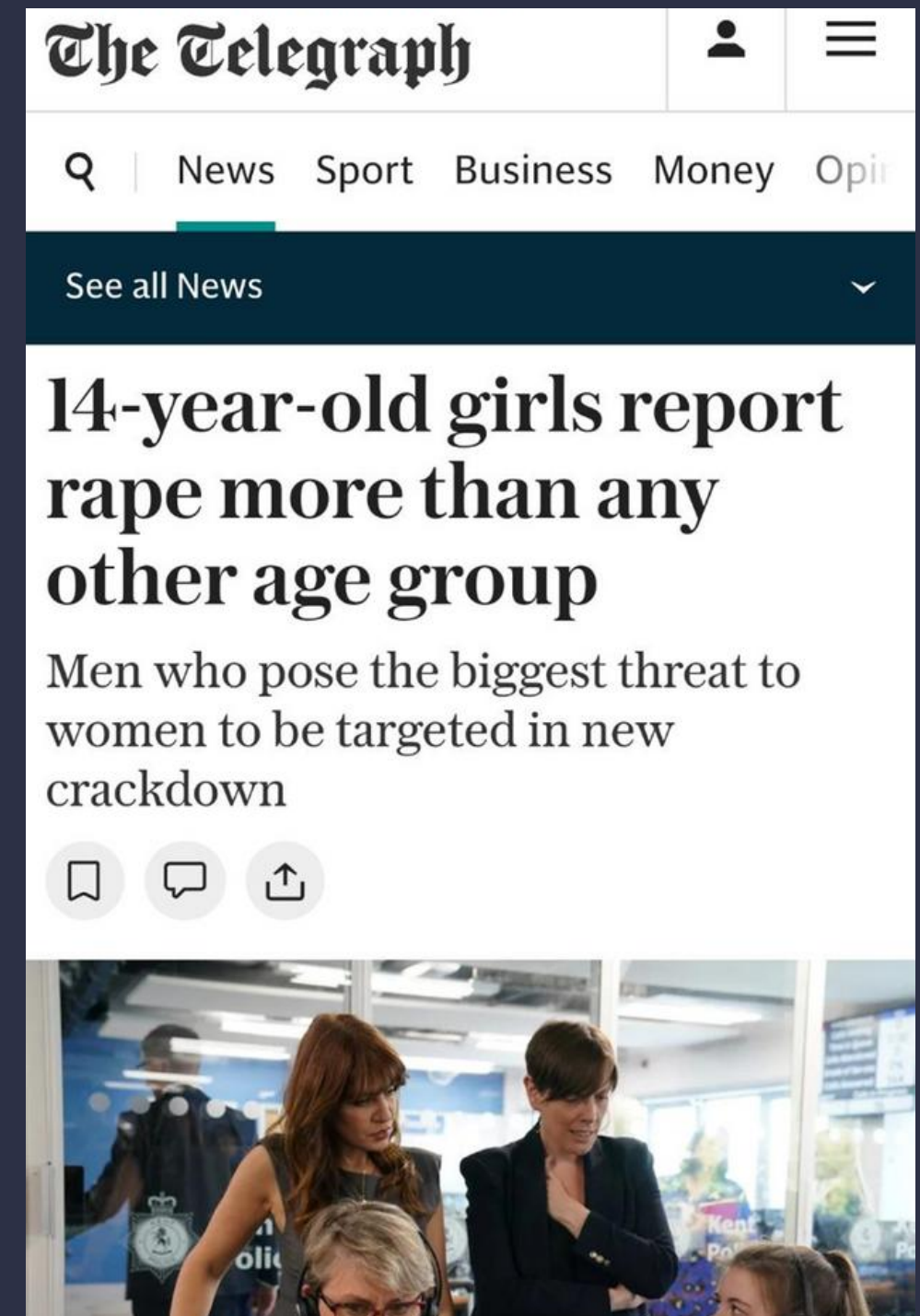
94% of children are exposed to porn by 14.

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.”

