



**PAPAYA**

# Let's talk about our kids and their tech

JENNIFER POWERS

Choosing a different path for your family

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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

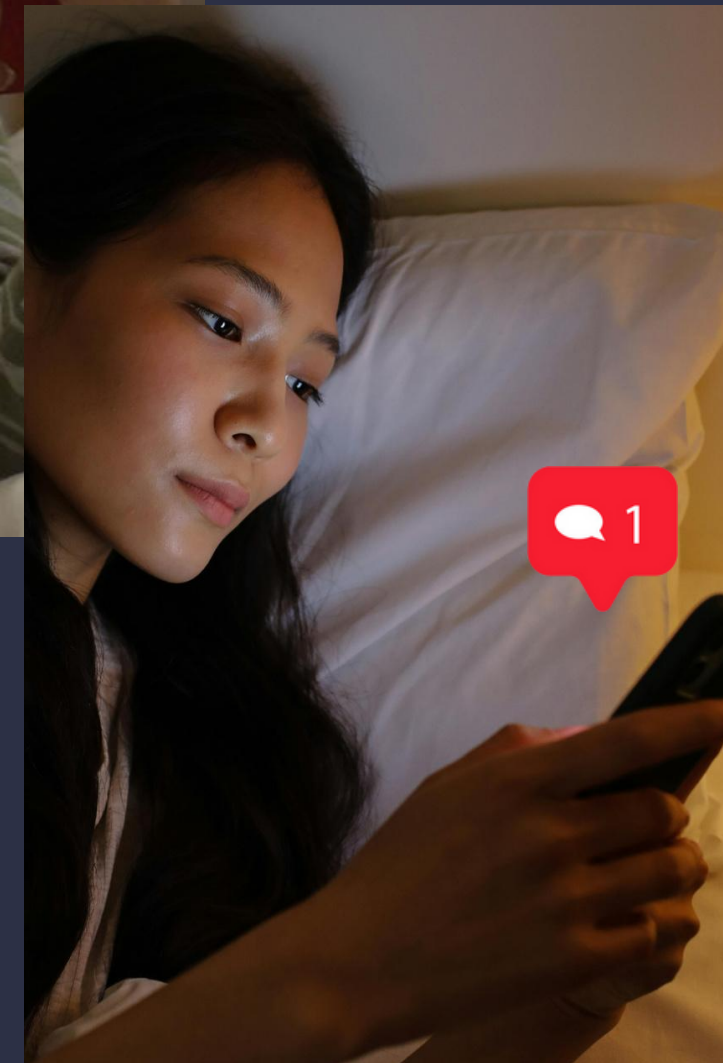
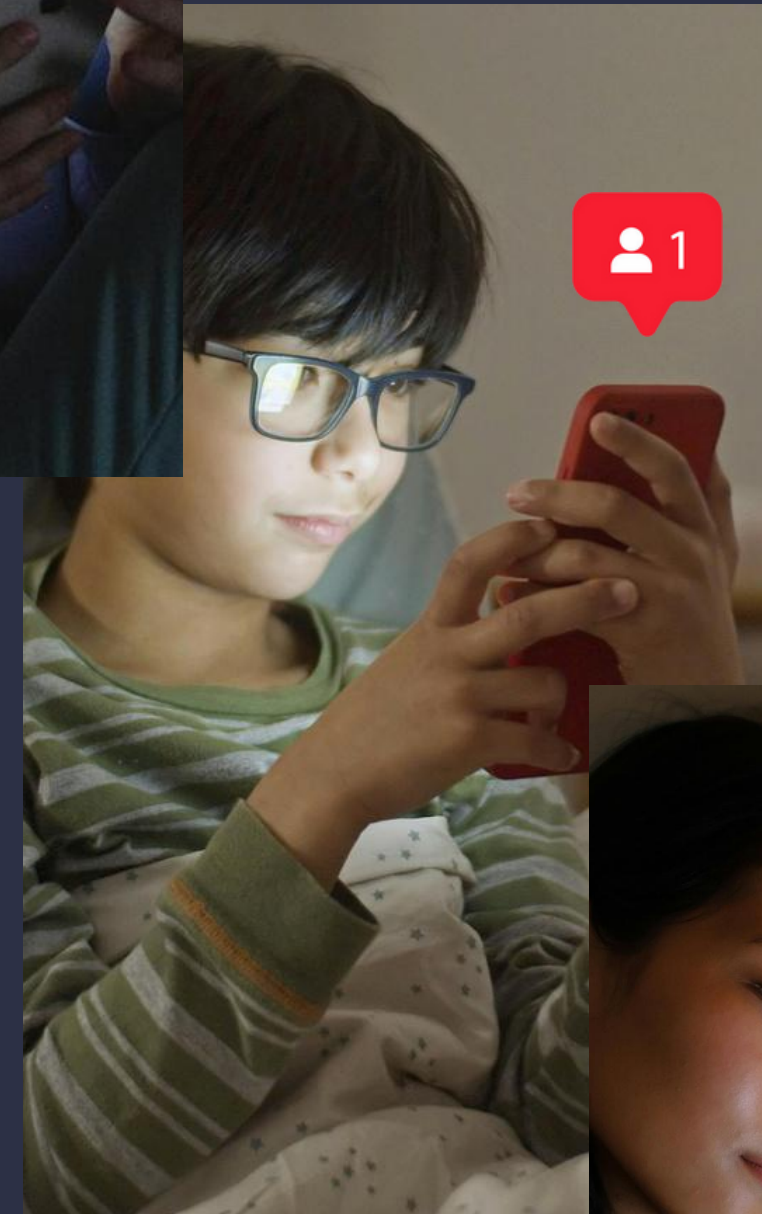
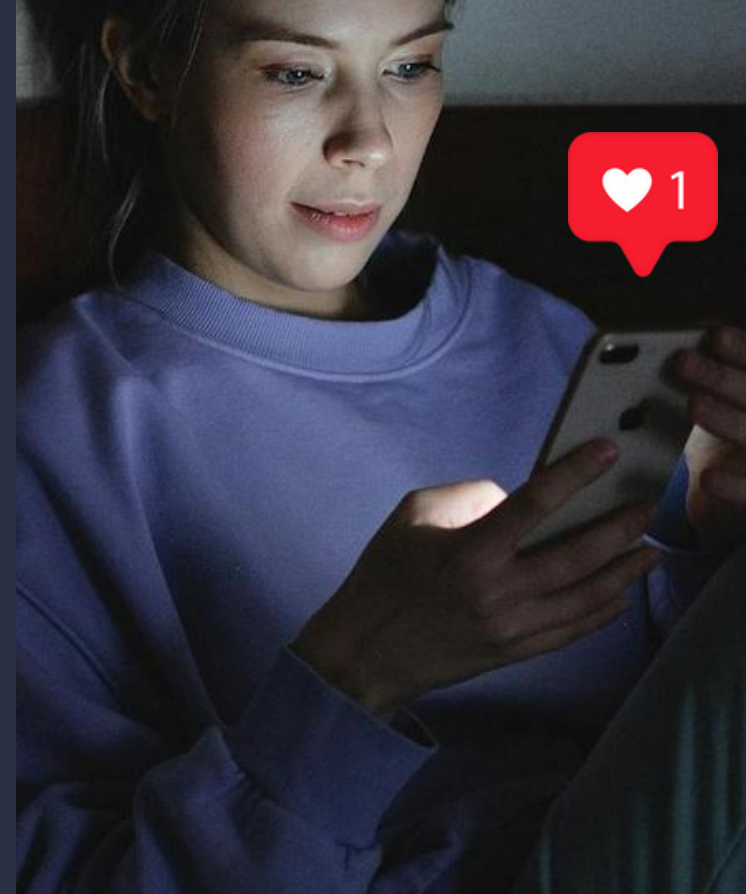
According to Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation*, the average teen spends between 6 to 8 hours a day engaged in screen-based activities, with approximately 4.8 hours dedicated specifically to social media.



