



**SMARTPHONE  
FREE CHILDHOOD**

# Raising kids in the smartphone era

PARENT TALK - 2026



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



# In two decades, everything's changed

## 2005



## 2026



2005

Nokias ruled...  
texts, calls & snake

2007

The first  
iPhone launches  
"A computer in our  
pocket"

2012

4G UK launch,  
internet always  
available,  
everywhere

2020s

Explosion of  
short-form content  
& AI powered  
algorithms

2025

Smartphones have  
transformed  
society... and  
childhood



# Smartphones have become 'normal' for kids



Age  
6-7

**1 in 3**

children have a  
smartphone



Age  
9

**Average age**

a child gets a  
smartphone in  
the UK



Age  
12

**90%**

of children have  
a smartphone



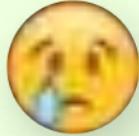
# Nobody is happy with the status quo



94%

of **primary school parents** think smartphones are harmful

PARENTKIND POLL  
2024



33%

of **parents of children with smartphones** have cried over their child's phone obsession

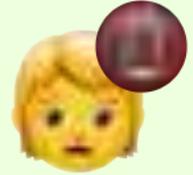
HMD POLL  
2024



87%

of **teachers** agree for teens the negatives of smartphones outweigh the benefits

TEACHER TAPP SURVEY  
2025



67%

of **16-18 year olds** think smartphones are harmful

PARENTKIND POLL  
2024



NIP IN THE BUD: A STOLEN CHILDHOOD



# The only winners are the tech companies

## The Attention Economy

We don't pay them.  
The more **time** we spend, the more **money** they make.



## 👁️ Attention = Profit 💰

The business model of social media giants is based on **addiction**

Tech companies make

# \$40B+

per year from under 18s\*

*The attention economy profits from lost childhoods*

\* Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health study, 2023 - \$11B of revenue for US; \$43B is extrapolated to a global figure for 2025