James Babbage, Director General of Threats at the NCA, Sky News, 25 March 2025
Telegraph, 24 September 2024



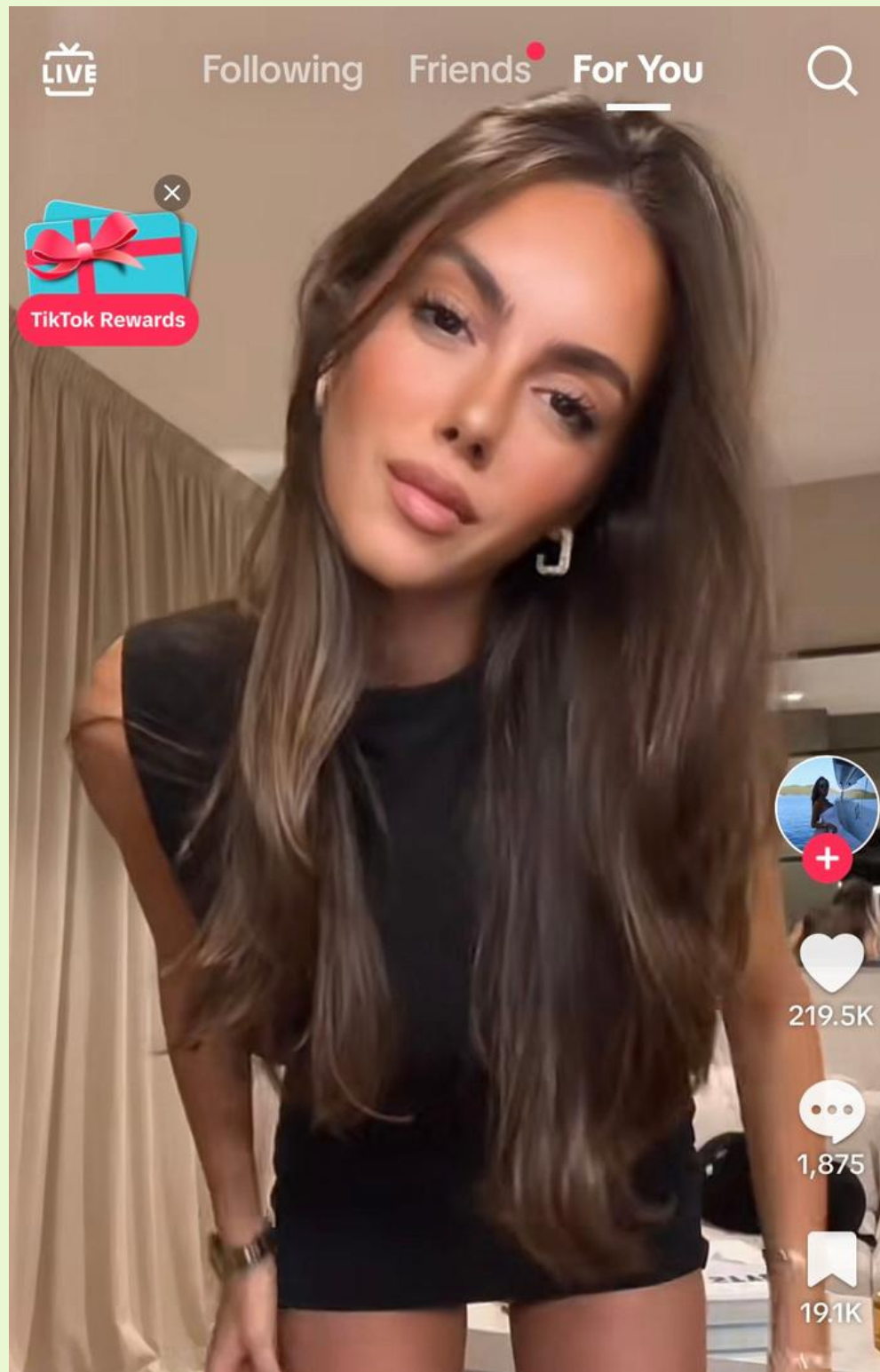
What are they seeing?

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

75%

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:

75%

were adversely affected

24%

Self harm as a result

Sleep

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

73%

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](https://www.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

↓ 50%

Children's outdoor
playtime has
halved in a
generation

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

JONATHAN HAIDT





LET'S TALK ABOUT OUR KIDS AND THEIR TECH

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...



