



Let's talk about our kids and their tech

JENNIFER POWERS

Choosing a different path for your family

Created by Dr Susie Davies, Papaya Talks—all rights reserved

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

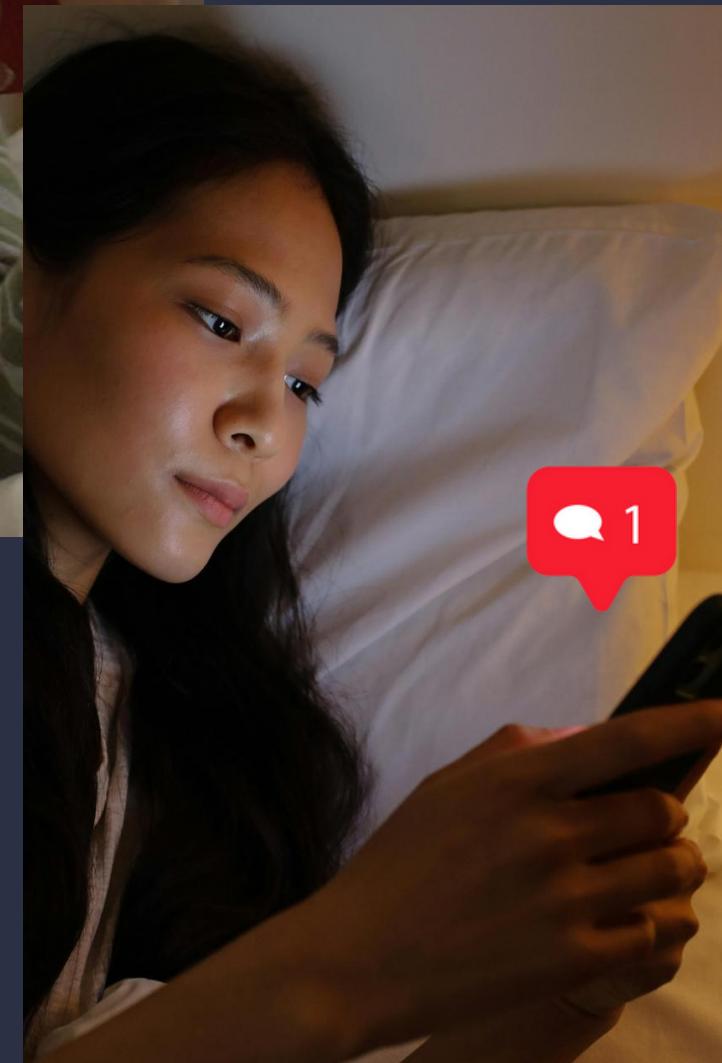
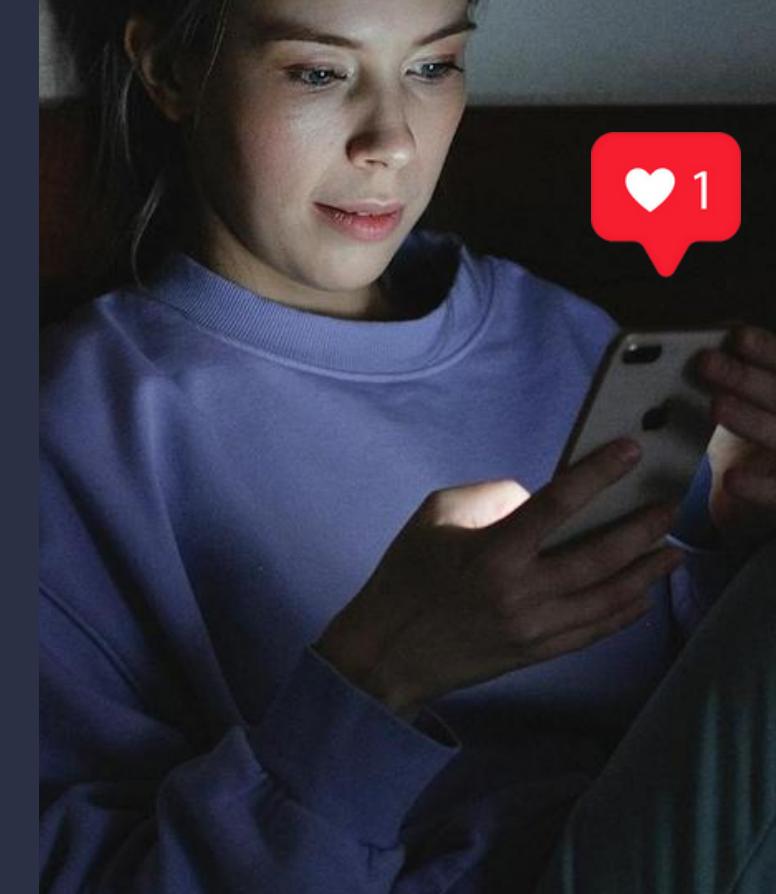
*Ofcom 2025

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.

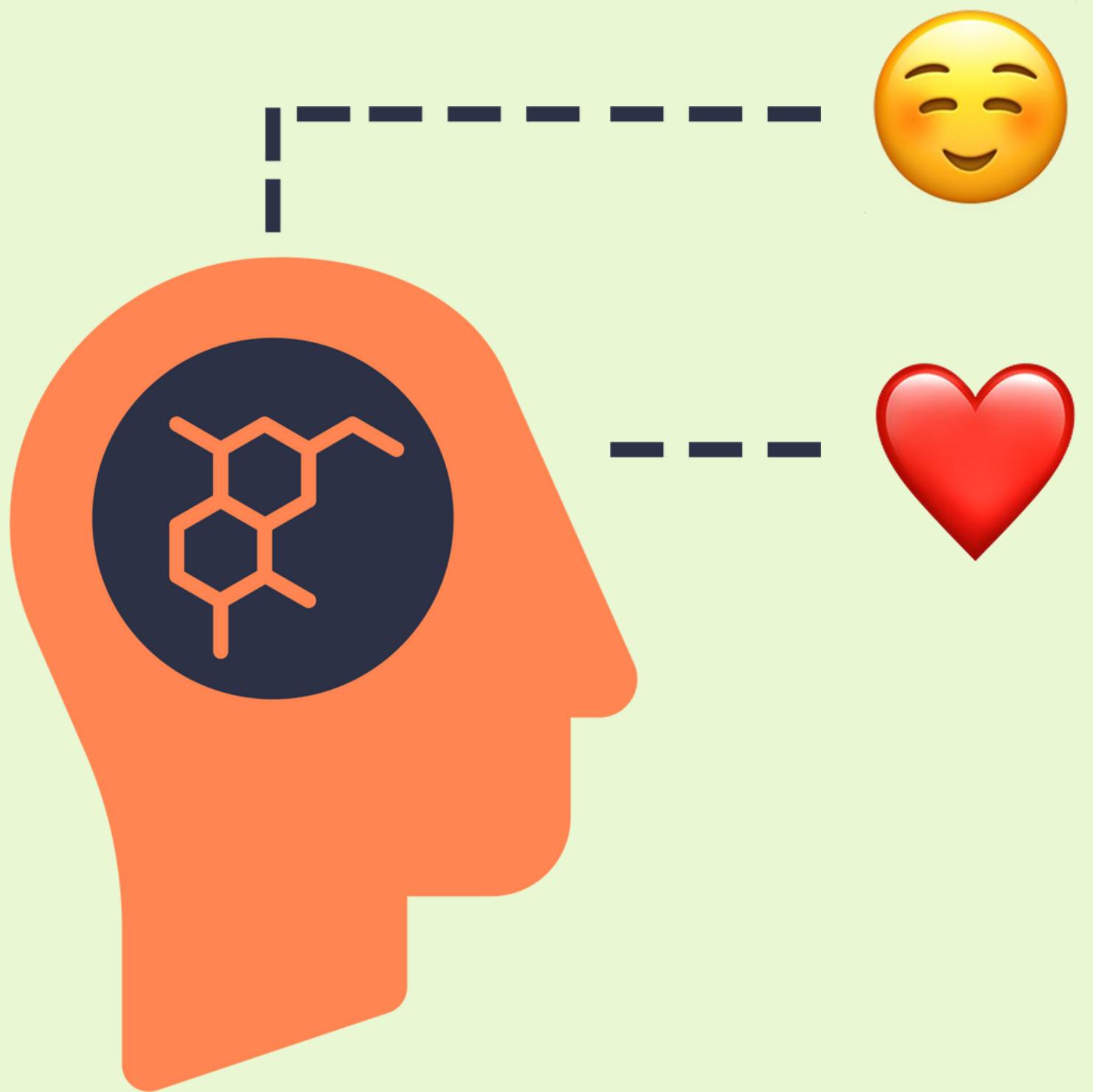
Persuasive design

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



Early 'Smartphones' & social giants begin

Facebook 2002
YouTube 2005

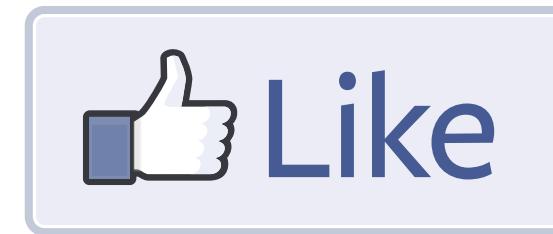
2007-2008



The iPhone 'touch screen'