# It can feel like an impossible position

**Either we...**  
Give our children an addictive  
product



**Or we...**  
Risk alienating them from their  
peers



*It's a lose-lose: for parents, young people & society*



# SFC isn't anti-tech, it's pro-childhood

**Delay smartphones until at least 14**

**Delay social media until at least 16**

**A simple phone to stay in contact**

**Shared access to a family computer**

**Alternative trackers (or go without)**



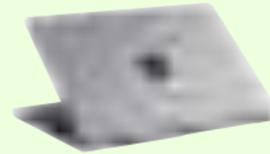
**SMARTPHONE**



**SOCIAL MEDIA**



**SIMPLE PHONE**



**FAMILY COMPUTER**



**TAGS OR GPS**



# We all want the same for our children



**Happy  
today**

*Enjoy a happy,  
healthy childhood*



**Thriving  
tomorrow**

*Grow into confident,  
capable adults*



**Safe  
always**

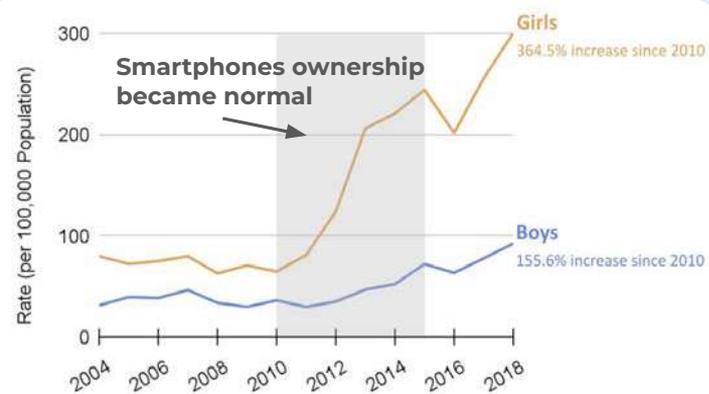
*Stay safe as they  
explore the world*



**Happy  
today**

# We're facing a teen mental health crisis

## UK 10-12 year olds, self-harm episodes





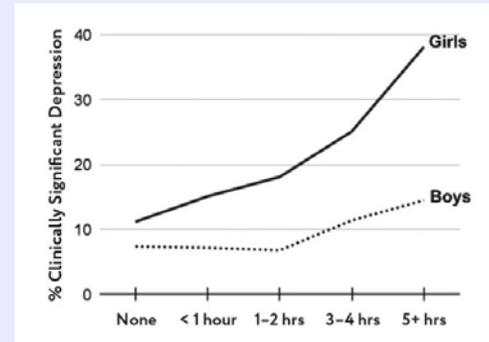
**Happy  
today**

# Smartphones increase the likelihood of mental illness

**3x**

**Depression risk  
& 2x anxiety  
risk**

Among teens with  
problematic  
smartphone use



King's College London, 2024

Millennium Cohort Study



**Happy  
today**

# **Smartphones are designed to be addictive**

**4-6 hours**

**Average daily time  
teens spend on  
smartphones**

Among UK 16-24 olds;  
nearly a full-time job



**Happy  
today**

**Smartphones expose kids  
to things they can't unsee**

**51%**

**of 13 year olds have  
seen violent, hardcore  
porn**

BBFC report, 2022

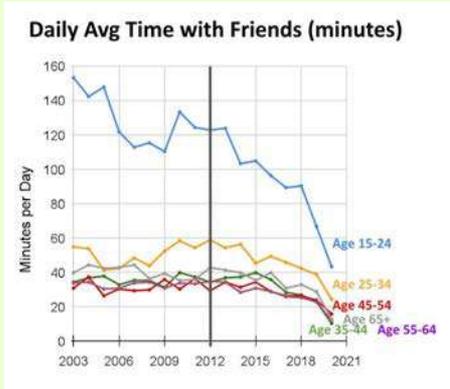


**Thriving  
tomorrow**

# Smartphones displace real world activities & connection

**↓ 65%**

**Reduction in time  
spent in real life  
with friends**



Since smartphones became common in the 2010s



**Thriving  
tomorrow**

# Smartphones fragment children's attention

**237**

**notifications a day  
on average**

Median average, Common Sense Media, 2023



**Thriving  
tomorrow**

# Smartphones disrupt sleep - critical to healthy development

**1 night / week  
heavy social-media  
users lose one  
night's  
sleep each week**

**“Our teenagers are truly addicted... The vast majority of teenagers tell me they are awake until the small hours on their phones.”**

**“In 20 years of teaching I have never before experienced so many instances of children falling asleep in lessons as now.”**

UK Millennium Cohort Study, 2019  
(11,872 adolescents, age 13–15)

Teacher testimonies  
shared with SFC, 2025



**Thriving  
tomorrow**

**Smartphones lower  
educational attainment**

**1-2 grades higher  
GCSE grades among  
schools with an effective  
smartphone ban**



**Safe  
always**

**Smartphones make  
bullying harder to escape**

**24/7**

**Bullying in children's pockets**

Issues no longer stop at the school gate; they can amplify and exacerbate overnight



**Safe  
always**

**The sharing of under-age  
nudes is an everyday  
reality**

**90% of girls  
50% of boys  
have been sent an  
unwanted explicit  
image**



# Smartphone-free kids have more chance to



## Have happier childhoods

*Better mental health  
More time for play  
More presence*



## Thrive in the future

*Stronger social skills  
Better concentration  
Improved school results*



## Be safe as they grow up

*Less exposure to harm  
Less exposure to predators  
Lower likelihood of bullying*



# First phones (11-14)

**Nokia 105 2G**



**Pros:** Compact, durable, great value, some basic games for fun  
**Cons:** Very small screen, can be fiddly, no camera

**TCL 4022S**



**Pros:** Nice-sized screen, easy to use, good battery life  
**Cons:** Poor quality camera, basic looks

**GPO 746  
push-button  
phone**



**Pros:** Simple 'calls only' function, stylish retro feel, works with modern internet-based phone services  
**Cons:** Requires a quick setup with a phone provider, stays put in the house (not portable)