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...



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...



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

I need a smartphone to track my child...



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

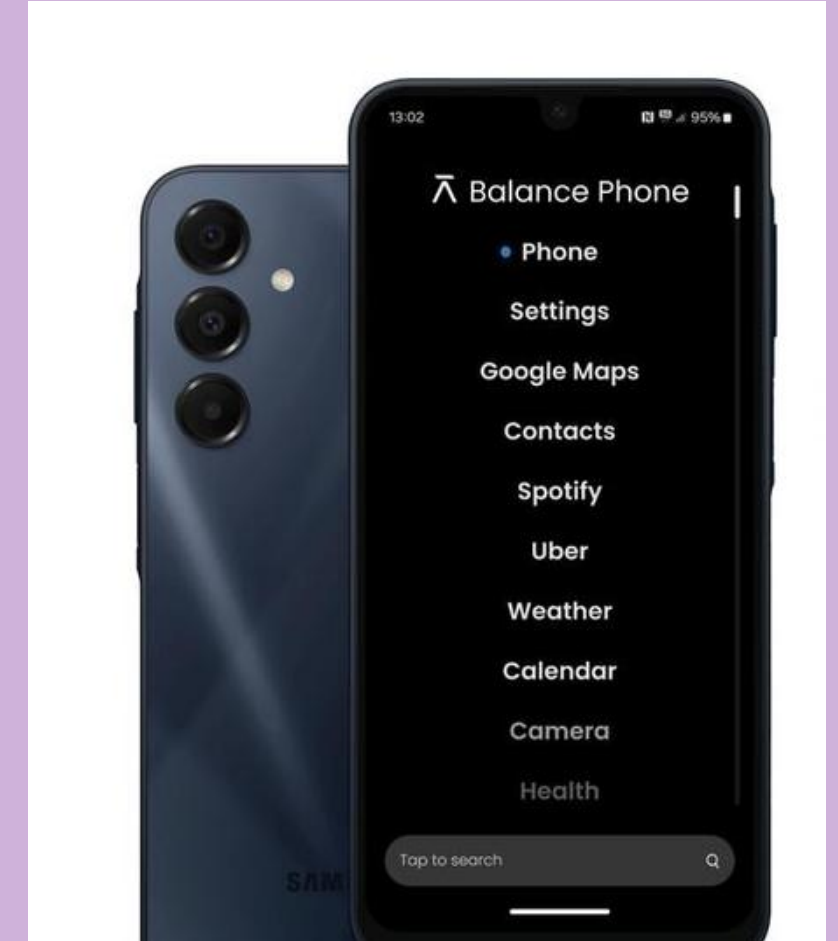
Can't we just use a stripped back
iPhone with parental controls?



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](https://www.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

MOST POPULAR

 **COMPLETE**

Advanced safety features with full customization.

£69.95/year

SAME AS £5.83/MONTH

Buy now

Complete includes:

- ✓ Games & apps blocking
- ✓ Daily time limits
- ✓ Web filtering
- ✓ Location monitoring
- ✓ Pause internet access
- ✓ AI-powered alerts
- ✓ Social monitoring
- ✓ Custom routines
- ✓ App insights
- ✓ Games & apps time limits
- ✓ Calls & messages monitoring*
- ✓ Unlimited devices*

 **BASIC**

The tools you need for core protection.

£39.95/year

SAME AS £3.33/MONTH

Buy now

Basic includes:

- ✓ Games & apps blocking
- ✓ Daily time limits
- ✓ Web filtering
- ✓ Location monitoring
- ✓ Pause internet access

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



01. Delay the first phone.
Consider a basic phone first.

02. 14+ Consider a smartphone
phone with strict controls.

03. 16+ A cautious trial of selected
social media with private
settings and time limits.

04. 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.

