



March 2025  
Internet Safety Day



## 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  
negatives 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



## EVERYONE'S GOT ONE BECAUSE EVERYONE'S GOT ONE



Most parents believe smartphones are harmful, yet almost all children have them by Year 7



Because resisting peer pressure becomes almost impossible when children's social lives migrate online

*The powerful network effects of smartphones and social media mean parents and young people feel like they have no choice*



**So what exactly  
*is* the problem?**



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

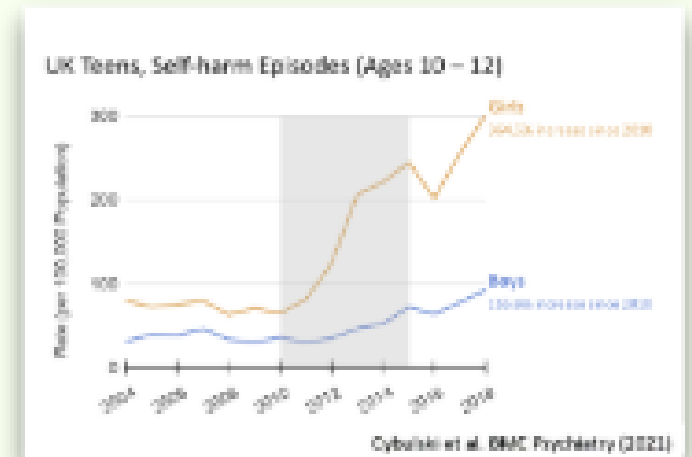
**Now we do, and the evidence is overwhelming.**



# 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

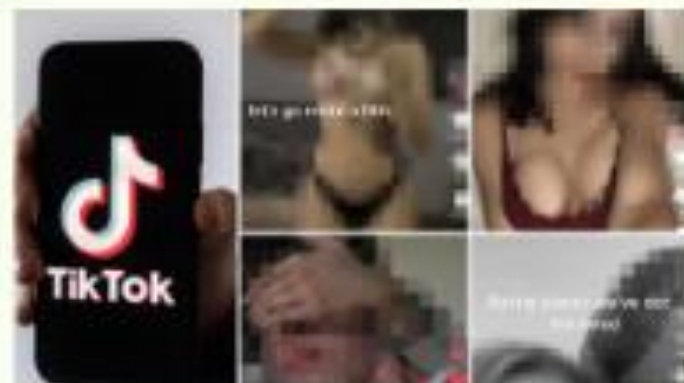
Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2024



## 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

Dated review of sexual abuse in schools, 2021



## 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 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**

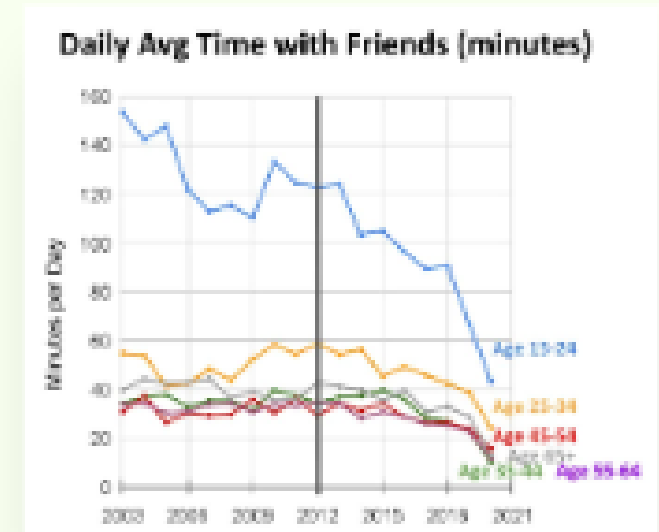
Co-inventor of ‘infinite scroll’, turned campaigner



## 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.



**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 - Mullen 2019

**65%**

The daily average time that teenagers spend with friends has plummeted by 65% since 2010

American Time Use Study



**Parents are in an  
*impossible* position**



## 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**



**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.**



## OUR 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**



## 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

(Parental Control poll, May 2024)

47%

of teens with controls in place say they have bypassed them

(Parental Control 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



## **WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER**

**Navigating the fast changing world of smartphones and social media is complex.**

**This stuff's tricky, the evidence is evolving fast, and every family is different.**

**Wherever you sit on the spectrum, or whatever decisions you've made for your children, we respect your position.**

**Every family will come to their own conclusions; we just want to open up a conversation about these issues.**

**It's a new frontier of parenting, and we're all in it together.**

## Simple phones



### The Phone £100 - £105 (€100) ↗

- A pared back internet-free phone that looks like a smartphone but only calls and texts (plus a few emojis 😊)
- Uncrackable operating system that can't access the internet and has no apps
- No camera
- Simple and intuitive to use
- Headphone jack for hands-free calling

<https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/alternatives>



### Pinwheel ↗

£239 for the Samsung Plus 4 model or £479 Google Pixel 8A model. Plus £13.99 monthly for the Pinwheel Caregiver Portal

- Modern, reliable kid phones with built-in parent management
- Device is designed to grow with your child, to meet their experience and maturity level.
- You can create a contact safelist, monitor texts and calls and set schedules for when contacts and apps are available.
- No web browser or social media apps, but hundreds of other vetted apps available, which you can choose to add when your child is ready, including banking, Google Maps, Spotify and Citymapper.
- Inbuilt GPS locator