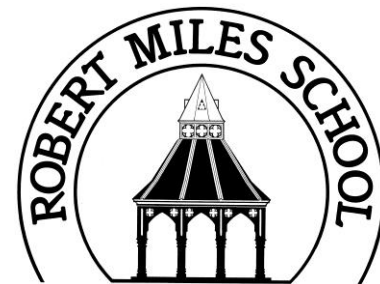


Online Safety & Mobile Phones



Parent Information
Session

September 2024

School & Home

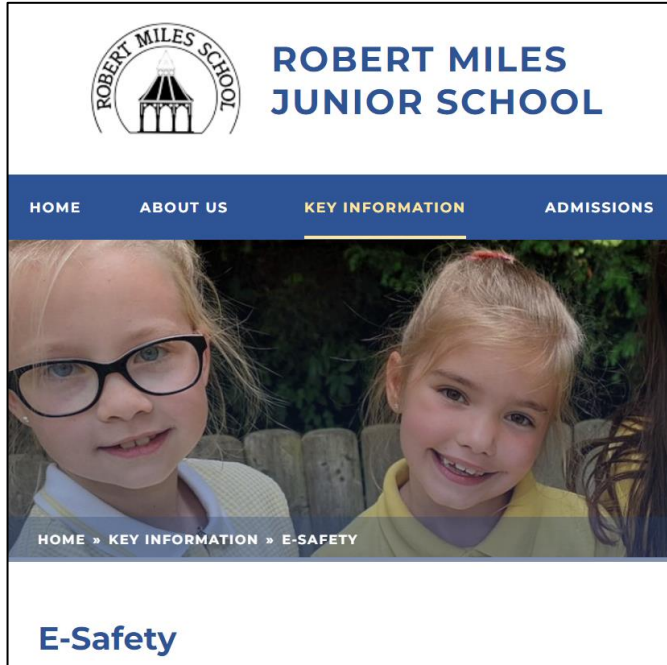


“There is no seatbelt for parents to click, no helmet to snap in place, no assurance that trusted experts have investigated and ensured that these platforms are safe for our kids. **There are just parents and their children, trying to figure it out on their own, pitted against some of the best product engineers and most well-resourced companies in the world.**”



- School experience
- Published research
- Solutions and options

Our Approach



- Develop Computing knowledge
- Promote a culture of digital safety and responsibility.
- Digital Safety curriculum component in PSHE & Computing
- Covered in assemblies
- Filtering software on school devices
- Sharing safety information with parents each week
- Equals Trust Digital Leaders
- External visitors

Age-Appropriate Development

- Curriculum content develops with age
- Promoting good choices and instilling good habits
- Make decisions based on age and understanding



Phone Ownership



- Starts with phone ownership
- Social norm
- Replacing traditional childhood 'play'
- Correlation between increase in social media/mobile phone use and increase in mental health concerns amongst teenagers. Causal link?

Teenagers Mental Health & Social Media

- (USA) The younger someone gets a mobile phone, the worse their mental health in later life
<https://sapienlabs.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Sapien-Labs-Age-of-First-Smartphone-and-Mental-Wellbeing-Outcomes.pdf>
- (Switzerland) Excessive smartphone use is associated with psychiatric, cognitive, emotional, medical and brain changes in adolescents that should be considered by health and education professionals
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140197121000853>
- (UK) The Millennium Cohort Study states that 'greater social media use relates to poor sleep, low self-esteem and poor body image'
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31193561/>
- (UK) In the last three years, the likelihood of a young person having a mental health issue has increased by 50% and emergency referrals to youth mental healthcare services have risen by 53%. This has been strongly correlated with smartphone use.
<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/well-being/mental-health-statistics>