PAPAYA



03. Sign the Parent Pact



<<<<<<<<<<<<

Scan to sign

smartphonefreechildhood.org/find-your-community



PARENT PACT

National (UK)

154,879

Children signed up

13,519

Schools covered

London, West

801

Children signed up

72

Schools covered

SCHOOL LEADERBOARD

Isleworth Town Primary School ↗	71
Ravenscourt Park Preparatory School ↗	64
Our Lady and St George's Catholic Primary School ↗	38
West London Free School Primary ↗	35
West London Free School ↗	34
Strand-on-the-Green Junior School ↗	32
St Peter's Primary School ↗	31
Latymer Upper School and Latymer Prep ↗	31
Wendell Park Primary School ↗	27
St Stephen's Primary School ↗	24
Grove Park Primary School ↗	21
Good Shepherd RC Primary School ↗	21

Surrey ↗	9046
Hertfordshire ↗	8331
Scotland ↗	7422
Hampshire ↗	6893
London, South West ↗	5934
Kent ↗	5201
London, North ↗	5024
London, South East ↗	4939
East Sussex ↗	4470



Resources



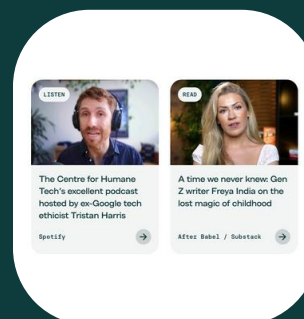
01. Tips for talking to kids about smartphones & social media