Appstore 2008;
1st Android 2008

2009-2010



Tech behaviourists maximise engagement

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

2010-2014



Internet everywhere - 4G

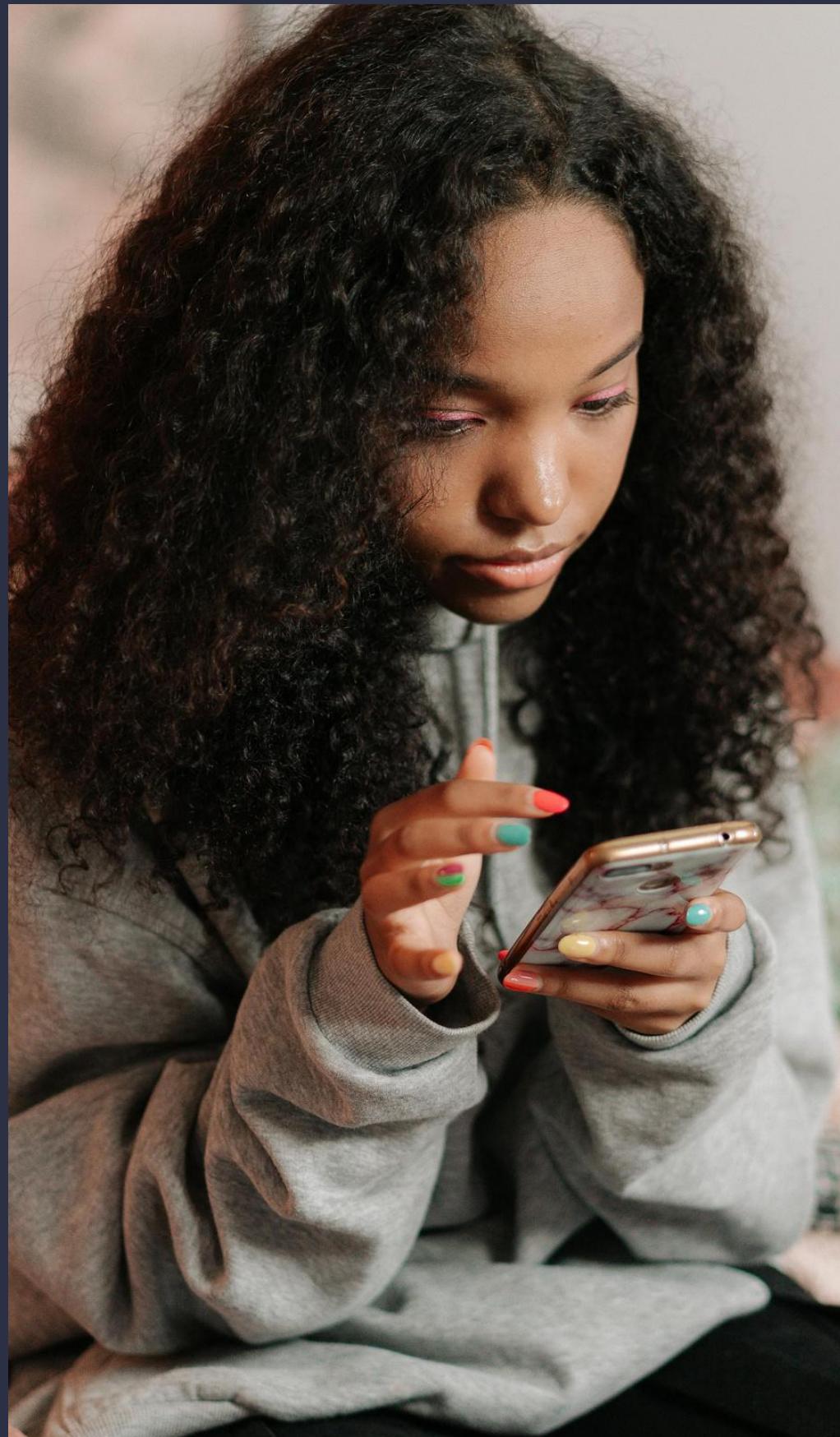
Instagram
Snapchat

2015-2025



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

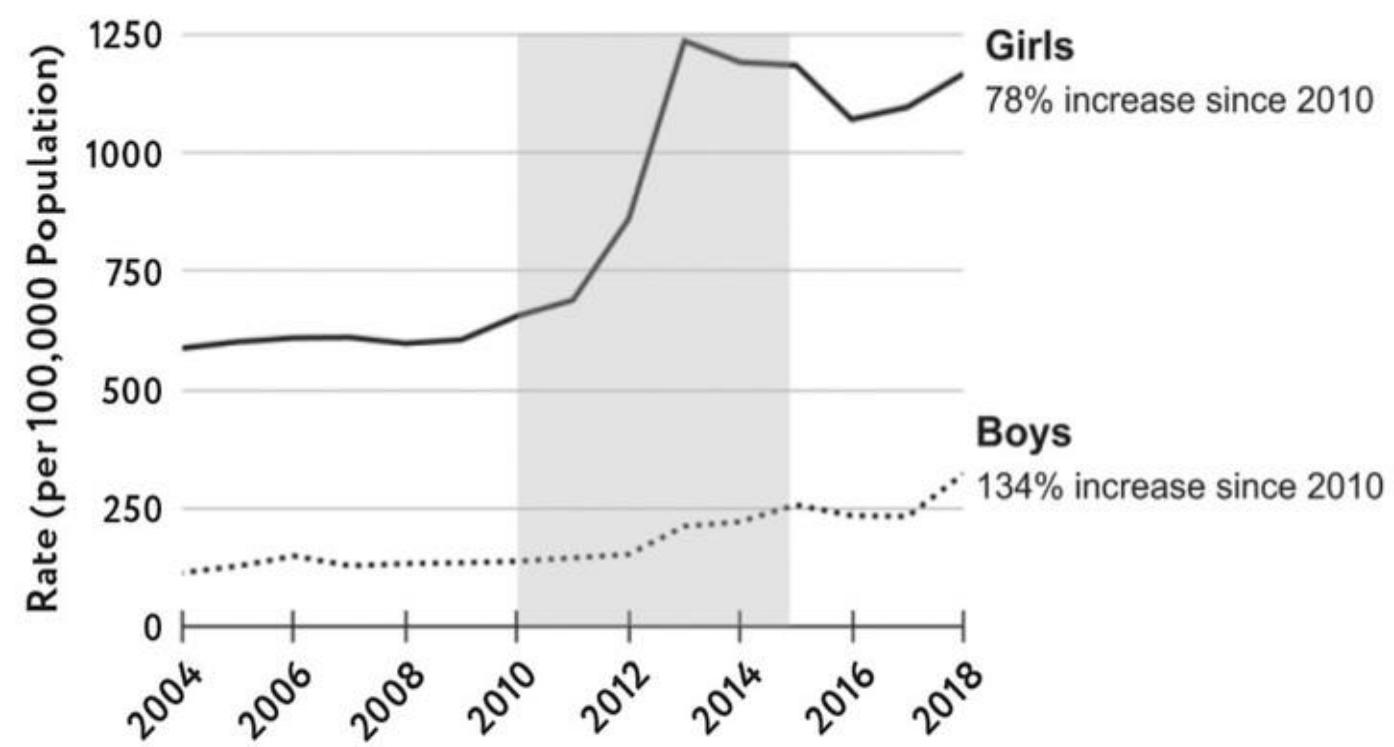


Figure 1.9. U.K. teens' (ages 13–16) self-harm episodes. (Source: Cybulski et al., 2021, drawing from two databases of