# Persuasive design

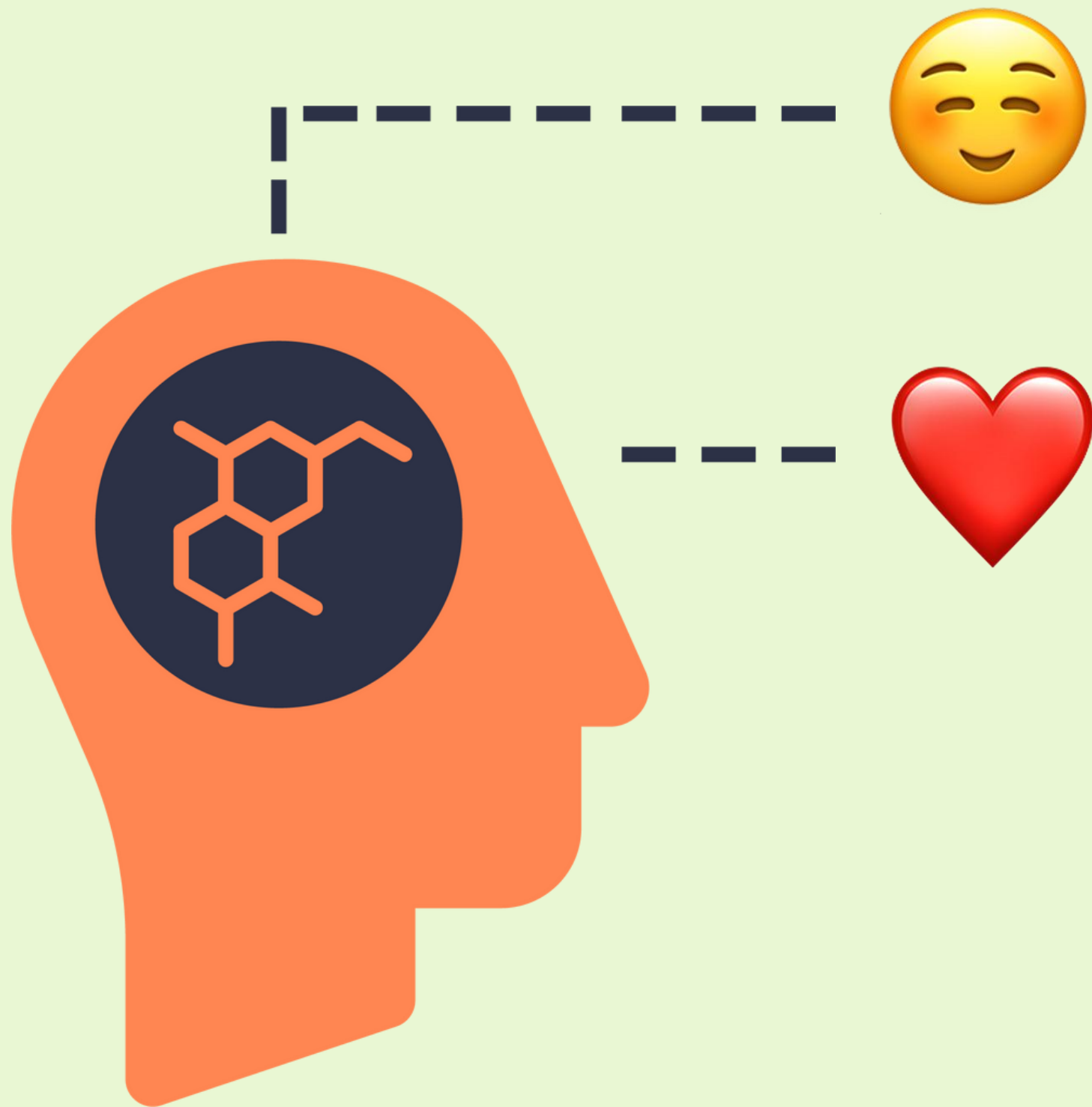
Smart technology taps into our dopamine reward pathway making us all vulnerable to overconsumption.