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



03. Become an SFC School Organiser to build momentum with other parents



04. 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



LET'S TALK ABOUT OUR KIDS AND THEIR TECH

Donate

www.papayataalks.com/donate



Extra resources

The Anxious Generation
by Jonathan Haidt

The Healthy Selfie
by Dr Susie Davies

papayataalks.com

smartphonefreechildhood.org

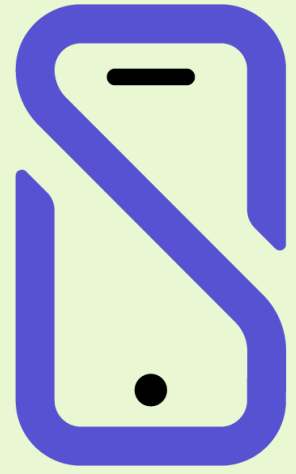
teched-off.com

internetmatters.org



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

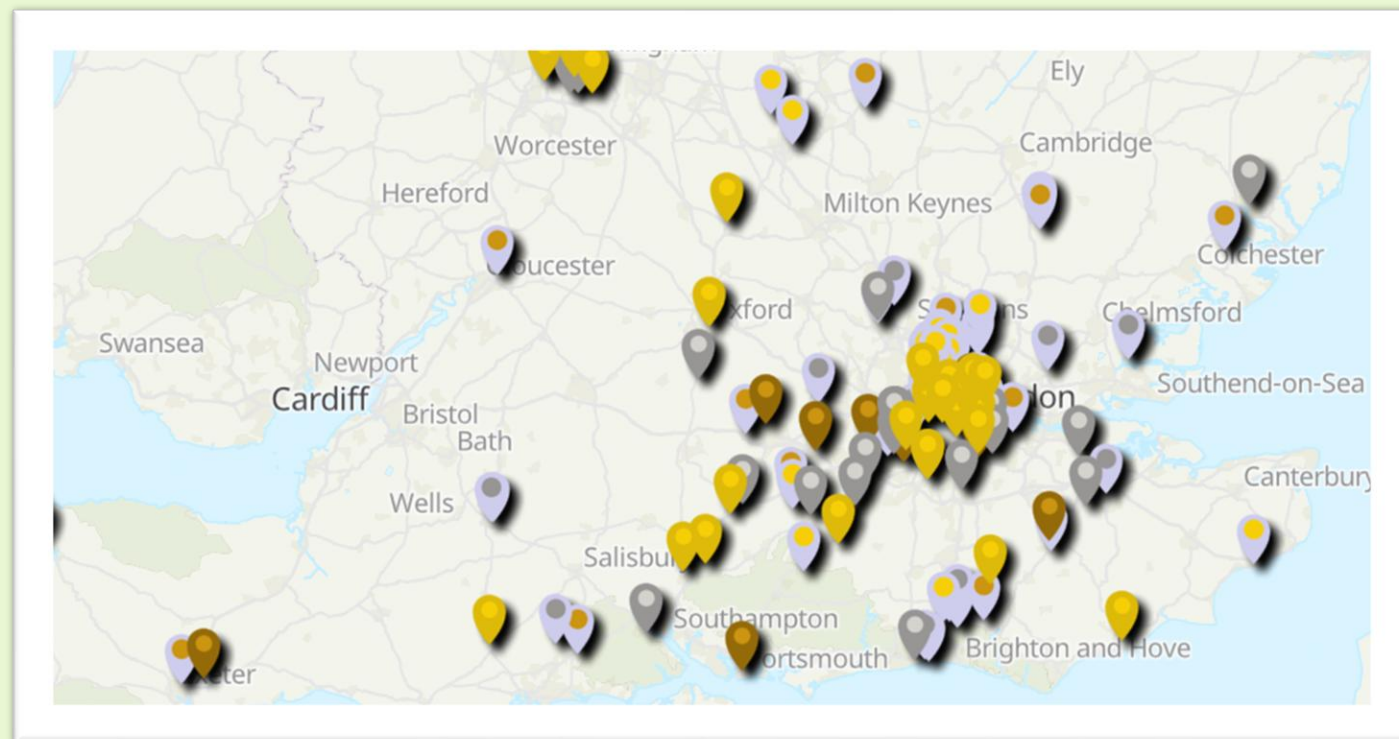
smartphonefreerating.org



SMARTPHONE FREE SCHOOLS RATING

Encourage your school to register – it's free!

smartphonefreerating.org



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



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.