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

↓ 70%

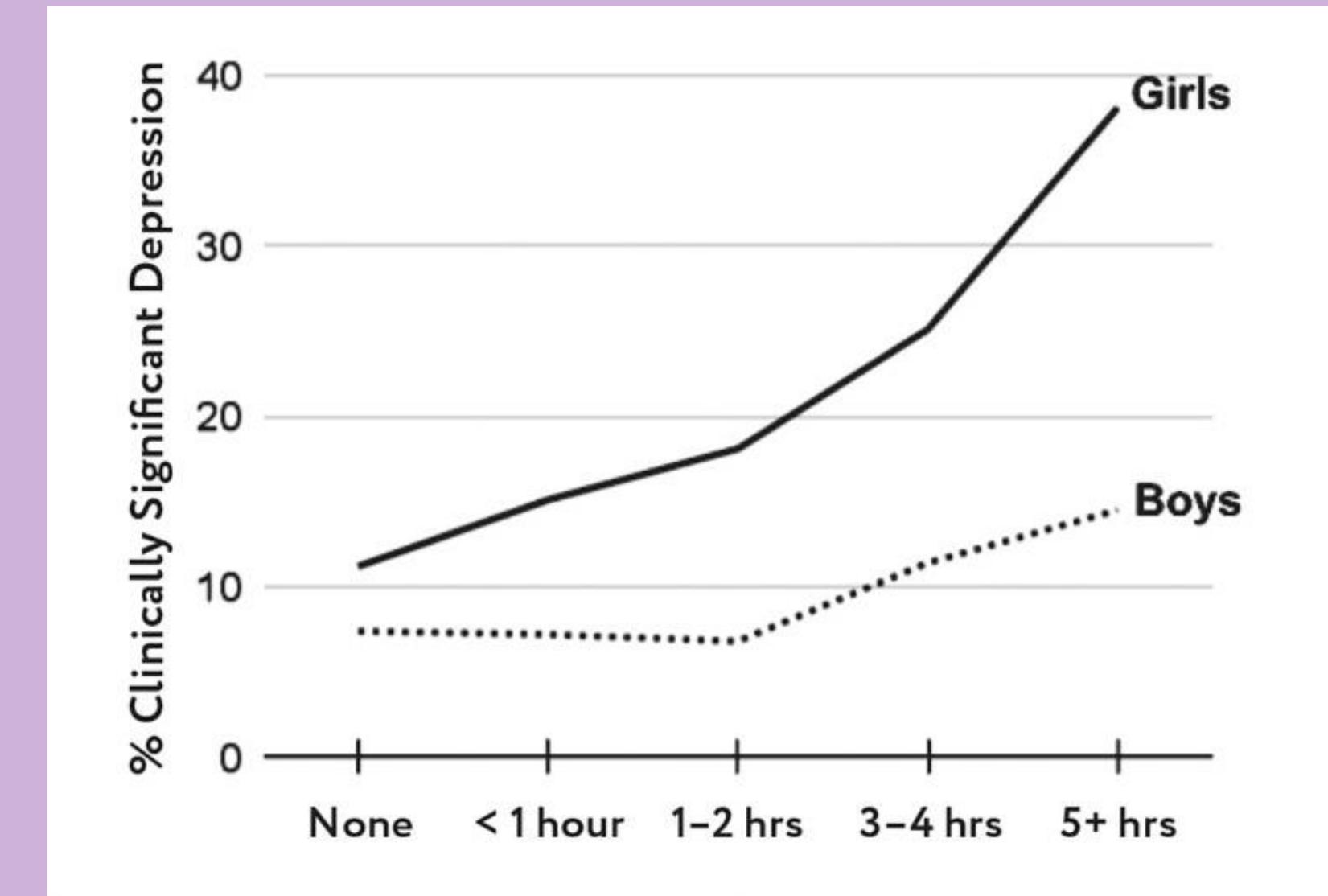
but self-harm has increased:

↑ 93%

Mental health



Depression by social media use, UK



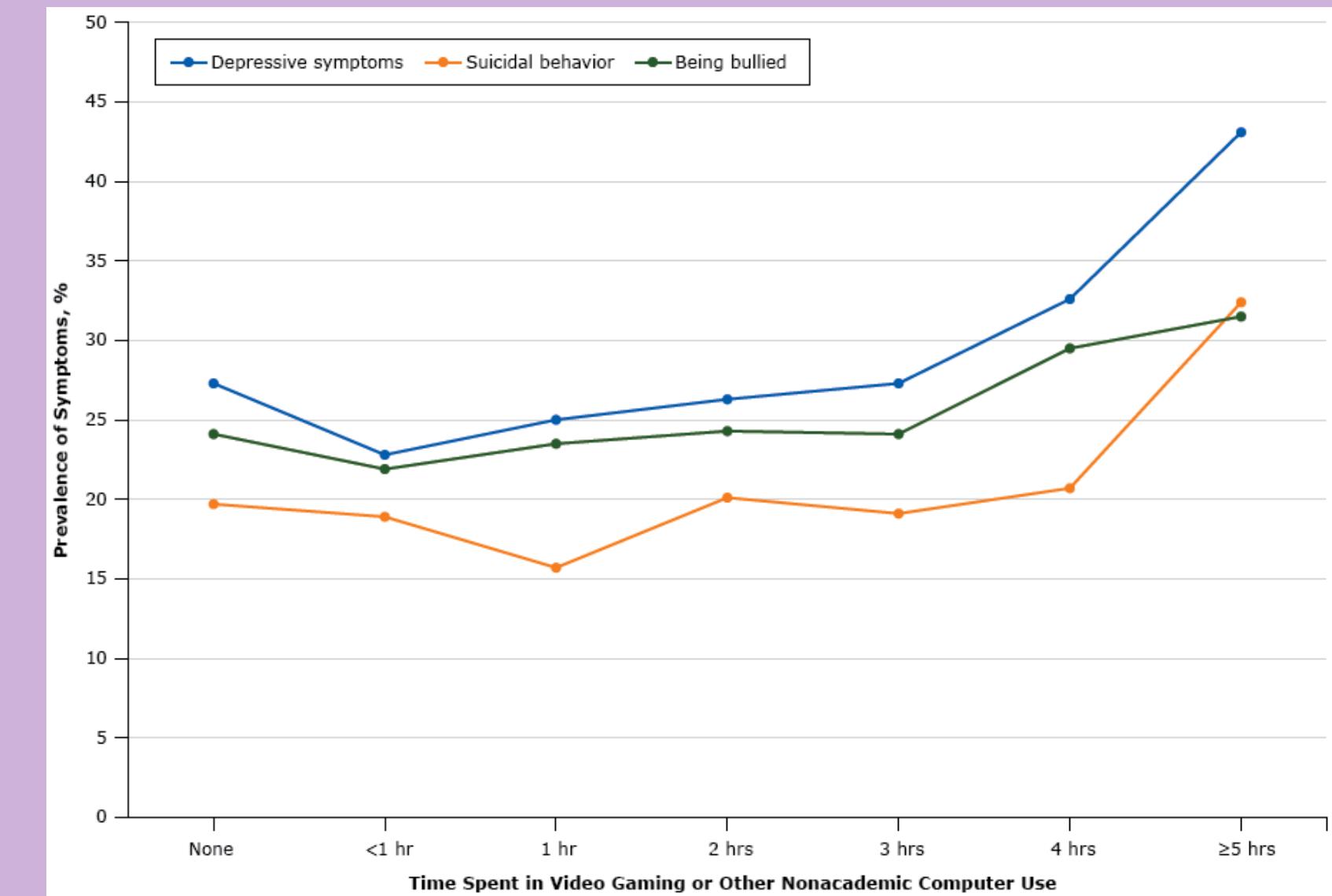
MILLENNIUM COHORT STUDY

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



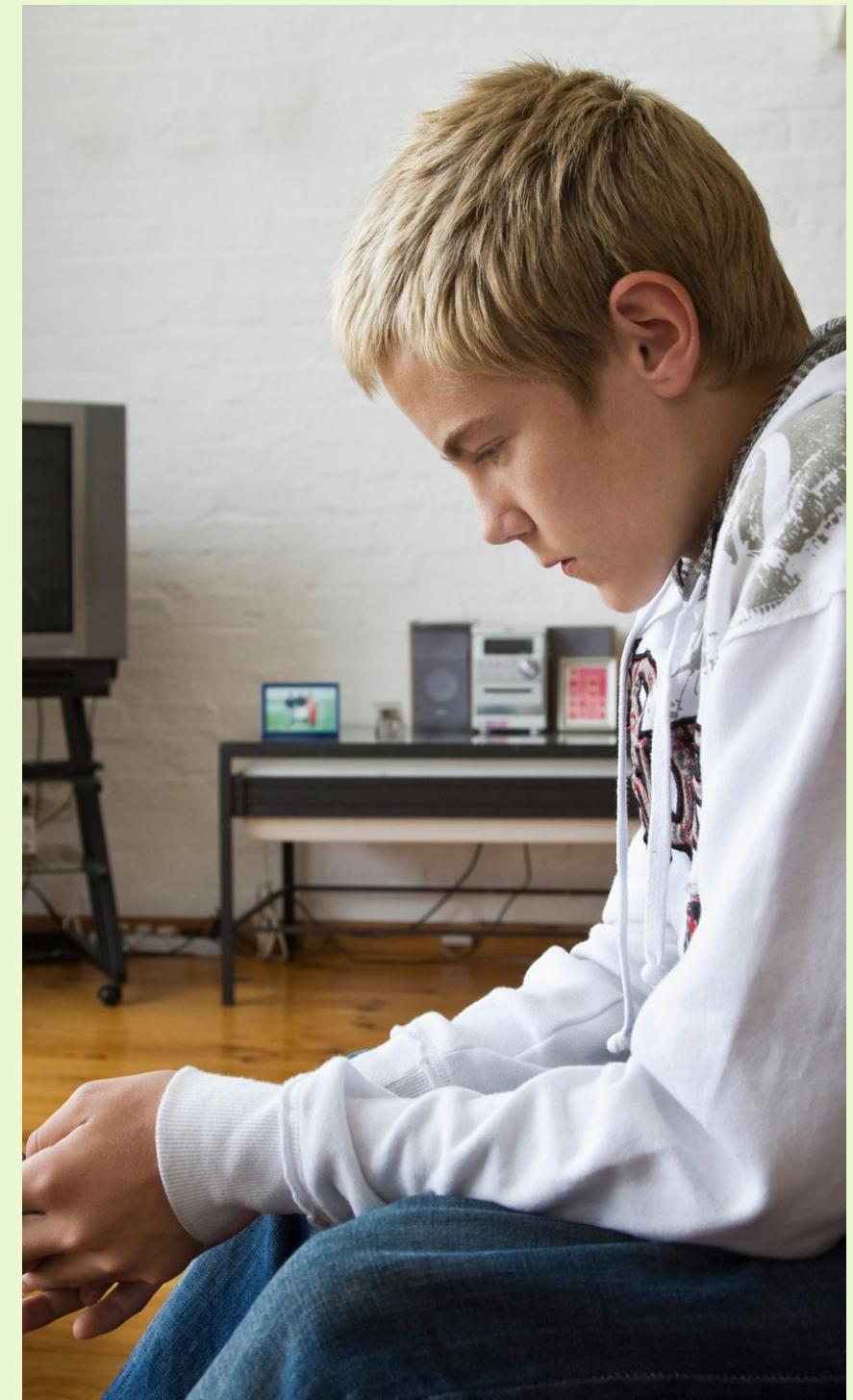
Opportunity costs, loss of
other interests and sleep



Self-esteem



Comparison



Pornography



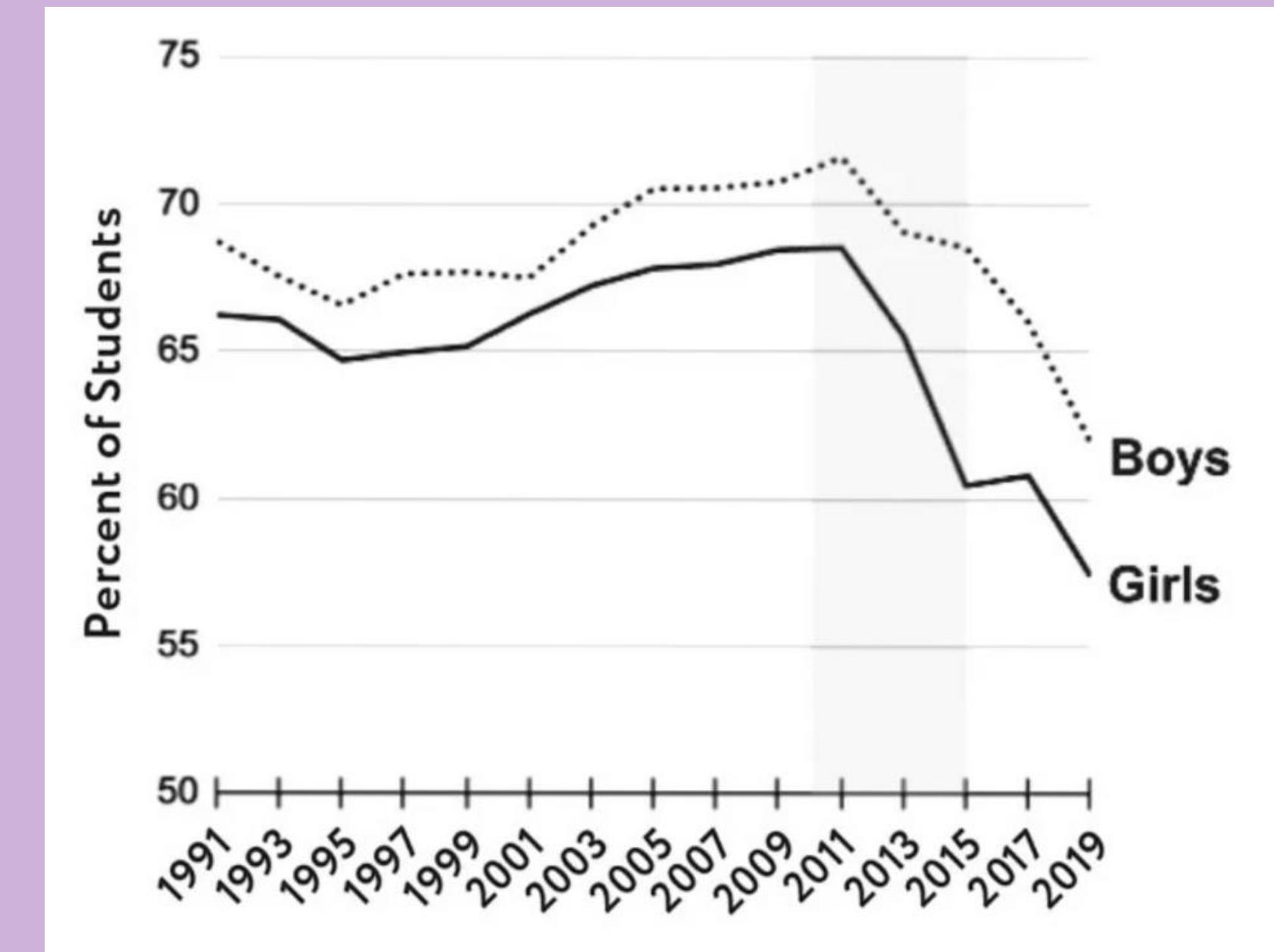
Gaming

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



The Telegraph logo at the top. Below it is a navigation bar with a search icon, 'News', 'Sport', 'Business', 'Money', and 'Opinion'. A 'See all News' dropdown is also present. The main headline reads: **14-year-old girls report rape more than any other age group**. A sub-headline below it says: **Men who pose the biggest threat to women to be targeted in new crackdown**. Below the headline are three small circular icons for bookmarking, commenting, and sharing. At the bottom is a photograph of three people in what appears to be a police station or office setting.

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

The rise of the chatbot



DANGER IS TWOFOLD

1. Nature of the advice

- Exposure to harmful content.
- Encouragement of harmful behaviour.