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



2007-2008



2009-2010



2010-2014



2015-2025



**Early 'Smartphones' & social giants begin**

Facebook 2002  
YouTube 2005



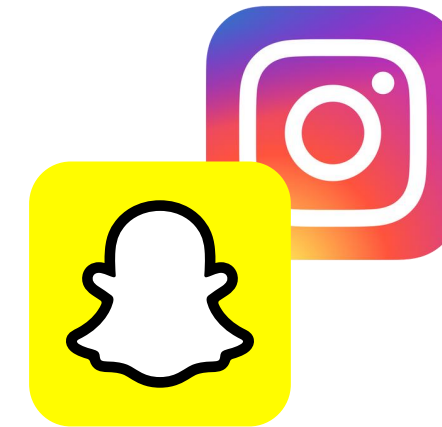
**The iPhone 'touch screen'**

Appstore 2008;  
1st Android 2008



**Tech behaviourists maximise engagement**

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



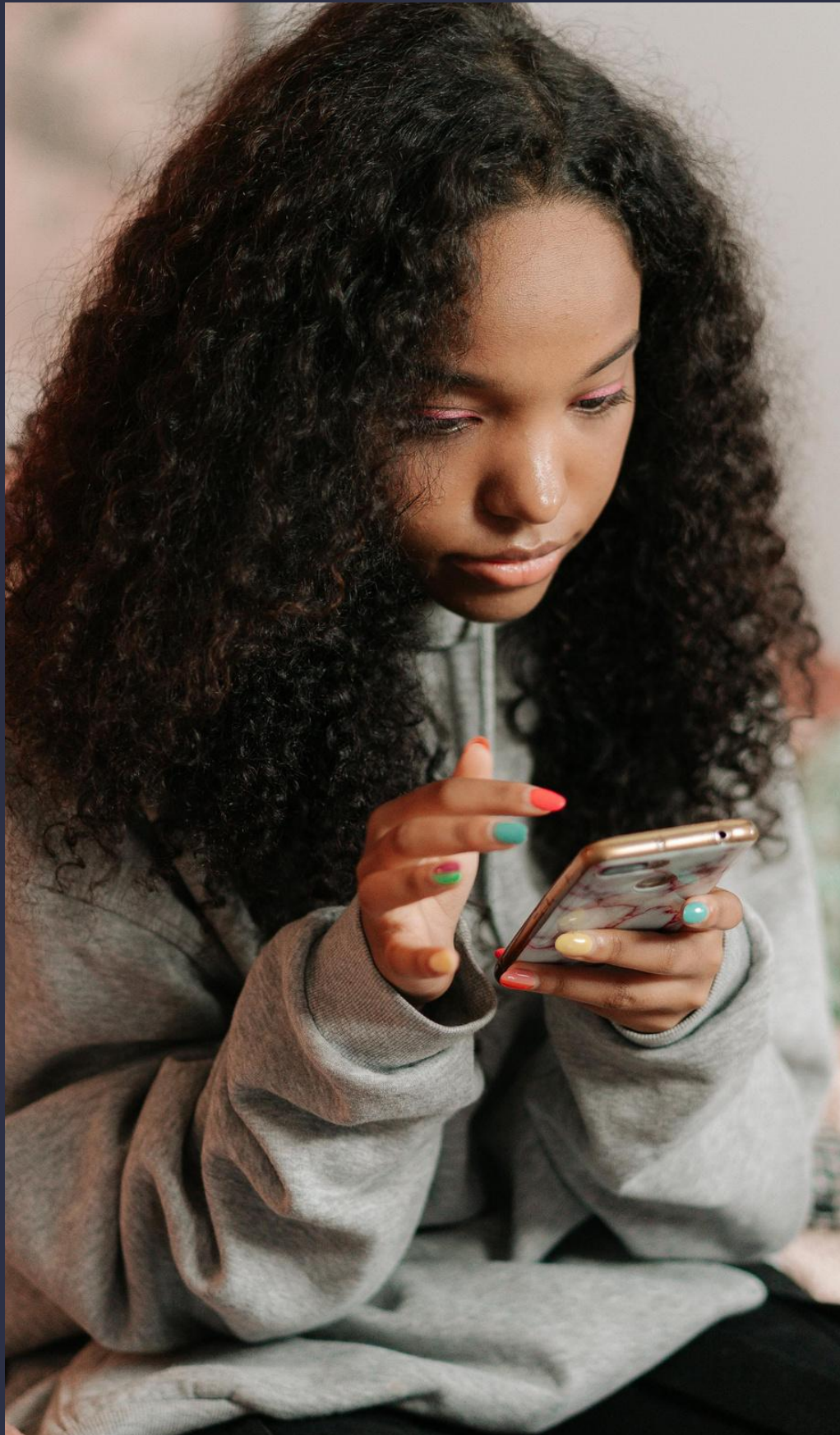
**Internet everywhere - 4G**

Instagram  
Snapchat



**97% of UK 12yr olds own a smartphone**

2024: Social Media revenue >\$250B; TikTok hits 1.8B users in 8yrs



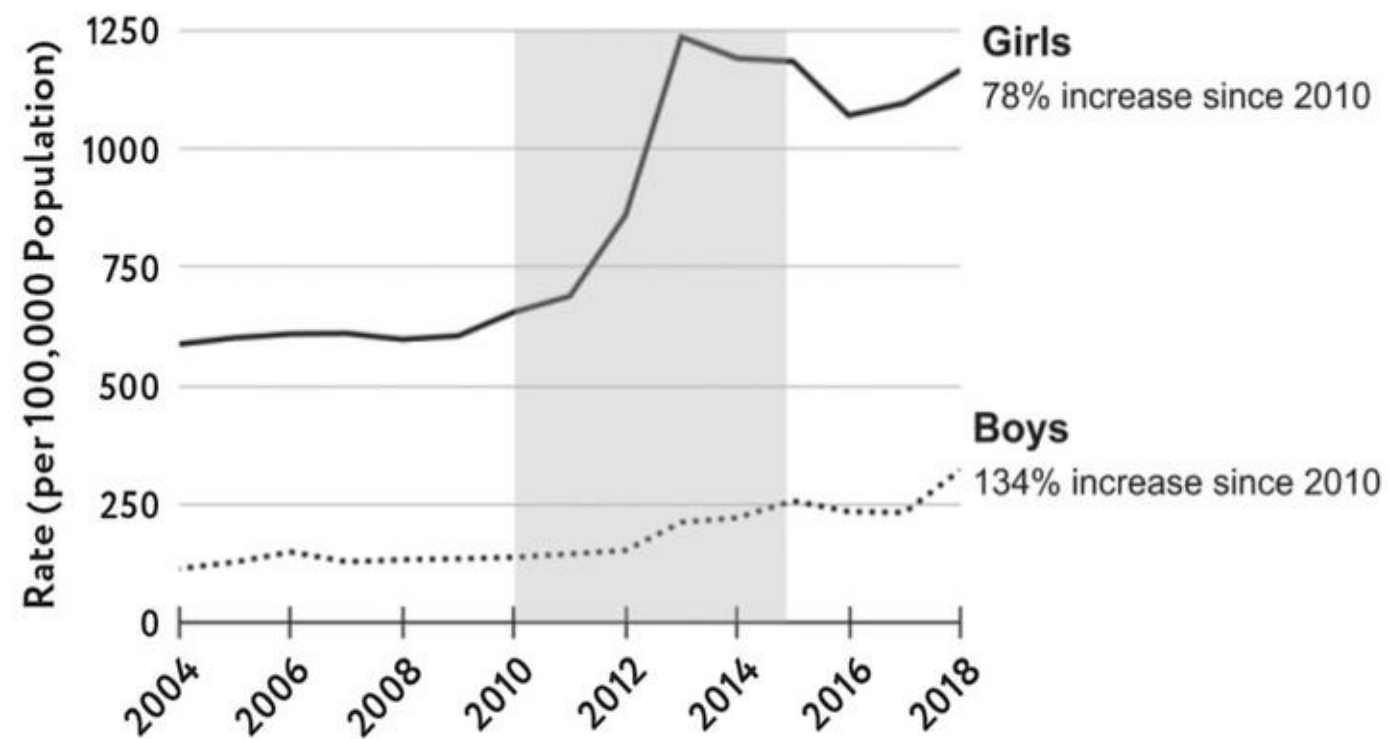
Children with Problematic Smartphone Usage (PSU) are twice as likely to experience anxiety and three times as likely to experience depression compared to children without PSU