**Nokia 2660 Flip**



**Pros:** Looks stylish, good battery life, well priced  
**Cons:** Does have some very limited internet access if you have a data SIM

**The Phone+**



**Pros:** Large, bright touchscreen, calls & texts only, well priced  
**Cons:** Cheaper build quality than some



# Follow on phones (14-16)

## HMD Fusion X1



**Pros:** Looks great, modern features, incredible parent-level control  
**Cons:** Monthly sub require

## The Light Phone II



**Pros:** Good choice of features, compact design  
**Cons:** E-ink screen has quirks, hotspot feature may require caution

## Balance Phone



**Pros:** Modern smartphone design, independence with guardrails, decent camera quality  
**Cons:** Whatsapp access, selfie camera

## Pinwheel



**Pros:** Good performance, strong parental controls, GPS tracking  
**Cons:** Choice & options could feel overwhelming



# Smartwatches, Trackers & Data Free Sims

## Xplora X6Play



**Pros:** Nice design, GPS tracking, great parental controls for minimal distraction  
**Cons:** Camera

## Apple Watch SE



**Pros:** Great performance, easy to use, can grow with child  
**Cons:** Expensive, parent requires an iPhone

## Bluetooth Trackers



Apple AirTag

Tile Mate

## GPS Trackers



AngelSense GPS Tracker

Weenect Kids Tracker

## Data Free Sims



Asda Talk & Text

ParentsShield



# What if my child already has a smartphone?



**Take an interest  
& have open  
conversations**



**Set clear boundaries**

- No phones overnight
- Screen-free meals
  - App time limits
  - Delay social media



**Review your own  
smartphone  
behaviours**



**Invest in parental  
controls & monitor  
constantly**



# Parental Controls are important but not the solution

Most kids don't have parental controls

**58%**

of teens say they have never had parental controls

Parentkind Poll, May 2024

If you have them, invest time understanding how kids get around them

**47%**

of teens with controls have bi-passed them

Parentkind Poll, May 2024

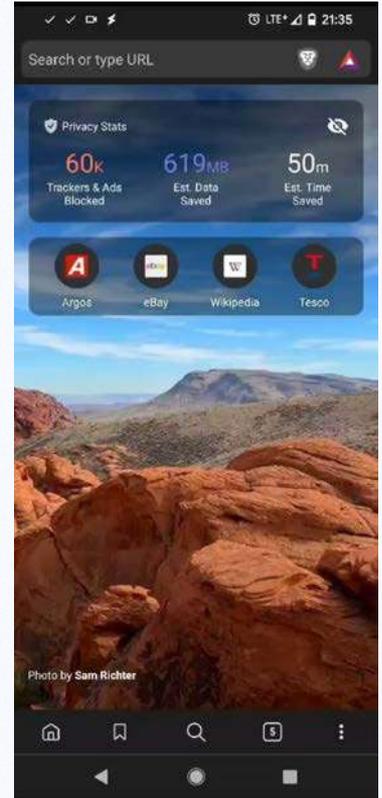
Performing a factory reset

Using VPN software

Hacking the router

Memorising your passcode

Using a proxy





# If you still have questions...



Find answers  
to common  
questions



Explore  
'Child-friendly'  
phone options



Learn how to talk  
to kids about  
smartphones



View the latest  
data and  
research

[SMARTPHONEFREECHILDHOOD.ORG](https://SMARTPHONEFREECHILDHOOD.ORG)



# What next?

## Join the conversation

Join the SFC school  
Whatsapp group



## Get involved in SFC

Spread the word in your  
class and beyond





# Discussion points for the room



How should we talk to our children about smartphones?

Share your thoughts & experiences



How to navigate sleepovers and playdates with kids who have smartphones (if your child doesn't).

How to talk to other parents without sounding judgemental?



Kids using WhatsApp:

Important peer connection?  
Or too risky?