

A collage of children playing and drawing, with a teal overlay. The children are engaged in various activities: one is drawing on a piece of paper, another is laughing, and a girl in an orange dress is running. The background is a mix of these scenes, creating a vibrant and active atmosphere.

**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



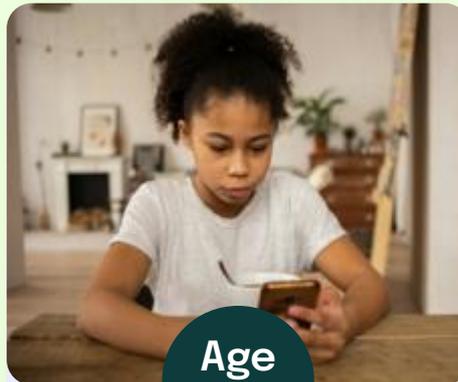
Smartphones have become 'normal' for kids



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

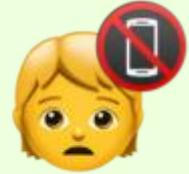
HMD POLL
2024



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



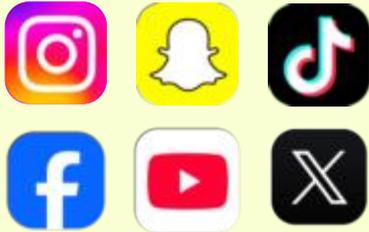
NIP IN THE BUD: A STOLEN CHILDHOOD



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



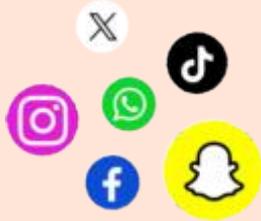
SFC isn't anti-tech, it's pro-childhood

Delay smartphones until at least 14



SMARTPHONE

Delay social media until at least 16



SOCIAL MEDIA

A simple phone to stay in contact



SIMPLE PHONE

Shared access to a family computer



FAMILY COMPUTER

Alternative trackers (or go without)



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**

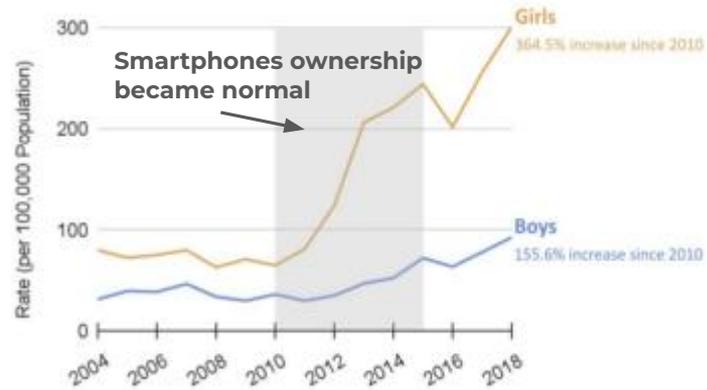
*Stay safe as they
explore the world*



**Happy
today**

We're facing a teen mental health crisis

UK 10-12 year olds, self-harm episodes





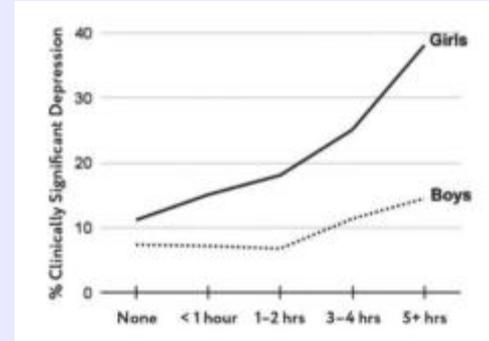
**Happy
today**

Smartphones increase the likelihood of mental illness

3x

**Depression risk
& 2x anxiety
risk**

Among teens with
problematic
smartphone use





**Happy
today**

Smartphones are designed to be addictive

4-6 hours

**Average daily time
teens spend on
smartphones**

Among UK teens; 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

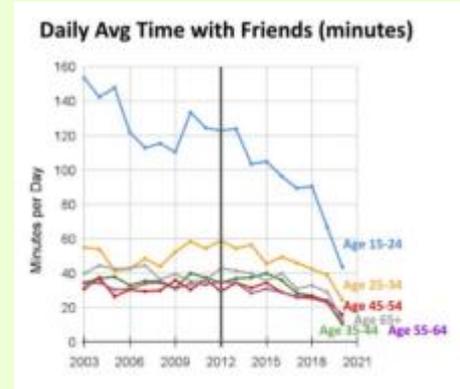


**Thriving
tomorrow**

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**

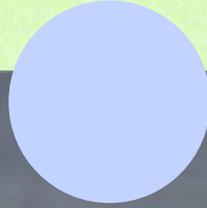


Smartphone-free kids have more chance to



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



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?