\*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%

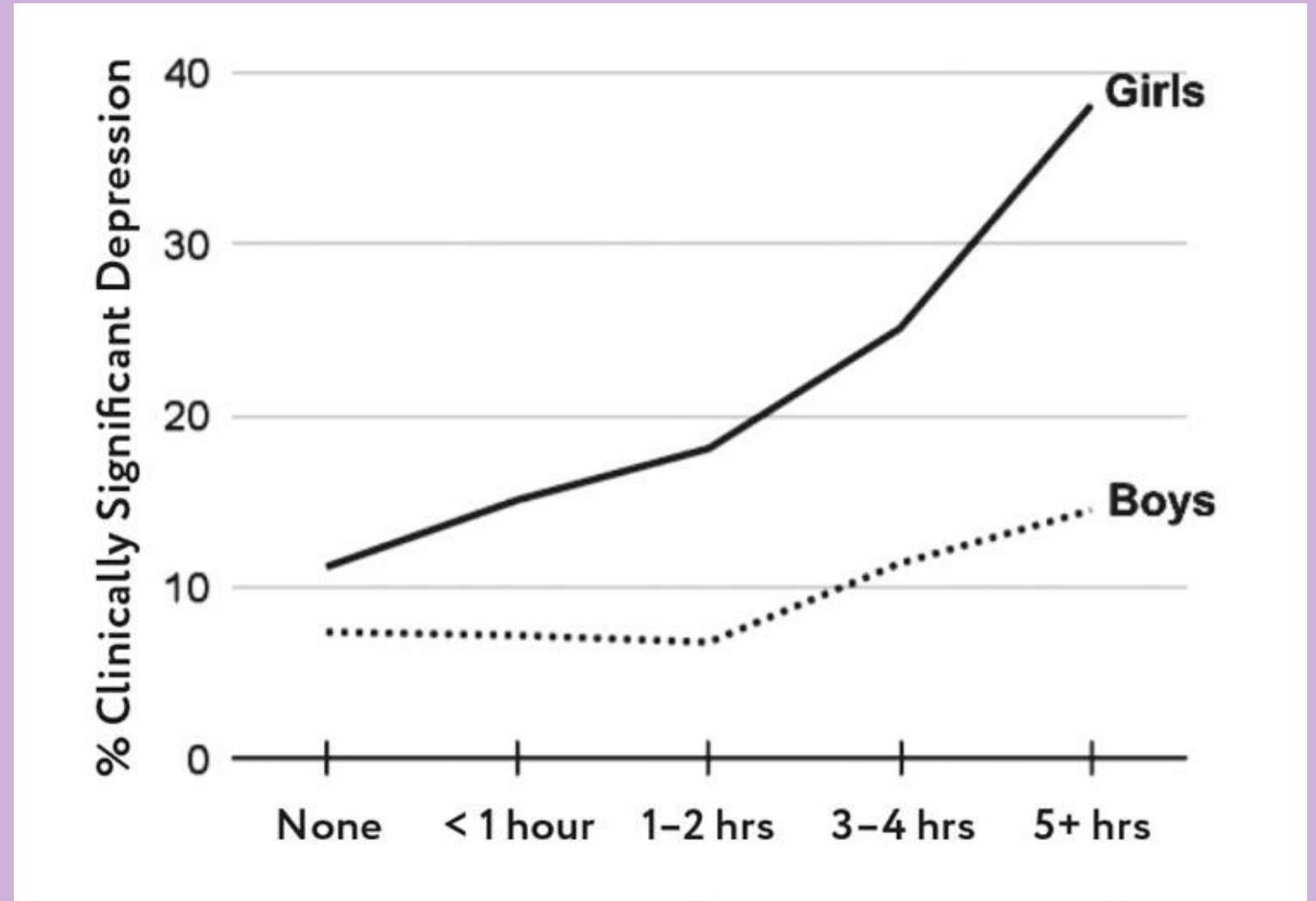
but self-harm has increased:

↑ 93%

# Mental health



## Depression by social media use, UK



### MILLENNIUM COHORT STUDY

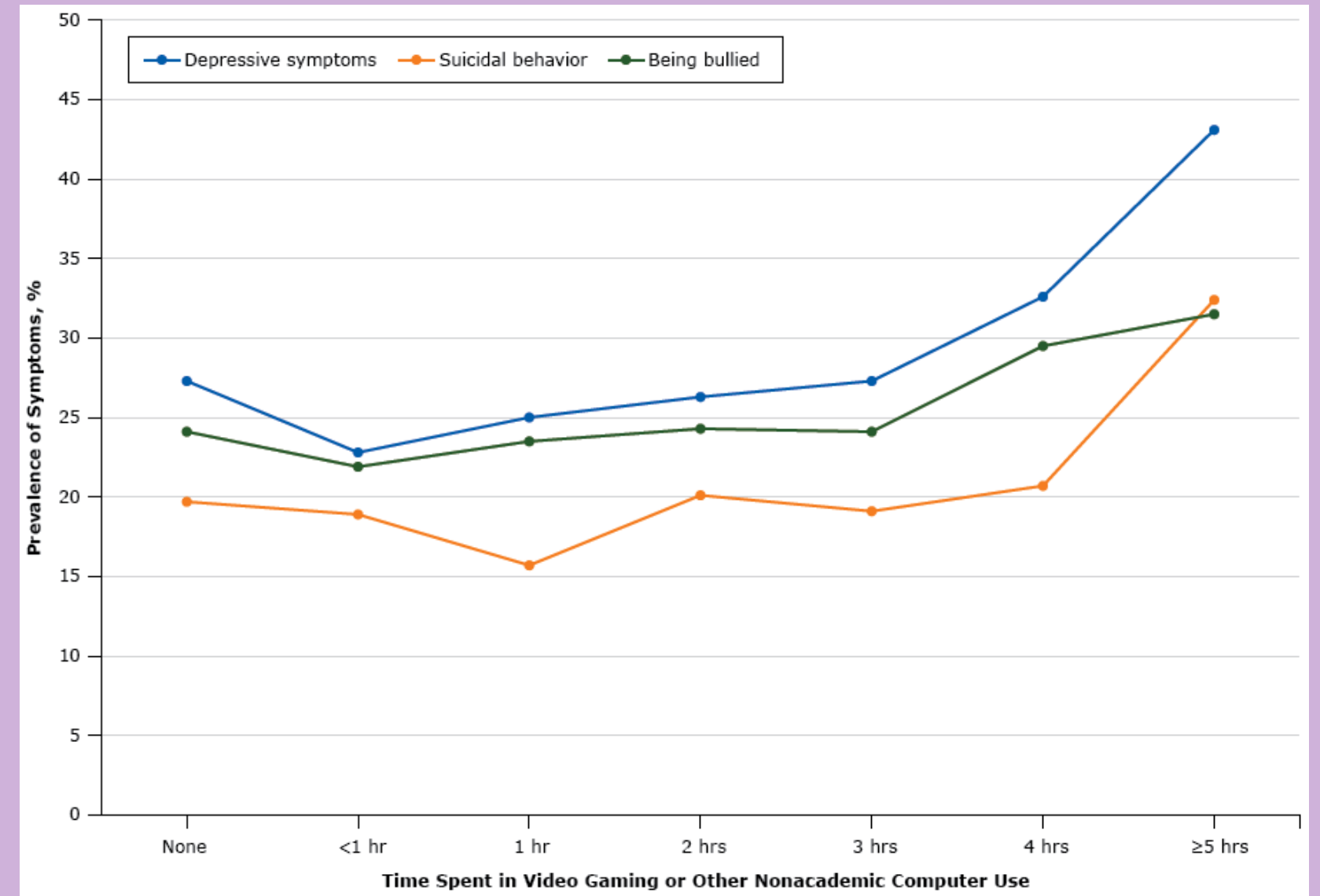
Figures from The Anxious Generation, Jonathan Haidt