Graph from 'The Anxious Generation' by Jonathan Haidt

Mental Illness Among College Students

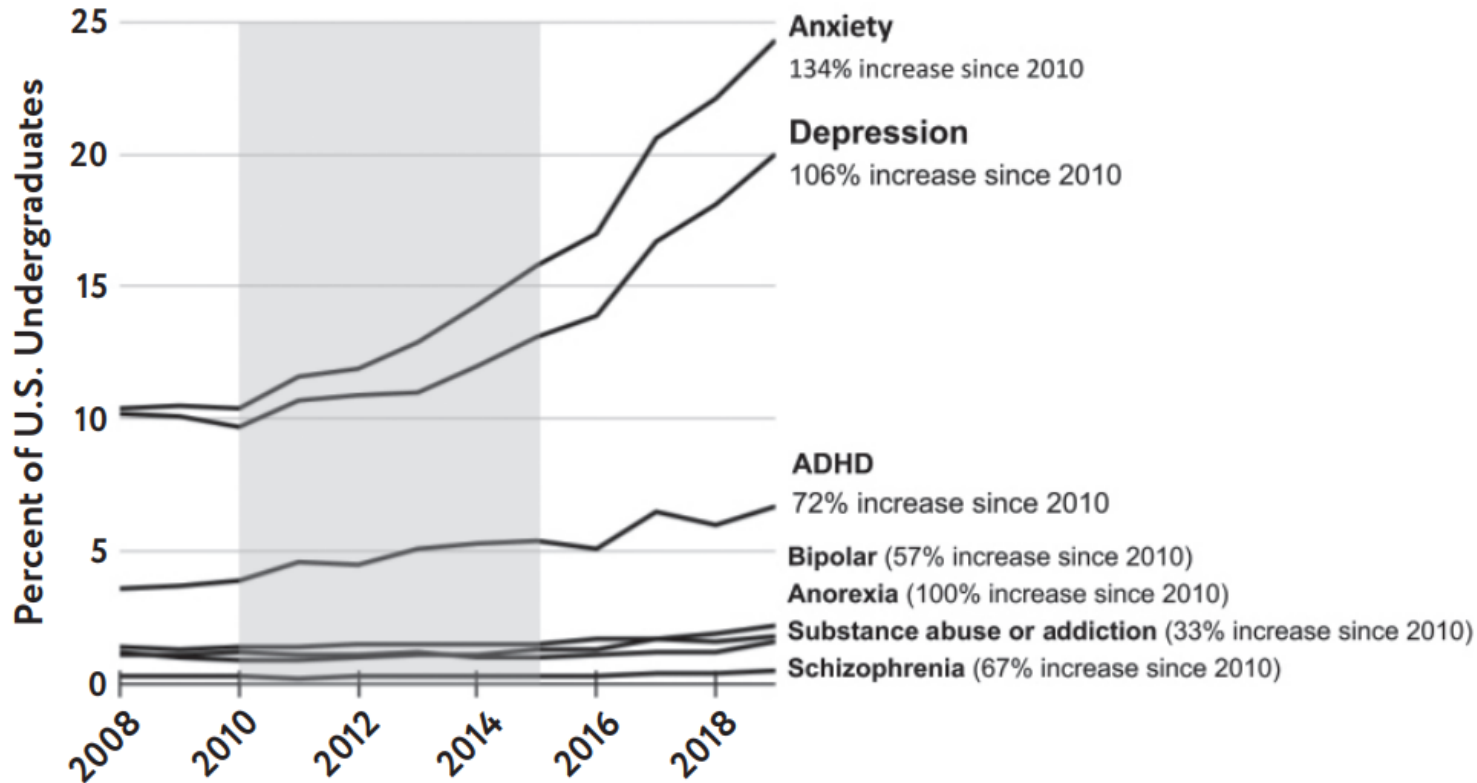


Figure 1.2. Percent of U.S. undergraduates with each of several mental illnesses. Rates of diagnosis of various mental illnesses increased in the 2010s among college students, especially for anxiety and depression. (Source: American College Health Association.)⁹

Graph from 'The Anxious Generation' by Jonathan Haidt

Anxiety Prevalence by Age

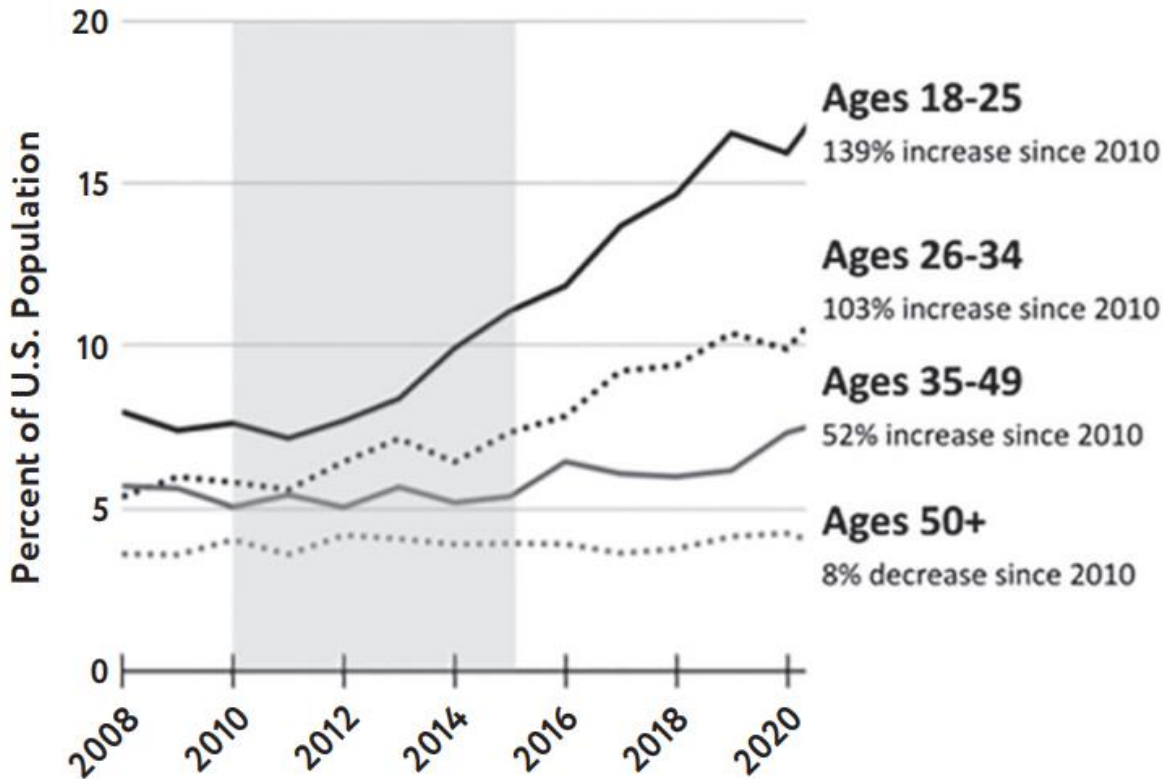


Figure 1.3. Percent of U.S. adults reporting high levels of anxiety by age group. (Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health.)¹¹