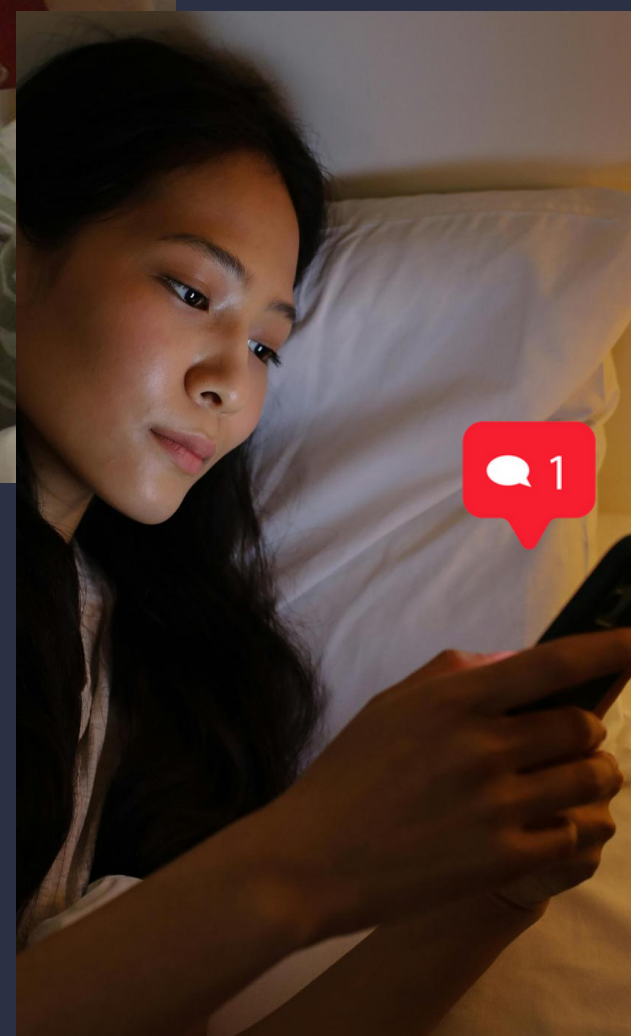
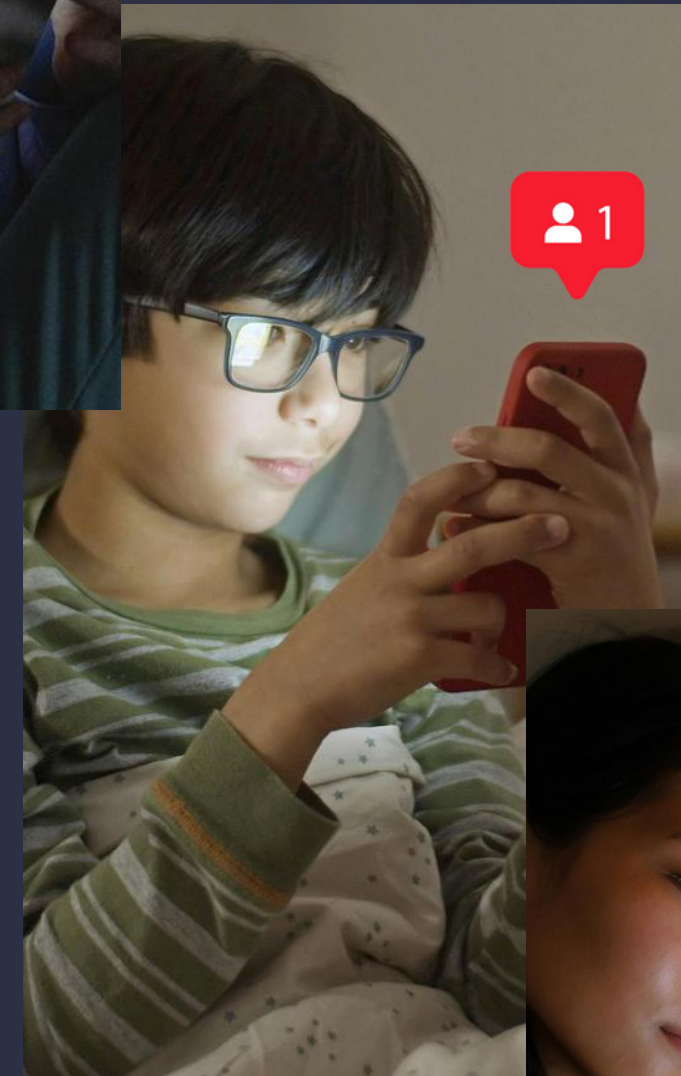
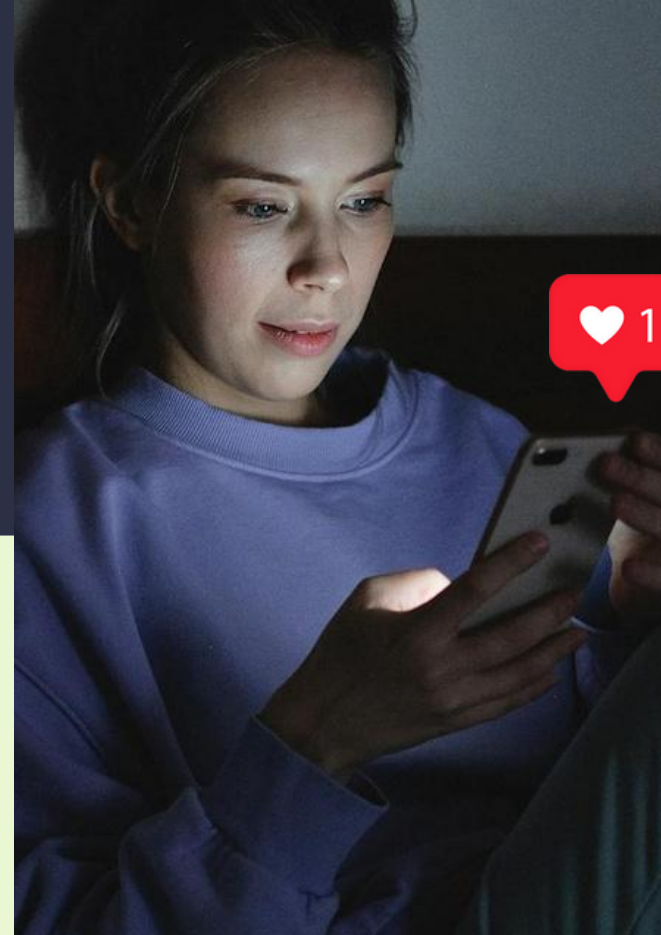
Use filters and parental control apps

04.