# Mental health



## Depression use gaming, USA



aHogan H. Lee<sup>1</sup>; Jung Hye Sung, Sc.D.<sup>2</sup>; Ji-Young Lee, MSPH<sup>3</sup>; 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



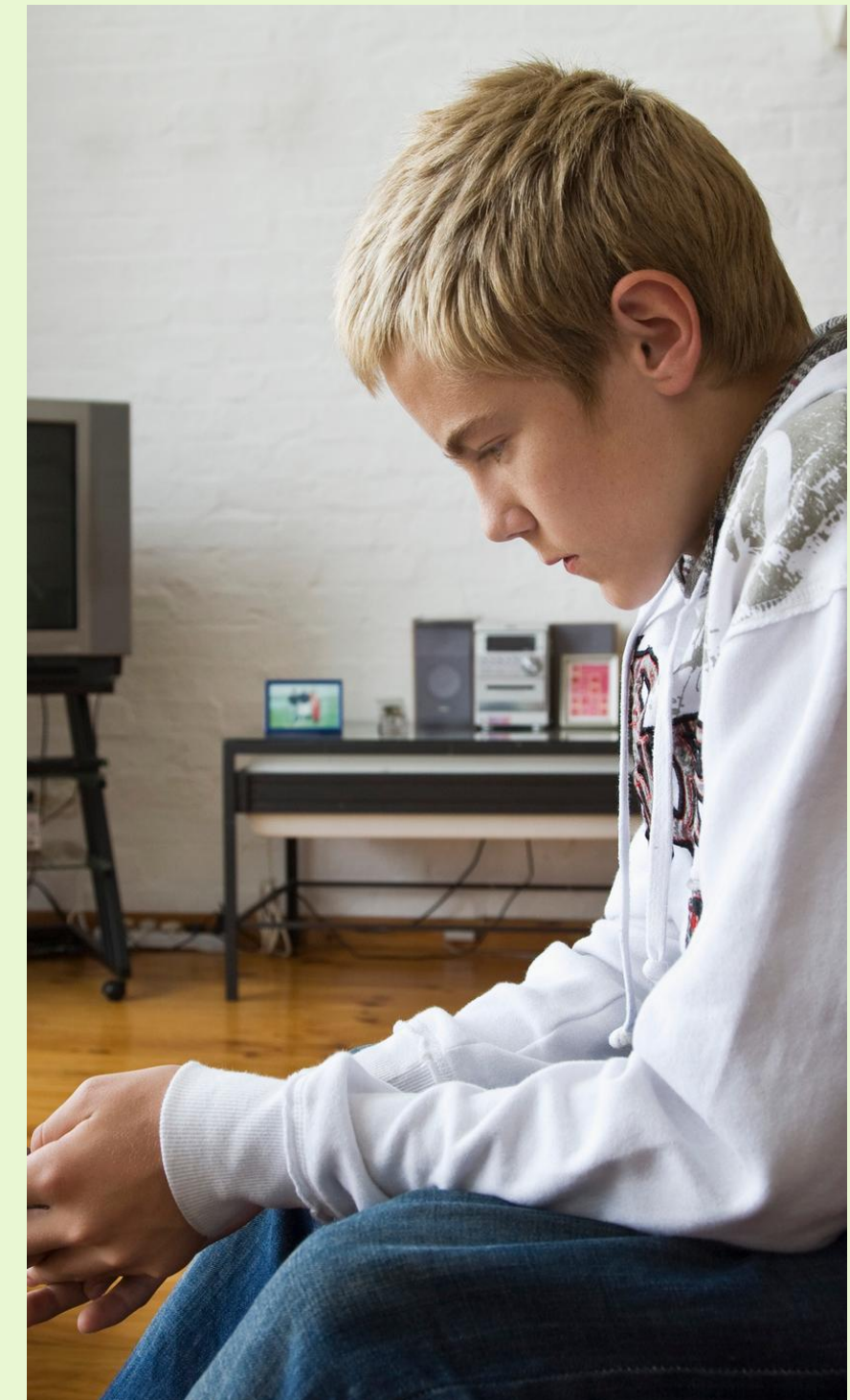
Comparison



Pornography



Gaming

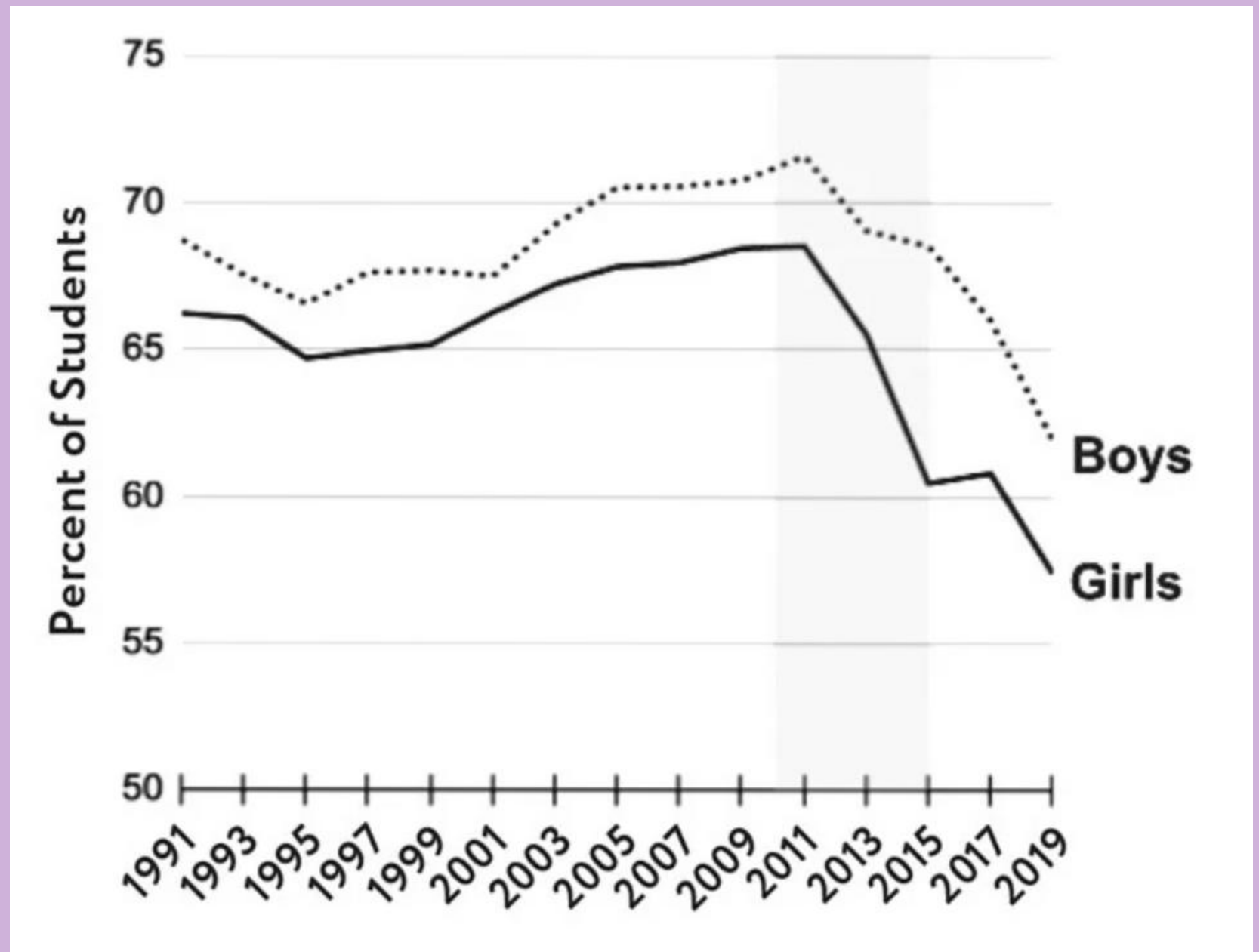


# Comparison

“

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