2. Nature of the relationship

- Emotional manipulation & grooming.
- Detimental social & cognitive development.

FRICTIONLESS = FALSE

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:

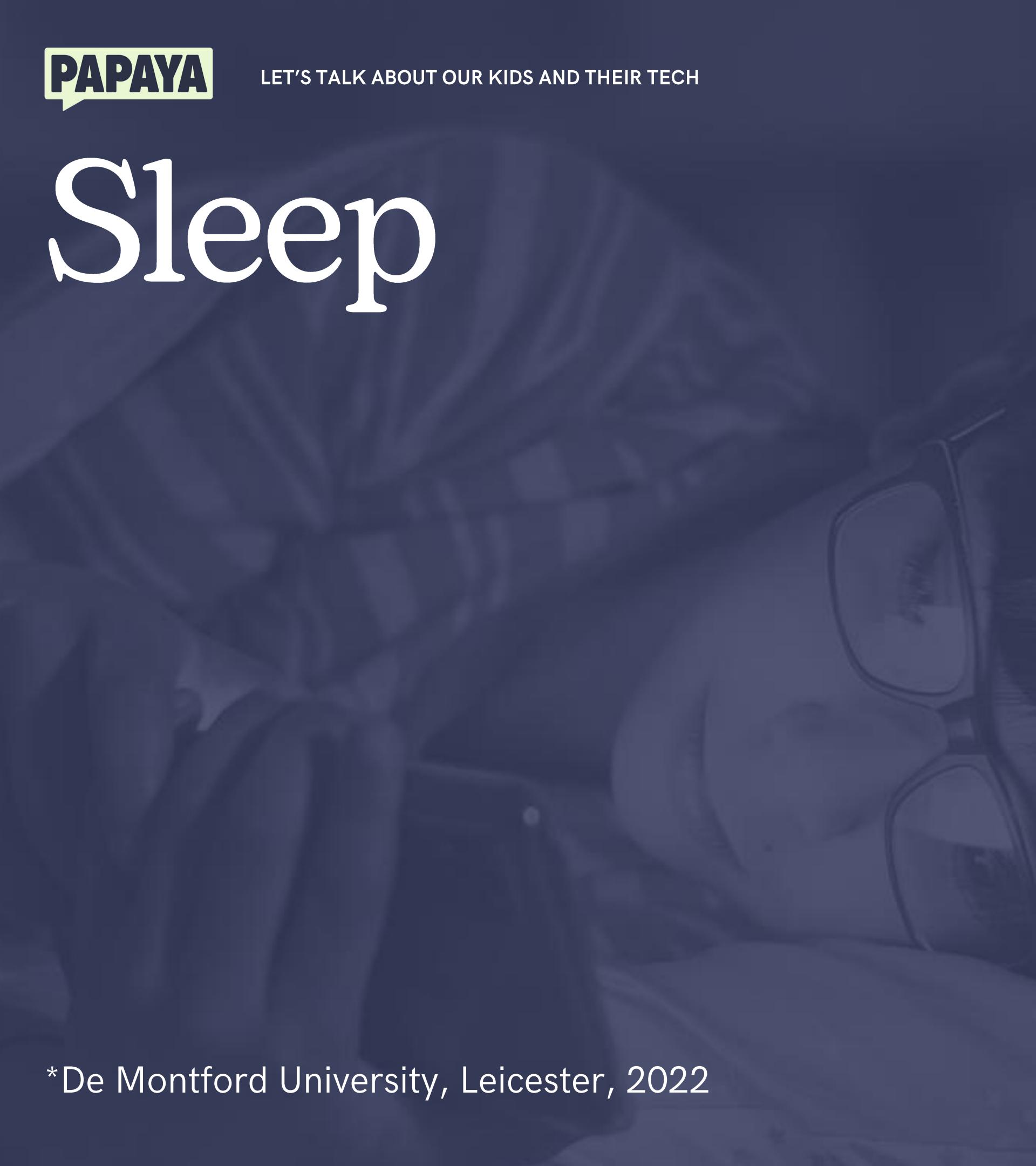
75%

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)

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



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 safer 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 things 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

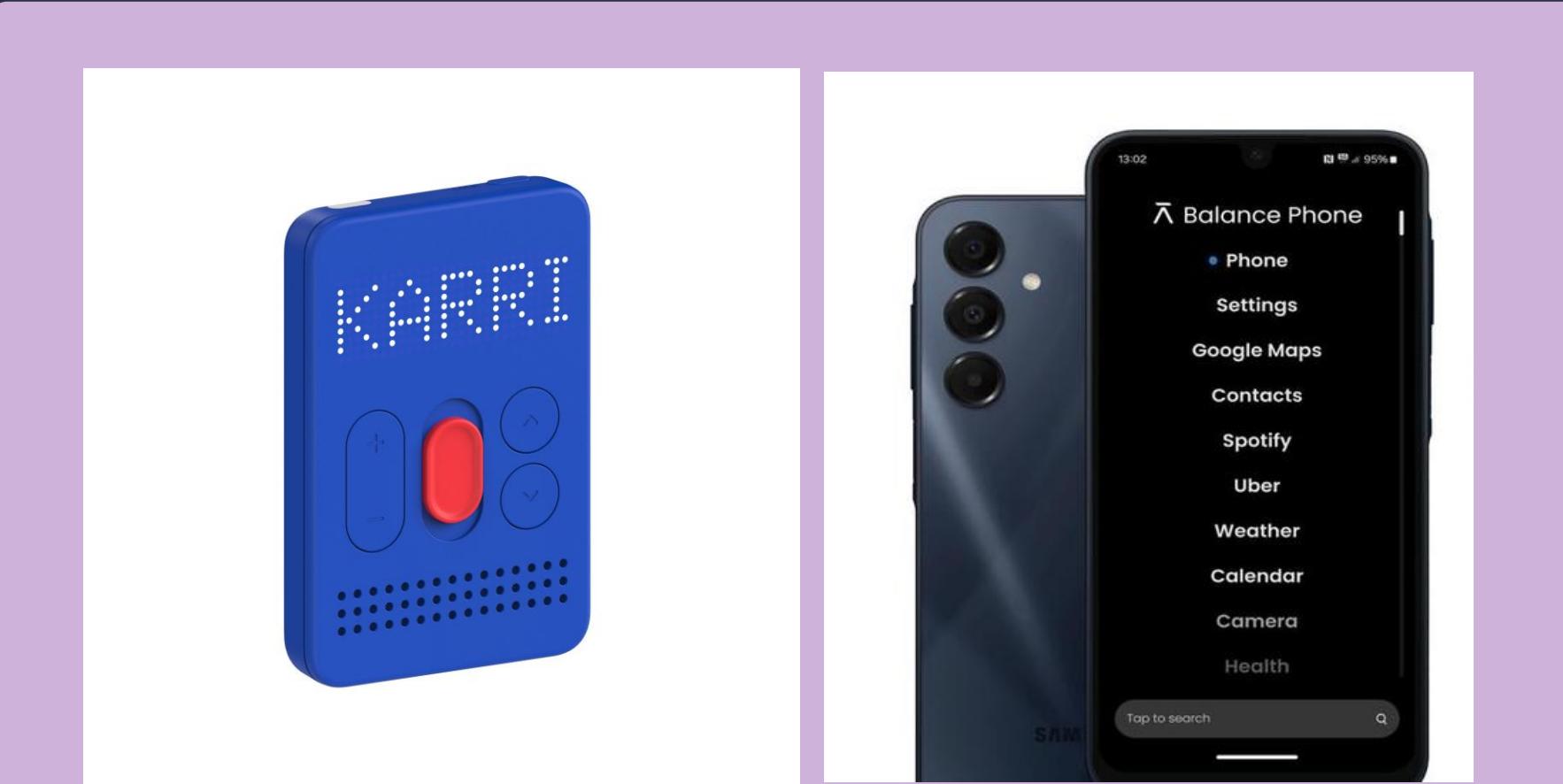
Can't we just use a stripped back iPhone with parental controls?



You can, but most parental control settings are easy to bypass

Basic devices allow children to connect with others via text and calls.

New models all the time



Alternatives

Younger kids

Karri Messenger

Smartwatches: Xplora,

Omo, Garmin, imoo...