Graph from 'The Anxious Generation' by Jonathan Haidt

Self-Harm Episodes, U.K. Teens

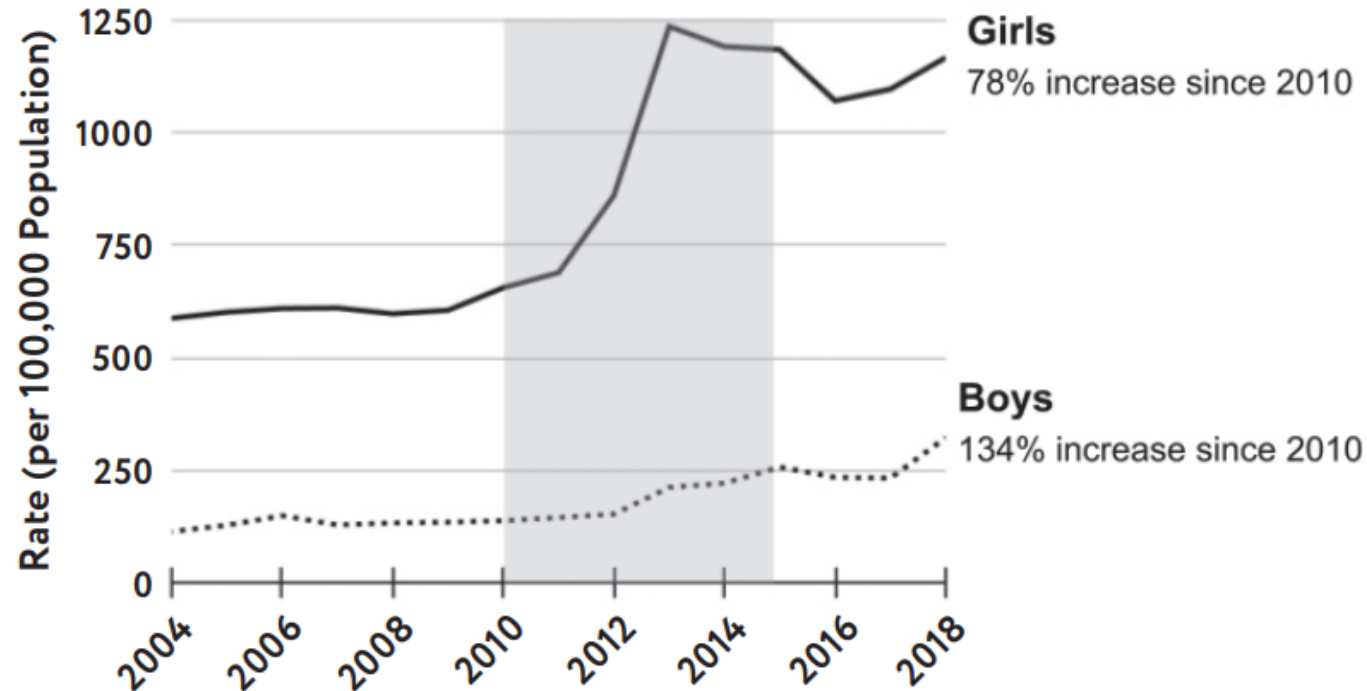


Figure 1.9. U.K. teens' (ages 13–16) self-harm episodes. (Source: Cybulski et al., 2021, drawing from two databases of anonymized British medical records.)⁵¹

Graph from 'The Anxious Generation' by Jonathan Haidt

Communication Technology Adoption

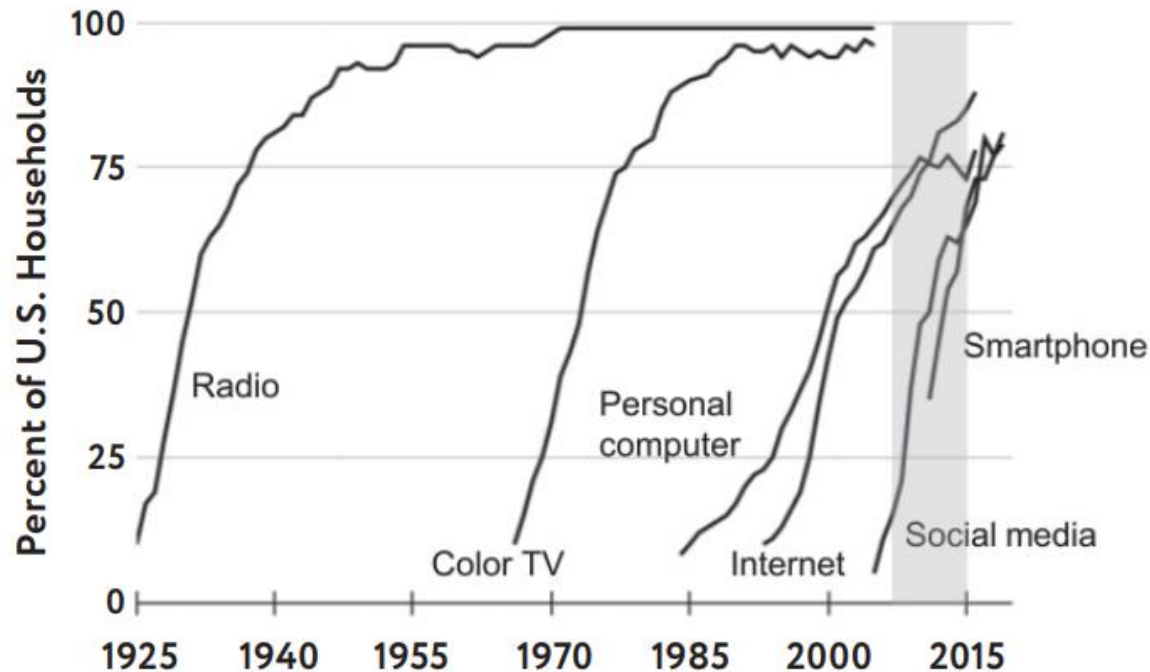
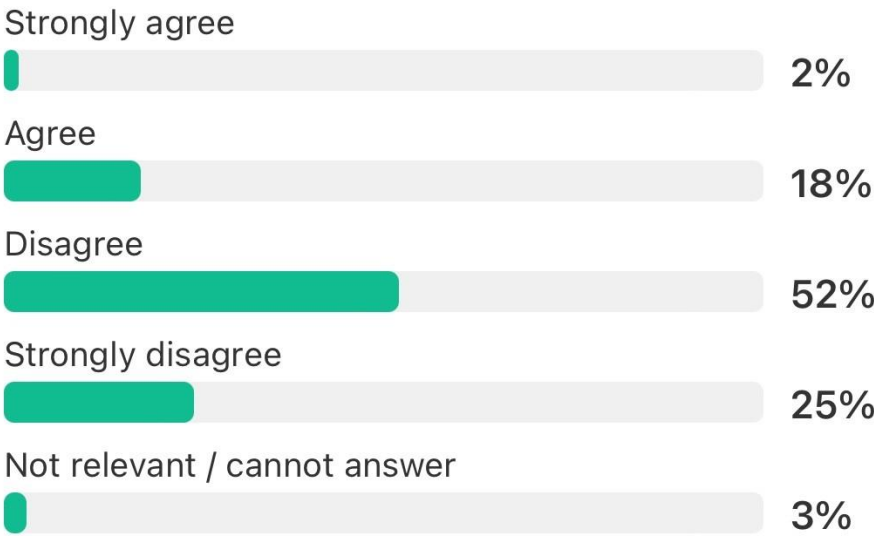