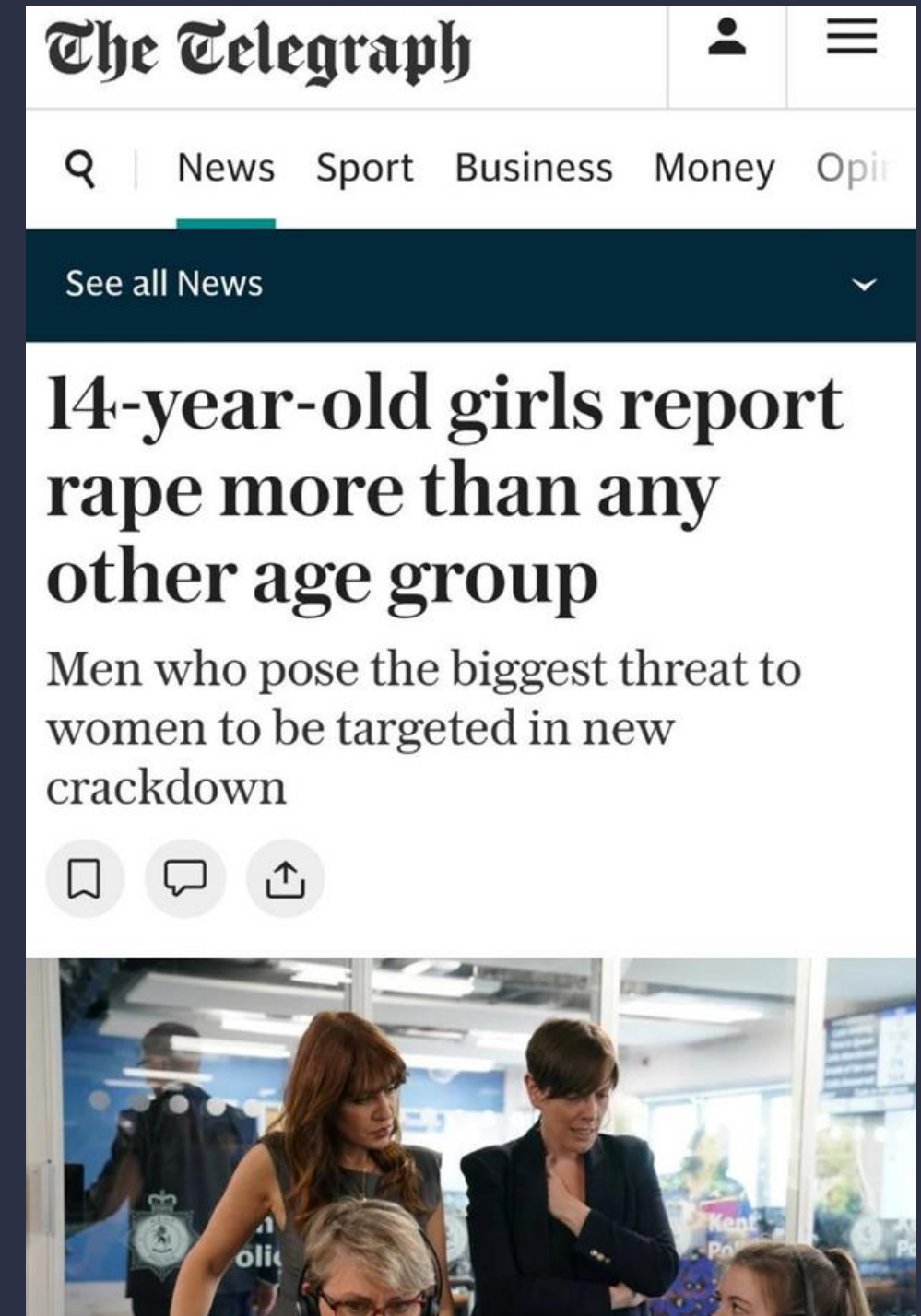
94% of children are exposed to porn by 14.

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



# What are they seeing?

The Children's Commissioner  
Rachel de Souza spoke to a  
class of 15-year-olds:

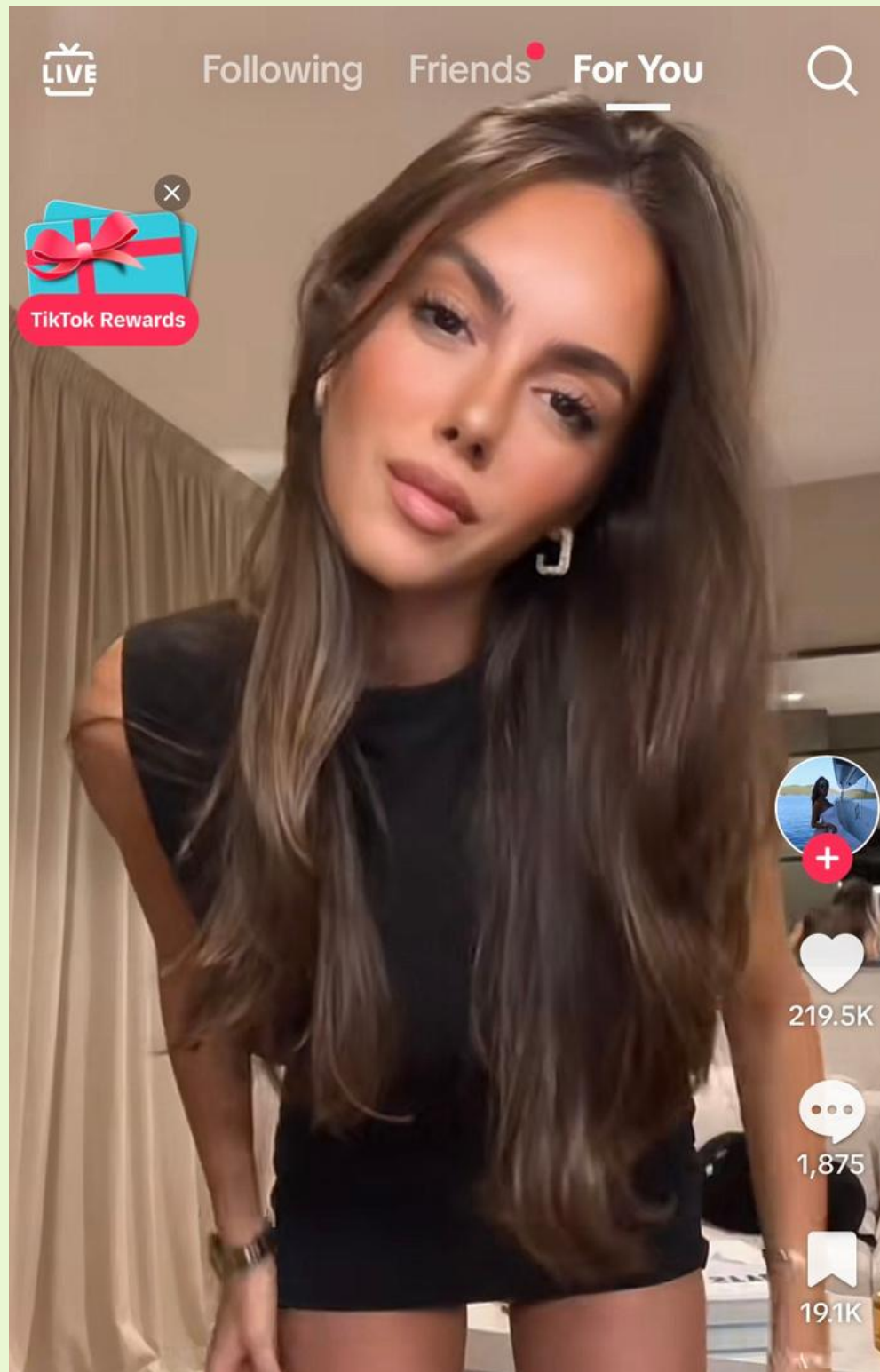
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75%