Nokia 2660 Flip

XploraOne - preorder

Older Kids

Light phone II (hipster phone)

The Phone+ (only calls & text)

Pinwheel phone

Balance Phone

HMD Fusion or Fuse

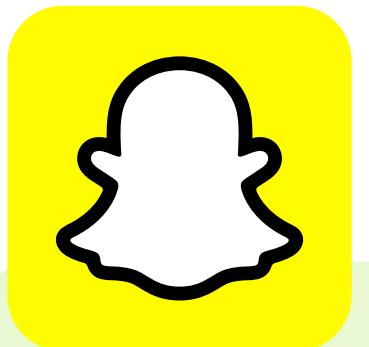
Other Phone (mumsnet)



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 to review and set up apps. Increase privacy settings.

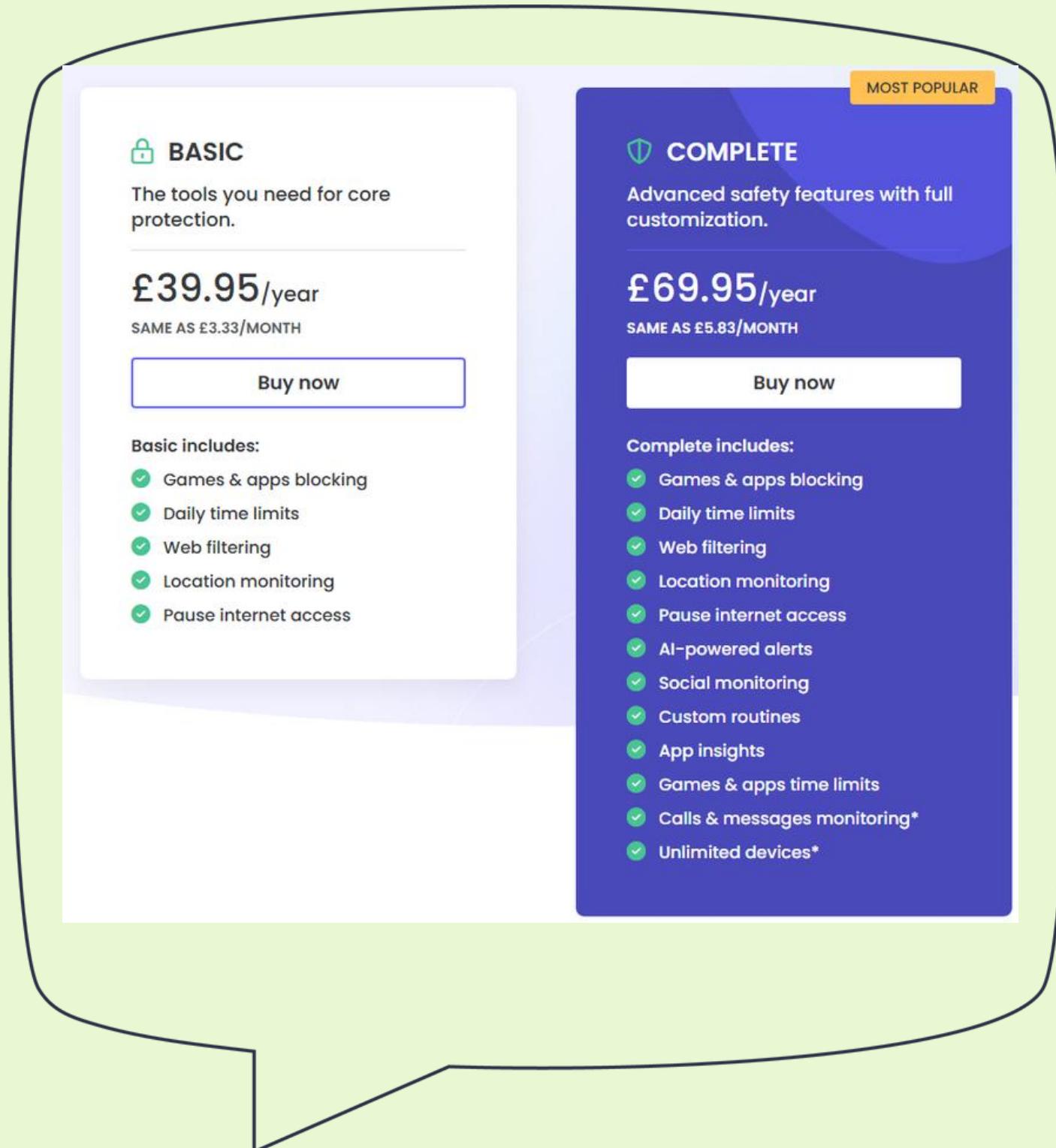
Block adult content

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



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 device 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.

Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2023

Want to do more?

01. Talk to your child and other parents.

02. Join your local Smartphone Free Childhood WhatsApp group.

smartphonefreechildhood.org/find-your-community



03. Sign the Parent Pact

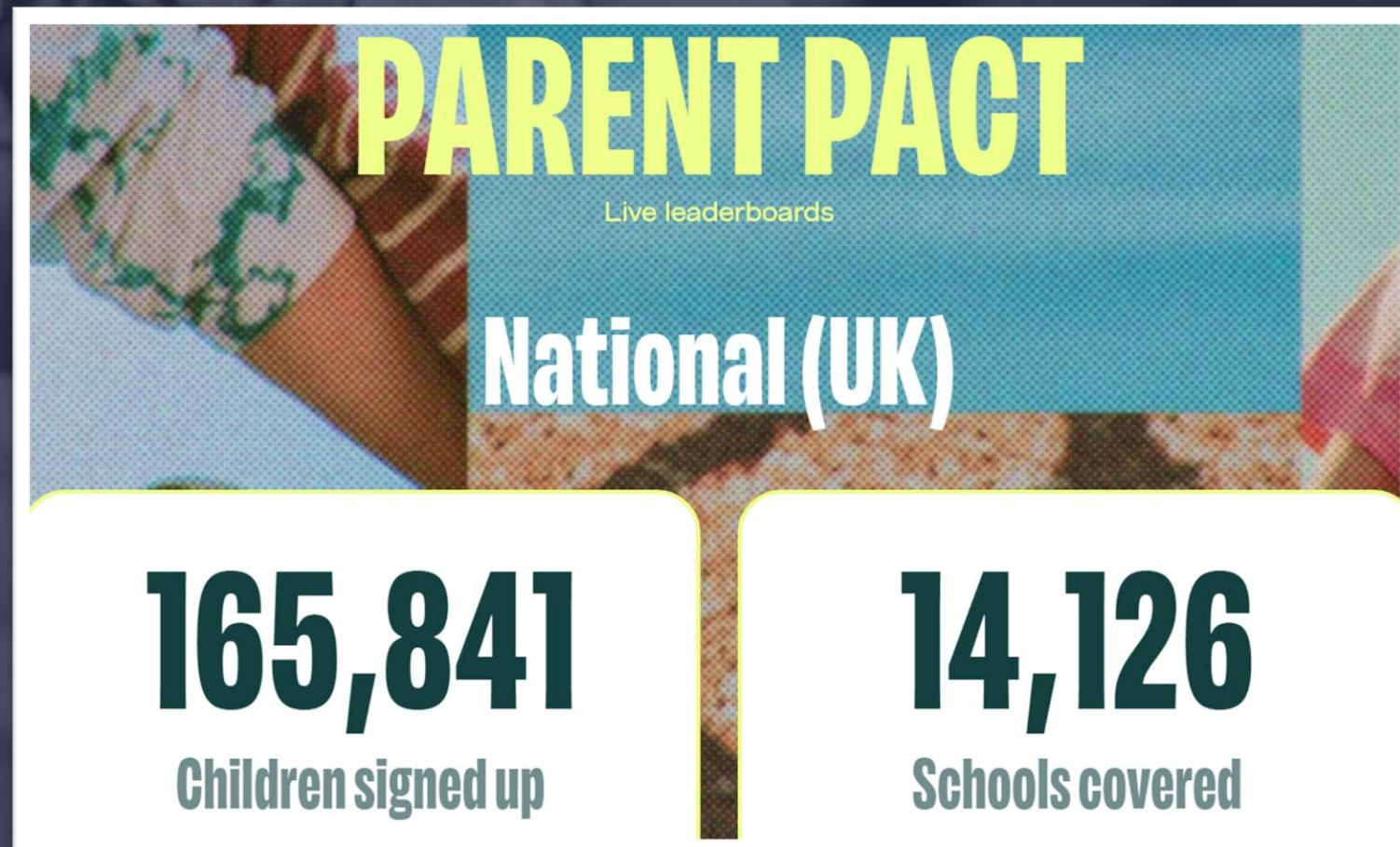


<<<<<<<<<

Scan to sign



PARENT PACT

A blurred, close-up photograph of a child's face, looking slightly to the side.