Figure 1.6. The share of U.S. households using specific technologies. The smartphone was adopted faster than any other communication technology in history. (Source: Our World in Data.)²⁵

Teacher Feedback



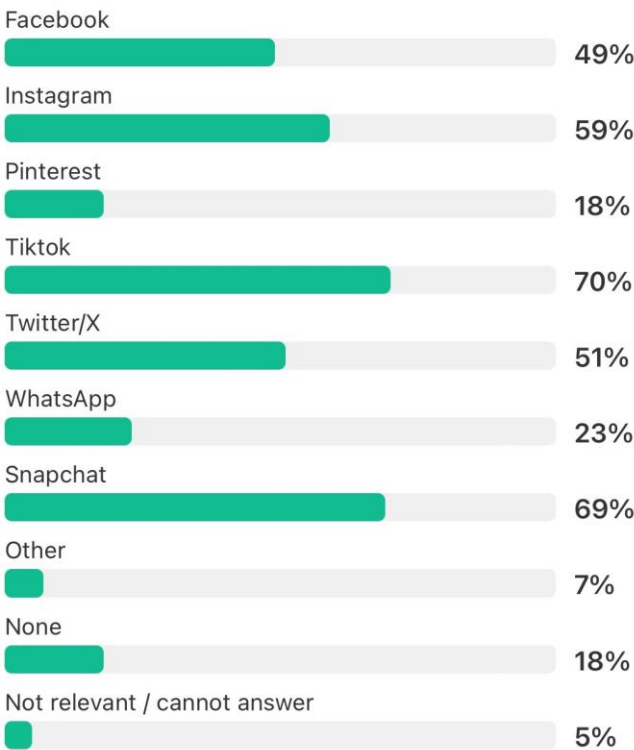
On balance, the benefits of allowing children aged 13-17 to use social media outweigh the downsides for them



11,583 responses on 27th May 2024



Would you like to see a ban on under 16 use of any of the following platforms?



11,632 responses on 28th May 2024

[illegible]

Body + Soul 9

Despite pressure from her daughter (and her friends), Fleur Britten is taking a tough line

Being such a minority is not surprising given that, according to Ofcom, she's one of only 4 per cent of British secondary school pupils who don't own one. "I hear you," I reply. "But I'm not bugging."

My resolve was only strengthened this week when the American surgeon general Dr Vivek Murthy said that social media platforms should come with health warnings like those on tobacco products. "Adolescents who spend more than three hours a day on social media face double the risk of anxiety and depression symptoms," he said, adding that average daily use was almost five hours. "It's time," he declared,

I had actually agreed to give Eve a smartphone for Year 9 (aged 13). But with the increased awareness of the dangers for teenagers I've since warned her to expect a possible government ban on ownership for under-16s — which has proved a handy 'out of order' defence in our debates. Eve has also recently bolstered my determination in the Smartphone Free Childhood (SFC) movement, a now parent-led community intent on raising the age at which kids get smartphones (smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk). I'm in a WhatsApp group for parents of secondary school-age children, many of whom want to remove their kids' phones but were liable for the social exclusion that will result if they don't. — *Barry Libe Allen*

So I did a little air-punked interview with her (mother to Ethel, Izzy, and Marnie, 11) recently said on her podcast *Miss Me* with Misquitta Oliver that she'd retracted her daughters' smartphones — and persuaded other parents to do the same, meaning there's less fomo for the kids. "It's their brains I'm worried about long term," Allen explained. "They've got enough to cope with, having me as a mum. I'd rather take smartphones out of it."

Last year I bought *Eve* a Nokia 105, on which she can call, text, listen to the radio and play *Snake*. I don't call it a brick; it's a cool "retro" phone. "It's so small," she wailed. "And *Snake* is pointless and stupid." I've bought her a camera, and set her up on a WhatsApp App group with her friends on my smartphone. Sample thread: "Hi. 'Huaa.' 'Hiuu.' 'Wyd [what you doing]?' 'Nnuu [not much, you?]' 'Whuuu.'"

It's fair to say that the *Eve* community is a little out of touch on whether to give teenagers WhatsApp access, but I'm aware that this is where *Eve* may miss out on incidents

social chat as she gets older. So when these conversations start saying something I can set her up on WhatsApp with an Android tablet (there's no app for iPads) and her brick number, no smartphone required.