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

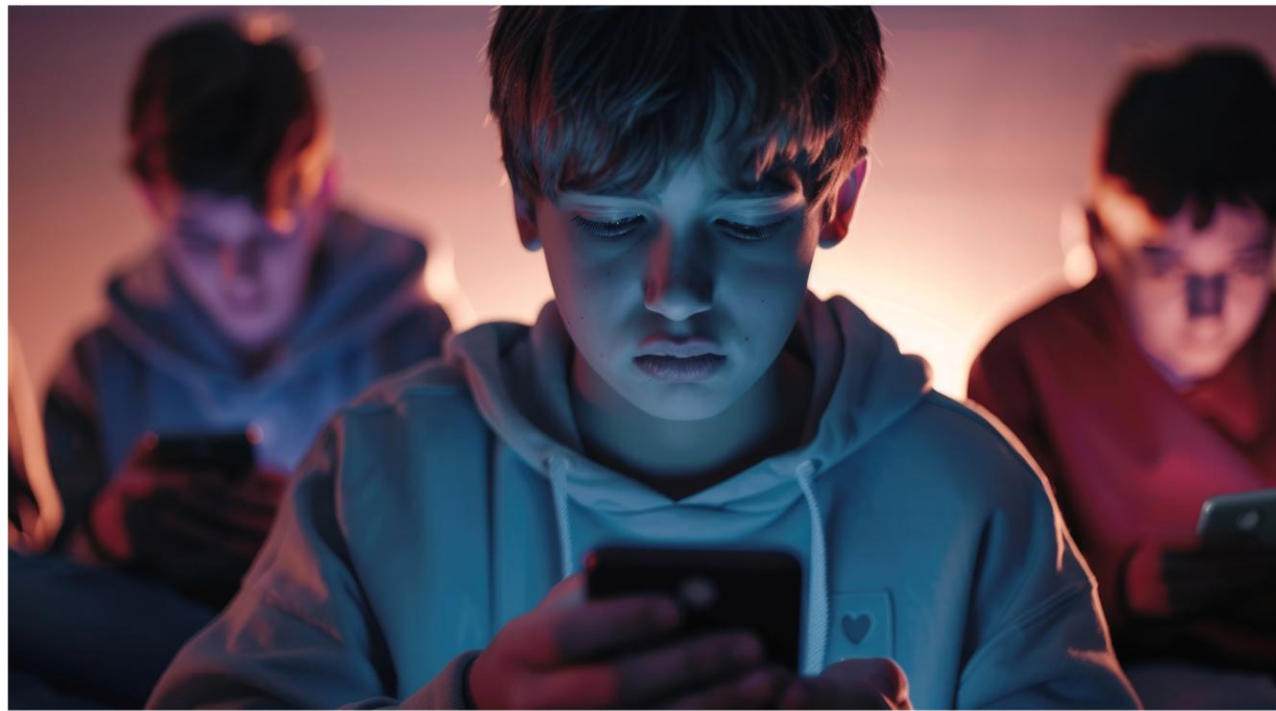
03.  
Content about eating disorder content  
shown within 8 minutes

04.  
TikTok's algorithm delivered content  
promoting self-harm and eating disorders  
every 39 seconds to vulnerable users

# The rise of the chatbot



**character.ai**



## DANGER IS TWOFOLD

### 1. Nature of the advice

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

### 2. Nature of the relationship

- Emotional manipulation & grooming.
- Detrimental 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

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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](https://www.ofcom.org.uk))

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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





LET'S TALK ABOUT OUR KIDS AND THEIR TECH

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

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## Talk to other parents

This is your superpower! Just because your child says everyone else has x doesn't mean they do

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## 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 thing 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

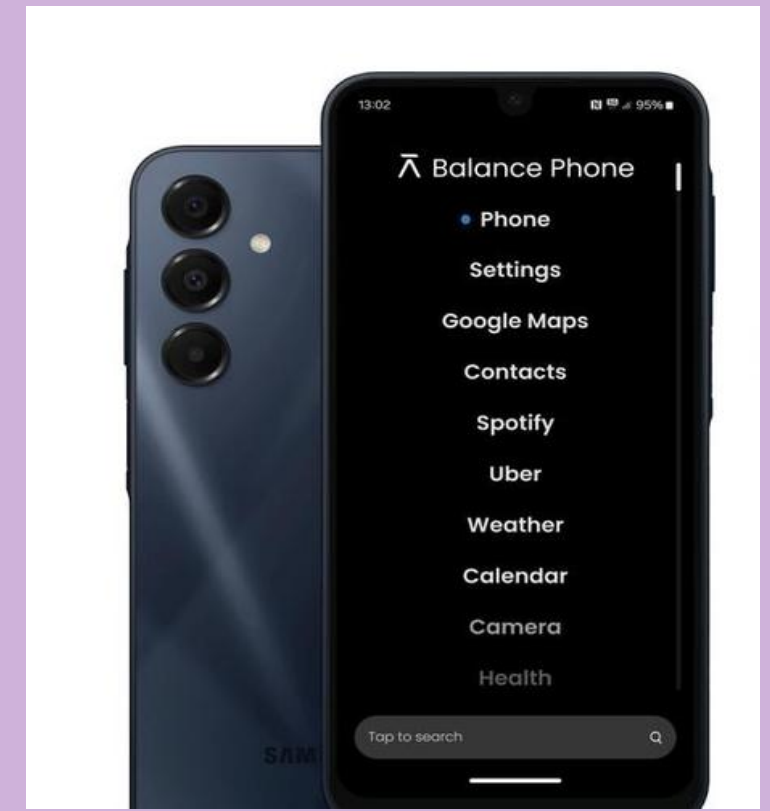
Can't we just use a stripped back  
iPhone with parental controls?