PARENT PACT

Live leaderboards

National (UK)

165,841
Children signed up

14,126
Schools covered

WEST LONDON SCHOOL LEADERBOARD

St Stephen's CofE Primary School ↗	86
Isleworth Town Primary School ↗	69
Ravenscourt Park Preparatory School ↗	63
West London Free School Primary ↗	37
West London Free School ↗	33
Latymer Upper School and Latymer Prep ↗	33
Strand-on-the-Green Junior School ↗	33
St Peter's Primary School ↗	31
Wendell Park Primary School ↗	27
Glebe Primary School ↗	24
Good Shepherd RC Primary School ↗	23



resources



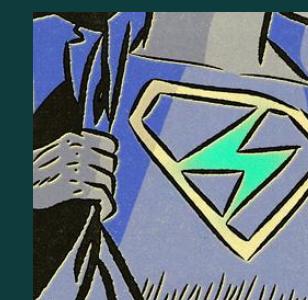
01. Letter template to Primary School Headteachers



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



03. How to engage your whole school community about smartphones



04. Read 'How do I talk to my primary school age child about delaying smartphones?'

The Healthy Selfie



Free P&P with code DISCOUNT



You can buy a copy of The Healthy Selfie at www.thehealthyselfie.co.uk via the QR code or on Amazon

Extra Resources

www.papayatalks.com/after

Link to slides, feedback form, chance to
donate and smartphone alternatives.



The Anxious Generation
by Jonathan Haidt

The Healthy Selfie
by Dr Susie Davies

papayatalks.com

smartphonefreechildhood.org

teched-off.com

healthprofessionalsforsaferscreens.org



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

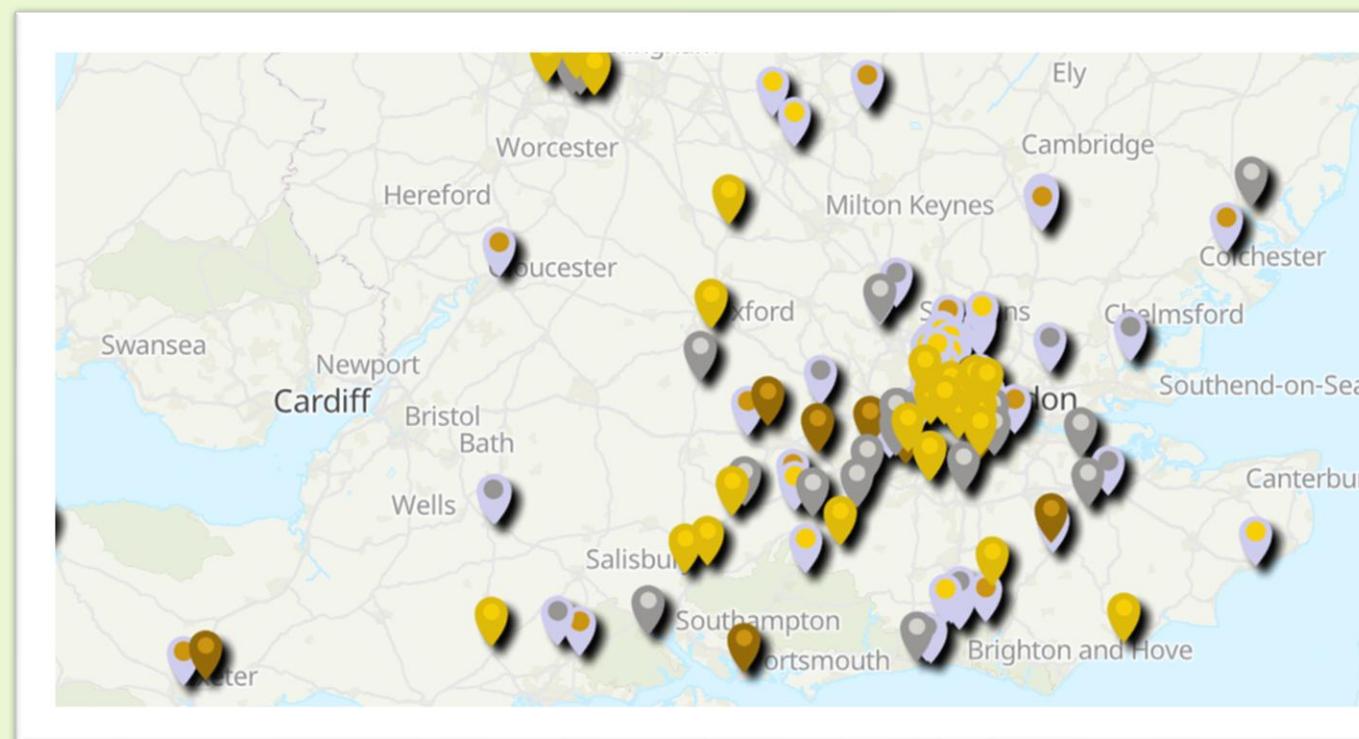
smartphonefreerating.org



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.