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

05.

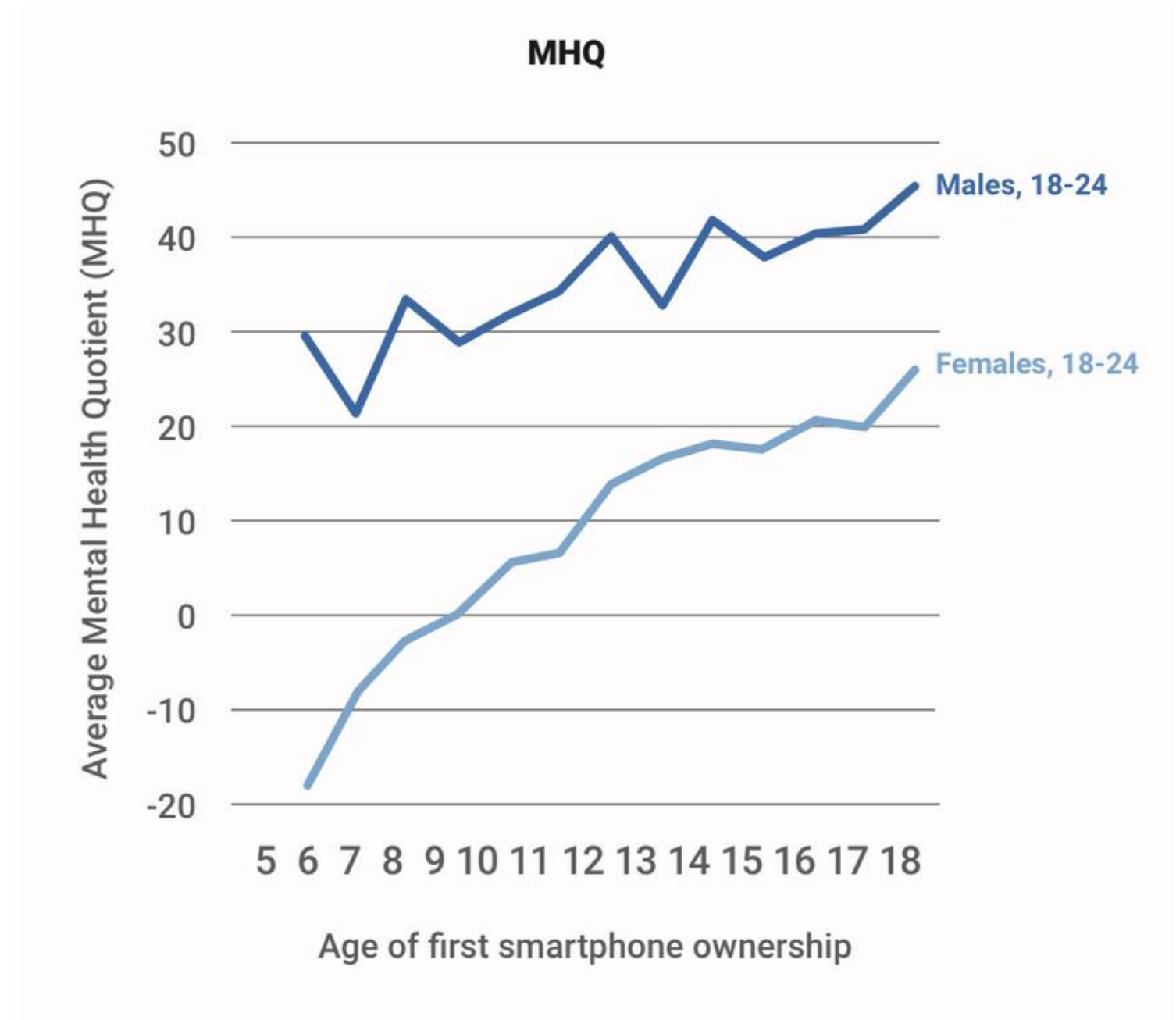
Consider changing your mind....



Mental health

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

A background image of two children, a boy and a girl, running and playing happily in front of a brick house with large windows. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark blue filter.

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

C.S. LEWIS