Snapechat will remain off limits. Only this week came reports of American children who have died after taking fake drugs bought on the app. Parents and police blame, in part, the app's disappearing messages feature (which wipes the details in 24 hours) that made it popular in the first

smartphone so they're not bullied or left out by being the only one without one, and to track them for safety. For the moment, Evie and her friends' social lives are still organized by us parents, so she's not missing out on arrangements or one takes them in, as it is in some playground one-umpirship areas. And since we live in rural Sussex with poor public transport she doesn't need tracking because I'm her chauffeur. I know a lot of city-based SWF parents, whose children make their own way to school—they stick an Air Tag on their trainers or buy them a smartwatch; others consider tracking a violation of trust.

For me the benefits of Evie being smart-

phone-free are joyous to see. She reads for hours, is teaching herself piano and cartwheeling, and regularly wows me with her spontaneous creativity. Last weekend she and her younger brother, Zac, nine, invented "Crocker" — cricket with a Croc for a bat. When we couldn't find dice to play a board game she made one out of paper.

Of course, my "hard no" is easy in comparison with removing smartphones from teenagers who have one. Most parents are resigned to the idea that the genie can't be

The TV presenter Kate Silverton was "hard for kids", and "telling them off with days before implementation that children need to 'self-soothe'", so she means that as well. And, critically, she has a healthier phone policy. "We can't say 'no' on your phones," she says, "but we can take a leaf out of the scrolling scroll."

My 'hard no' is easier than trying to put the smartphone genie back in the bottle

behaviour," adding that their bikes and reading about the real world. She turned child therapist and says that the "loss can feel like a death." She suggests initially wearing a smartphone-free week: "It's a challenge, but it's important a ban. She often uses phrases 'for me' and 'for you' as a way of advising finding replacement, such as reading together. Parents need to model use themselves. Silverton says to kids: 'You can't be on your phone if it's bad for you,' then sit down. 'Perhaps we could do a family book — she

an impressive commitment to his smartphone for a 11-year-old. "Our kids see what we do the same," he says. Maybe down adults' phones too.

1

100

Increase Media Prevalence

Ministers look at social media ban for teenagers

Oliver Wright, Rachel Sylvester

Ministers have said they are open to a complete ban on children using social media as a senior adviser claimed that inappropriate content online may be fuelling a mental health crisis.

Peter Kyle, the science and technology secretary, said he was looking "very closely" at an Australian policy to set a minimum age for access to platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat and Facebook. The government in Canber-

ra is to test age verification technology and intends to set an age limit — likely to be 14 and 16 — this year.

Kyle said there was "considerable evidence" that social media were "harming vulnerable young people". He added that

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interes
sidered
prime
"I'm

"I would do anything to keep young people safe."

Lord Darzi of Denham, the government health adviser, told The Times that the mental health epidemic among young people meant radical measures

waiting for mental health support. It's just awful, that's the future generation. These are the kids who will produce the journalists, the doctors, the nurses. It's frightening."

Senior government sources said Kyle

'You wouldn't sell them alcohol so why give children smartphones?'

Georgia Lambert

For Justine Elbourne-Cload, transforming how children use smartphones is personal. Her own son's struggle with an eating disorder has made her determined to break the grip of digital distractions on young minds.

"We've had several children over the last few years who have had issues or who restricted their eating. My son [now a young adult] went through the same thing; when I talk to him, he says that some of the things he saw online contributed to his eating disorder," the executive head teacher at Cunningham Hill Junior School in St Albans said.

This year, head teachers at schools in St Albans issued a joint letter urging parents not to buy smartphones for children under 14. But despite Cunningham Hill's blanket ban on phones, teachers have no control over their use outside school. Matthew Tavender, the head of schools at Cunningham Hill schools, said: "As soon as they leave school, premises, we can't police that — that's for parents to do."

A third of five to seven-year-olds use social media unsupervised, according to Ofcom. This presents "endless risks", Tavender said, including misinformation and hate speech from figures such as Andrew Tate, bullying and the impact of algorithms on self-image.

Speaking to parents, The Times found that their main concerns were their children's use of WhatsApp, particularly after the introduction of a locking feature that complicates efforts to monitor their activity.

For Will Ashton, a digital marketer and father of two, banning smartphone use at home is a "no-brainer" and something that he "regrets not doing sooner". He said: "My biggest fear is the TikTok brain. My nine-year-old was exposed to screens about three to four years old but we were always conscious of it. His attention span is short and potentially shortening."

Ashton, the lead parent ambassador, works with six others to discuss school initiatives, including a plan for a smartphone-free city. A recent survey showed three quarters of parents sup-

ported a voluntary pact to delay smartphone purchases until children turn 14.

Himanshu is the owner of a newsagents in St Albans and has two school-aged children. He said: "No one would even think about selling them alcohol or cigarettes, so why are we letting them have iPhones that cost thousands of pounds?"

Cunningham Hill is not alone in promoting analogue childhoods. Smartphone Free Childhood, a grassroots movement started by two mothers in Suffolk, aims to shift social norms around digital device use. Clare Fernyhough, a co-founder, said 12,000 people had signed a parent pact pledging not to buy smartphones for their children before they were reached 14 years old.

In South Devon, parents at All Saints' primary school in Thurlstone have signed a similar pact. At Ebbsfleet Academy in Kent teachers have seen a vast improvement in GCSE results since it banned smartphones in 2013.

A big national academy chain said yesterday that it would be the first in

England to ban access to smartphones at school. The Ormiston Academies Trust, which oversees 35,000 students in 44 state schools, has already phased out phone use in eight secondary schools. Tom Rees, chief executive of the trust, told The Guardian there was "a responsibility for schools to make it harder for children to access inappropriate content through the school day and restrict the draw of social media".