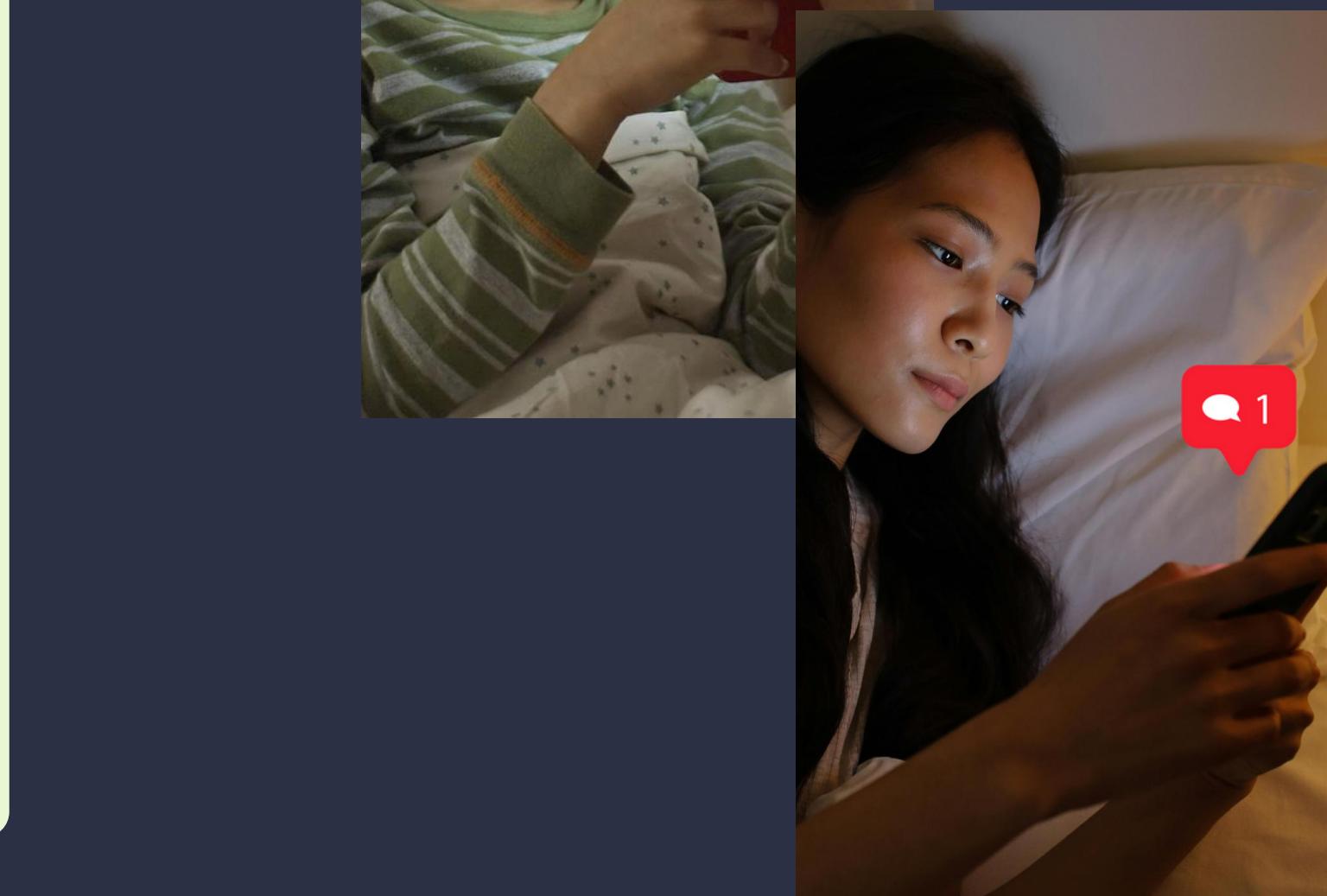
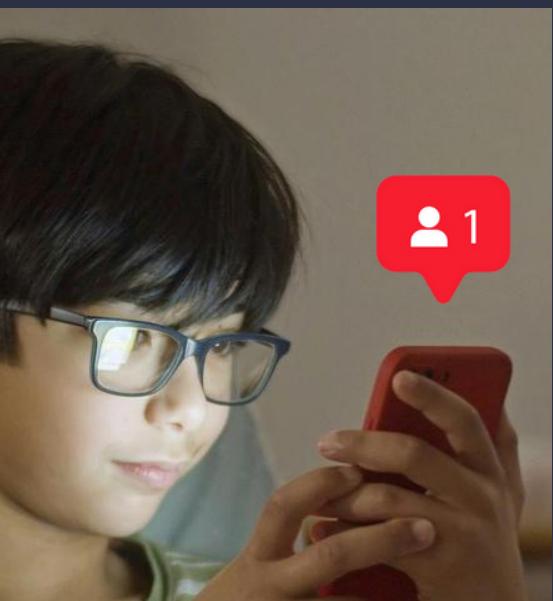
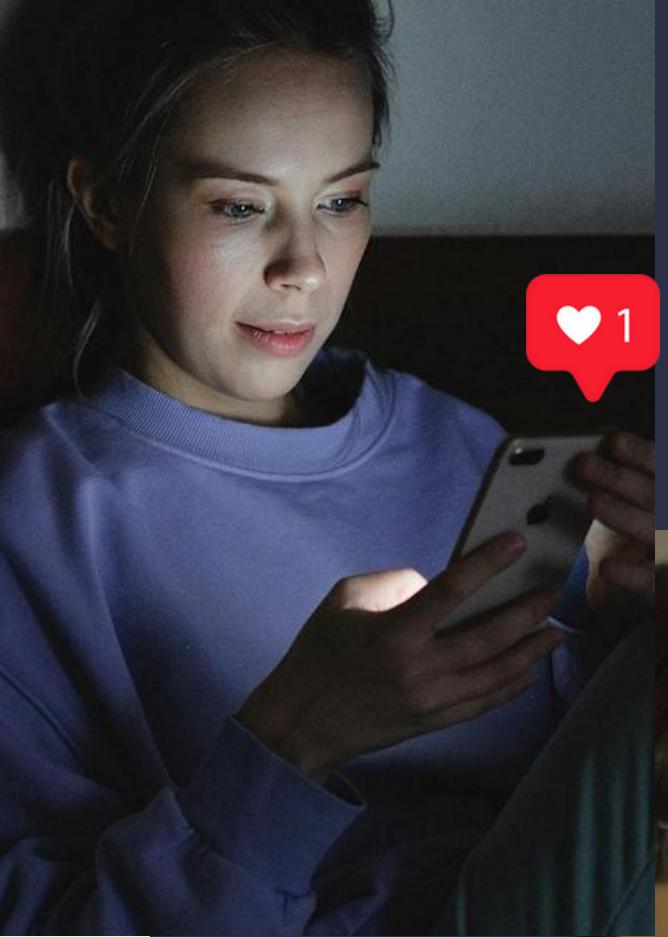
Use filters and parental control apps

04.

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

05.

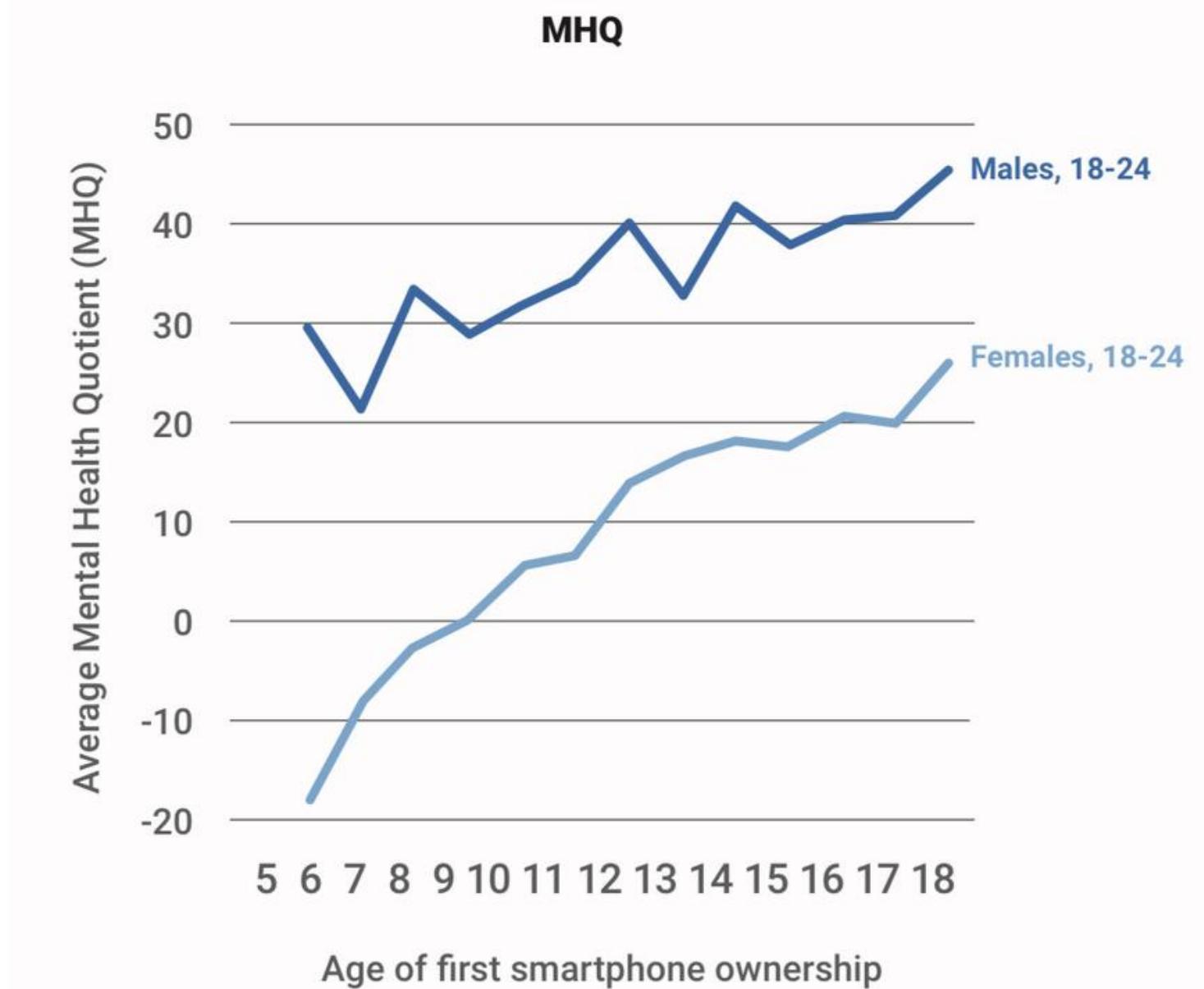
Consider changing your mind....



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 woman and a child are sitting on a couch, looking at a tablet together. The woman is holding the tablet and pointing at the screen. The child is looking at the tablet with interest. The background is a brick wall.

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

C.S. LEWIS