Action is also being taken across the pond. This month, California state legislators passed a bill mandating that school districts either ban or restrict smartphone use. Schools in Silicon Valley, the centre of the tech world, use phone caddies, or hand-in policies.

Sir Keir Starmer has said that he is not in favour of "simply banning" phones for under-16s. But Fernyhough said: "Tech companies are not only monopolising the market, they're monopolising childhood... Parents and schools are now standing up and saying, 'No, we don't want this.'"

St Albans is a pioneer in protecting children, leading articles, page 29

Backed up by young people themselves

In a survey of 2,000 13 to 18-year-olds, conducted by BBC Radio 5 Live and BBC Bitesize, young people were asked about various aspects of life - including mental health and their smartphone habits. The findings of the survey, carried out by polling company Survation, suggest:

- 23% agree that smartphones should be banned for under-16s
- 35% think social media should be banned for under-16s



School Responses



City headteachers suggest banning smartphones for U-14s



In a letter to parents, St Albans Primary Schools Consortium suggested that smartphones shouldn't be given to students until Year 9.

"We know that in our schools some children as young as Key Stage 1 have smartphones," the letter read.

The headteachers added that, while phones can be useful for parents to keep in contact while their children are away from home, phones "do not need to have access to the internet" to keep children safe.

"As head teachers, we have committed to promoting our own schools as smartphone-free."

The letter was signed by 20 of the 24 primary school headteachers in the city.

Research from Ofcom (the Office of Communications) - which oversees TV, radio and internet services in the UK - found that 91% of 11-year-olds own a smartphone in the UK.

01. Twyford Church of England High School, *Acton* →

Students all sign a mandatory mobile phone agreement to use only a Nokia 105, Samsung E1200 or Alcatel 10.16G brick phone, which must be switched off in bags all day. If pupils are seen breaking the rule, teachers confiscate the phone till the end of term.



02. Emanuel School, *London* →

As of this year, the school is advising parents of new Year 7 pupils joining in September to not buy a smartphone for their child until Year 9. Having run several 4-week trials where they asked pupils to limit social media to 1 hour per day, kids reported feeling happier, less lonely and having improved levels of concentration.



What's to be done?

Our best advice – delay buying your child a smartphone whilst their brain is developing. Wait until they are in Year 9.

We accept that you want to be able to contact your child especially if they are walking to/from school. Consider a 'brick' phone that provides communication without the social media component.



Alternatives

Online movements such as 'Smartphone Free Childhood' are gathering momentum. This was started by a pair of mums in February of this year and has now grown to tens of thousands.

It does not have to be an either/or situation.

01. Start with a children's smartwatch

02. Move on to a simple phone

And a tracker if you want to be able to see where they are.

03. Later (much later!), introduce a tablet at home



‘Smartphone Free Childhood’

The Smartphone Free Childhood website has a number of sections where you can find out more if you are interested.



[ABOUT](#) [THE PROBLEM](#) [OUR MISSION](#) [RESOURCES](#)

[JOIN US](#)



As parents, how can we talk to each other about this?

[READ MORE](#)

How to introduce the topic in your class WhatsApp

[READ MORE](#)

Letter template to Primary School Headteachers

[USE OUR TEMPLATE](#)

Letter template to Secondary School Headteachers

[USE OUR TEMPLATE](#)

Smartphone alternatives; brick phones, flip phones watches & more

[READ MORE](#)

Our official guide to making a Parent Pact in your school

[SEE OUR GUIDE](#)

Smartphone Free Schools guides for primary & secondary schools

[SEE OUR GUIDES](#)

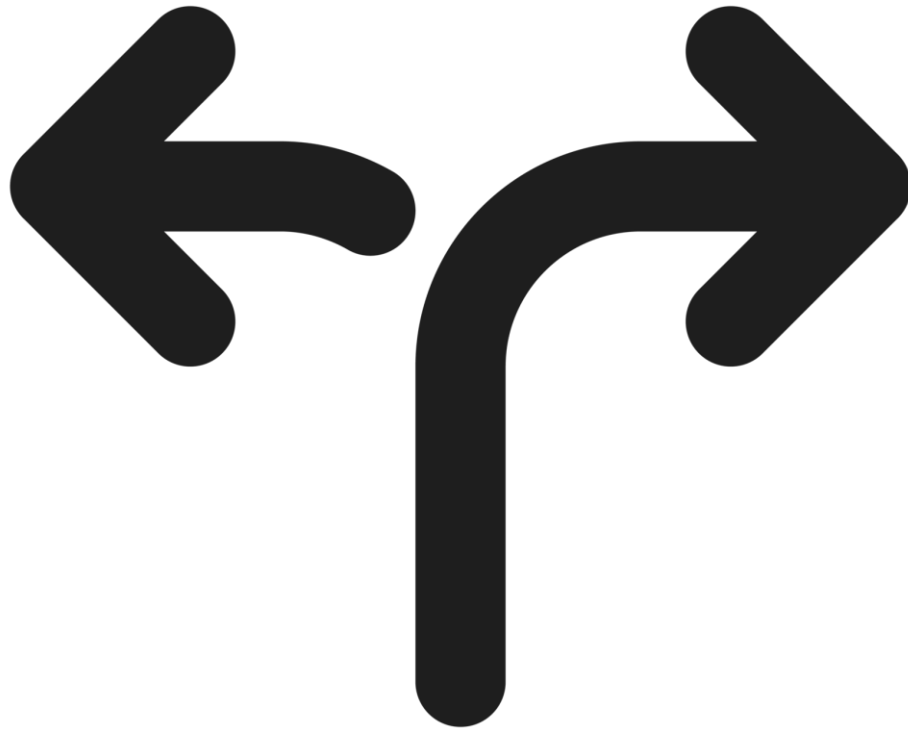
Our official flyer to circulate amongst parents and schools

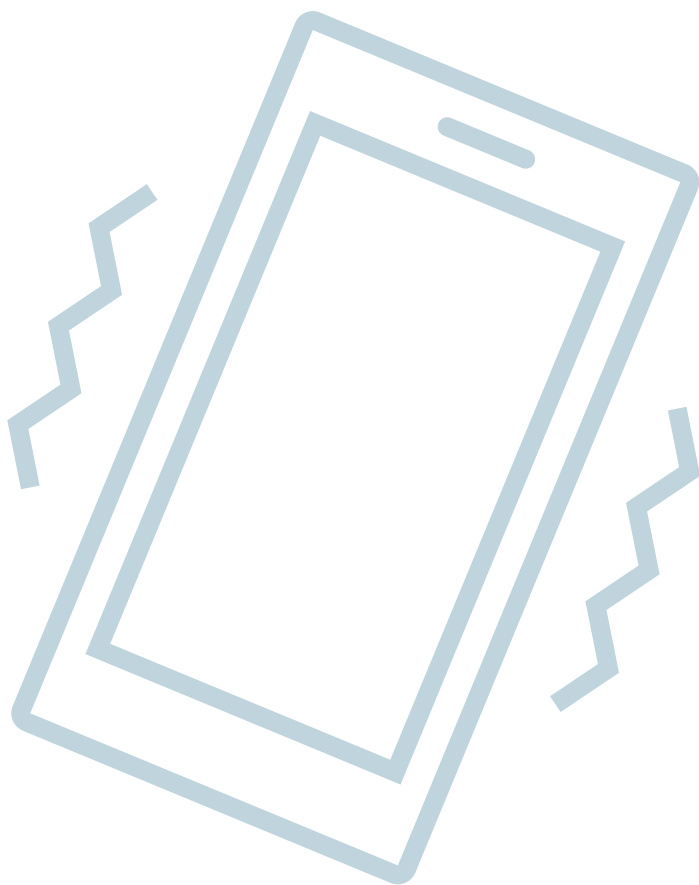
[SEE OUR FLYER](#)

Our MP letter template

[USE OUR TEMPLATE](#)

A brief pause...





If your child has (or will have) a smartphone

What steps can you take to
avoid the risks and pitfalls we
have discussed?

Internetmatters.org

Social media is for ages 13 and over

Most social media and entertainment platforms require users to be 13 or older. This includes platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. Pretending to be older will leave children open to risk.

Many platforms have family or parent modes

TikTok has Family Pairing, Snapchat and Instagram have their own Family Centres and Roblox has Allowed Experiences controlled via a Parental PIN. All of these features are safety tools that you can set up to keep your child safe on their smartphone.

Playing games is a part of socialising

Online games apps like Roblox, Fortnite and Minecraft are often about community and socialisation, not just playing games. The ability to chat and communicate with others means it's important to review in-game safety before they play.

Smartphones have in-built safety settings

Android devices come with Digital Wellbeing while Apple devices come with Screen Time. Individual companies will have additional safety settings -- like Samsung Kids or Google Family Link. Set these features up to improve your child's smartphone safety.

Social media platforms have in-built safety settings for teens

If your teen is honest about their age, they will benefit from additional safety on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Pretending to be an adult means they miss out on these features.

There are a range of messaging apps to follow

WhatsApp is a popular messaging app that children use. However, users must be 13 or older to use it. Additional messaging apps like Telegram might have different age requirements to safety considerations that you should look into.

Setting up filtering
can help reduce
inappropriate
content.

There are three
levels to doing this



**Your internet/wifi
provider (only works in
your home)**



On the device itself



**Within the settings of
specific apps**

Parental Controls

internet
matters.org

Entertainment & search engines

Select the stream
or other apps from

Social media

Select the social r
from the dropdov

Broadband & mobile networks

Select your network p
dropdown list:

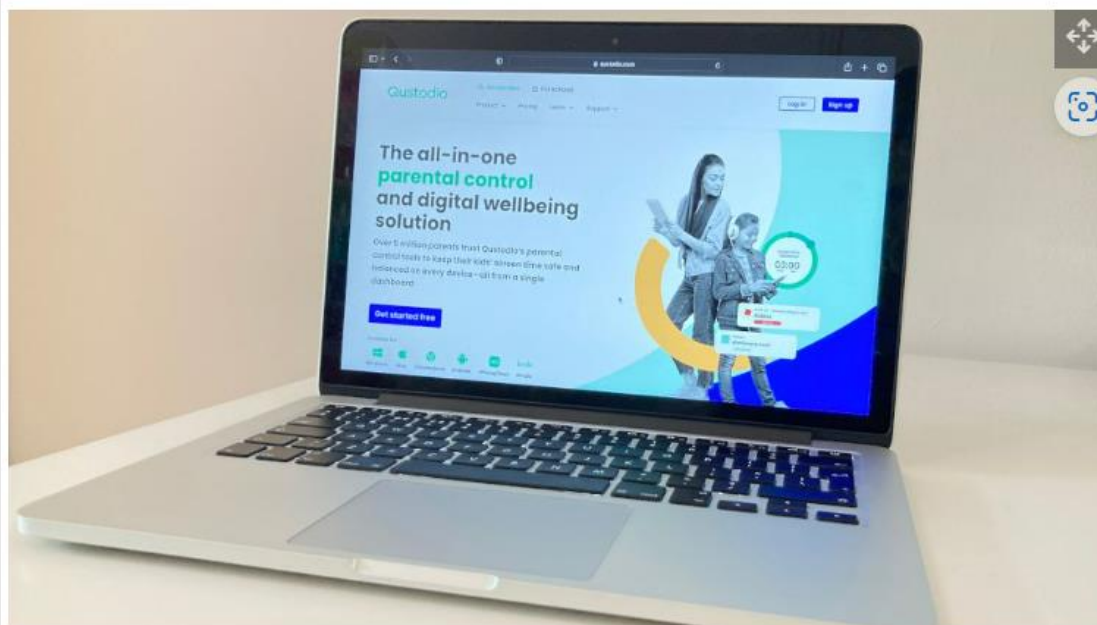
Video games & consoles

Select the video game or console from
the dropdown list:



VIEW ALL

BEST FREE PARENTAL CONTROL APP OVERALL



(Image credit: Future)

1. Quastodio ★★★★★

A full suite of parental control tools to keep your kids safe online

Talk about it:

Tips for a meaningful conversation

- Start conversations when your children won't be embarrassed, for example in the car going home from school. **Try to de-personalise it by asking their opinion on a current news story** that relates to an online issue.
- **Be proactive - don't wait until something has already gone wrong** - discuss issues ahead of time - knowing what children of a similar age are doing will help you know more about the environment that your child is living in.
- **Ask them for advice on how to do something online** and use this as a conversation starter.
- Make sure they know they can come to you if they're upset by something they've seen online - **listen to them when they do and try not to overreact** - the important thing is that they have come and told you!
- **Be sensitive and praise them** when they share their online experiences with you.
- If your child comes to you with an issue, **stay calm and listen without judging them.**
- **Talk about online grooming as you would stranger danger** and explain that people they meet online might not be who they say they are.
- Ask them about things online which **might make them (or others) uncomfortable.**

Dealing with inappropriate CONTENT

What to talk about

- They can come to you if they see anything that upsets them
- If they have seen pornography... that it presents an unrealistic image of sex and relationships
- The importance of respect for each other and the meaning of consent

Top tips / tools to use

- Parental controls on home broadband
- Content lock on mobile networks
- Safe search on Google (& other browsers) & YouTube; child-friendly search engines



Dealing with inappropriate CONTACT

What to talk about

- Sometimes people hide behind fake profiles for dishonest reasons
- Agree how they will respond to requests from people they don't know in real life
- Never ever to meet up with anyone they don't know in real life

Top tips / tools to use

- Set up safe social media profiles that don't share personal information
- Turn off geolocation settings on devices
- Use the strongest privacy settings on social media
- Learn how to report/block/mute

Dealing with inappropriate CONDUCT

What to talk about

- Talk to a trusted adult if they experience anything upsetting online
- Think carefully about sharing images of others
- Be responsible online, remembering they are creating their own digital footprint

Top tips / tools to use

- Report inappropriate posts/content to the social media providers
- Think carefully about using monitoring apps that identify inappropriate behaviour

Controlling tech time

And there are tactics you can put in place **to help manage** their screen time....

1 Set a good example

2 Talk together about the time spent online

3 Agree on appropriate length of time they can use their device

4 Get the whole family to unplug & create screen-free zones

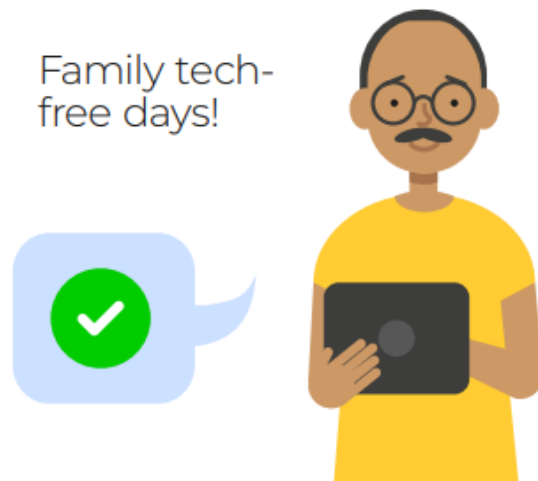
5 Use technology/apps to help manage screen time e.g. Forest App



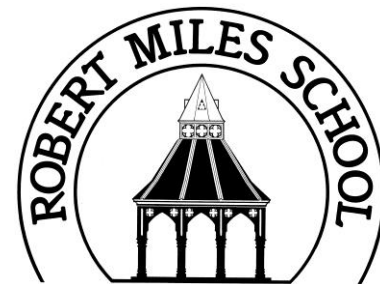
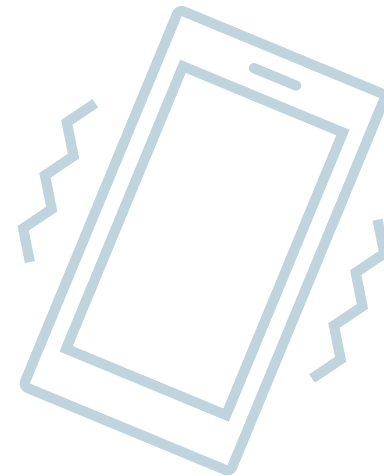
Controlling tech time

Your children will be watching the way you use technology and they will copy; make sure there is some consistency in how you **role model** good behaviour:

- 1 Turn off notifications on apps to avoid that constant 'ping'
- 2 Buy an alarm clock so you don't have devices in the bedrooms
- 3 Keep phone on silent in your pocket or bag when you pick the kids from school
- 4 'No phones at the table' rule or 'no phones between 6 and 7' rule
- 5 Family tech-free days!



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