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.

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## Reduce distraction

Reduce push notifications. Try using a flip cover, delete or hide distracting apps and turn it off.

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## 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](https://www.InternetMatters.org) to review and set up apps. Increase privacy settings.

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## Block adult content

Turn off explicit material (in apps, broadband, and data plans). Watch out for VPNs, relays, and private browsers.

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## Parental controls & monitoring

Use parental control software (e.g., Google Family Link, Norton Family, or Qustodio).





LET'S TALK ABOUT OUR KIDS AND THEIR TECH

# Parental Control Software

**BASIC**

The tools you need for core protection.

£39.95/year

SAME AS £3.33/MONTH

Buy now

Basic includes:

✓ Games & apps blocking

✓ Daily time limits

✓ Web filtering

✓ Location monitoring

✓ Pause internet access

**COMPLETE**

Advanced safety features with full customization.

£69.95/year

SAME AS £5.83/MONTH

Buy now

Complete includes:

✓ Games & apps blocking

✓ Daily time limits

✓ Web filtering

✓ Location monitoring

✓ Pause internet access

✓ AI-powered alerts

✓ Social monitoring

✓ Custom routines

✓ App insights

✓ Games & apps time limits

✓ Calls & messages monitoring\*

✓ Unlimited devices\*

MOST POPULAR

## Free

Apple Screenime  
& 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.

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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.



**PAPAYA**



# SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD

### 03. Sign the Parent Pact



<<<<<<<<<<<

Scan to sign

[smartphonefreechildhood.org/find-your-community](https://smartphonefreechildhood.org/find-your-community)





A banner image for Parent Pact showing a child's hand holding a smartphone. The text 'PARENT PACT' is in large yellow letters, 'Live leaderboards' is in small white letters, and 'National (UK)' is in large white letters.

**165,841**  
Children signed up

**14,126**  
Schools covered

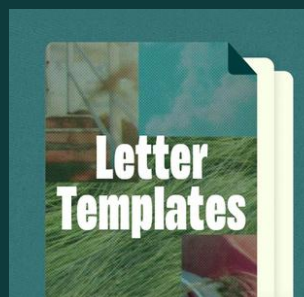
WEST LONDON SCHOOL LEADERBOARD

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 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

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

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03. How to engage your whole school community about smartphones

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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](http://www.thehealthyselfie.co.uk) via the QR code or on Amazon



LET'S TALK ABOUT OUR KIDS AND THEIR TECH

# Extra Resources

[www.papayataalks.com/after](http://www.papayataalks.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

[papayataalks.com](http://papayataalks.com)

[smartphonefreechildhood.org](http://smartphonefreechildhood.org)

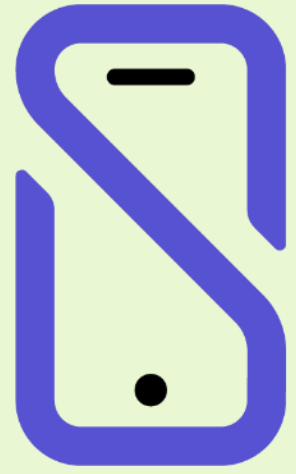
[teched-off.com](http://teched-off.com)

[healthprofessionalsforsaferscreens.org](http://healthprofessionalsforsaferscreens.org)



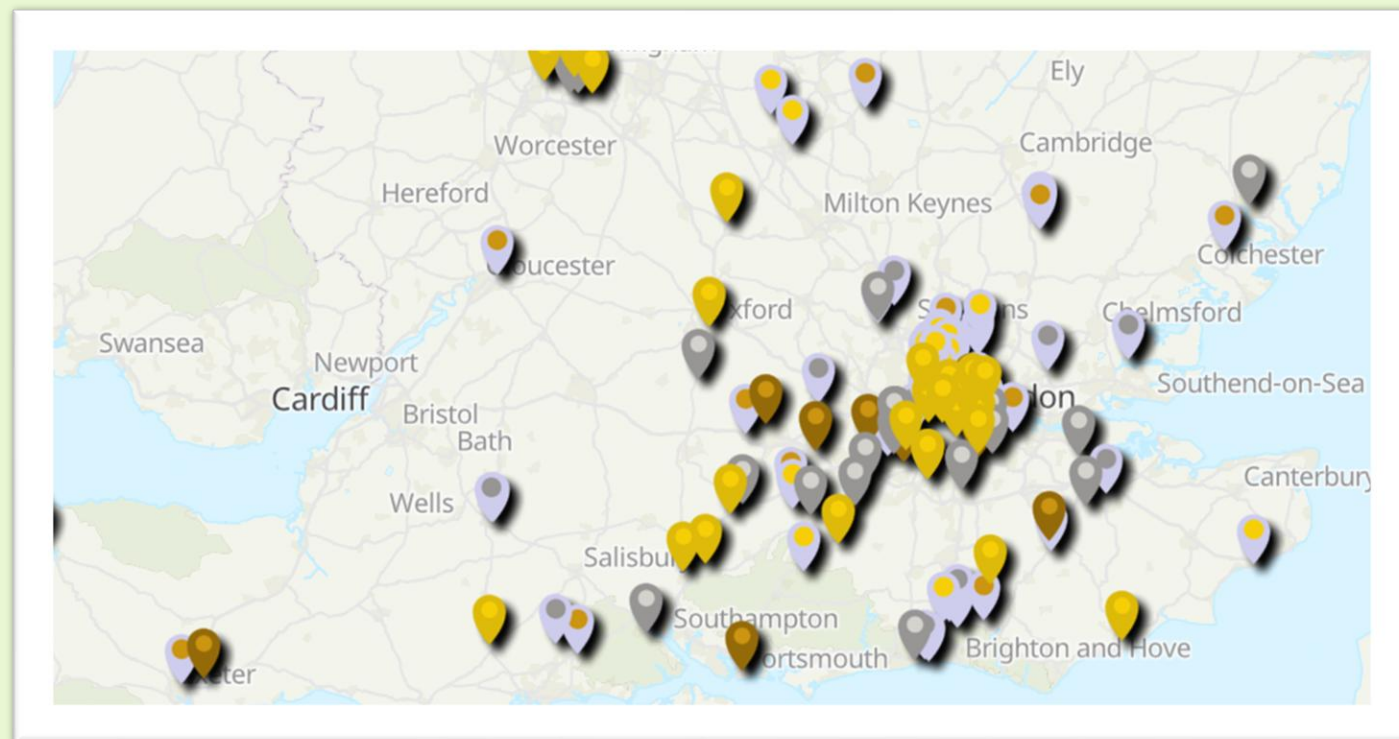
Encourage your school to register for  
the Smartphone Free Schools rating.

[smartphonefreerating.org](http://smartphonefreerating.org)



# SMARTPHONE FREE SCHOOLS RATING

Encourage your school to register – it's free!  
[smartphonefreerating.org](https://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

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02.

Set time and place boundaries (i.e. bedrooms)

---

03.

Use filters and parental control apps

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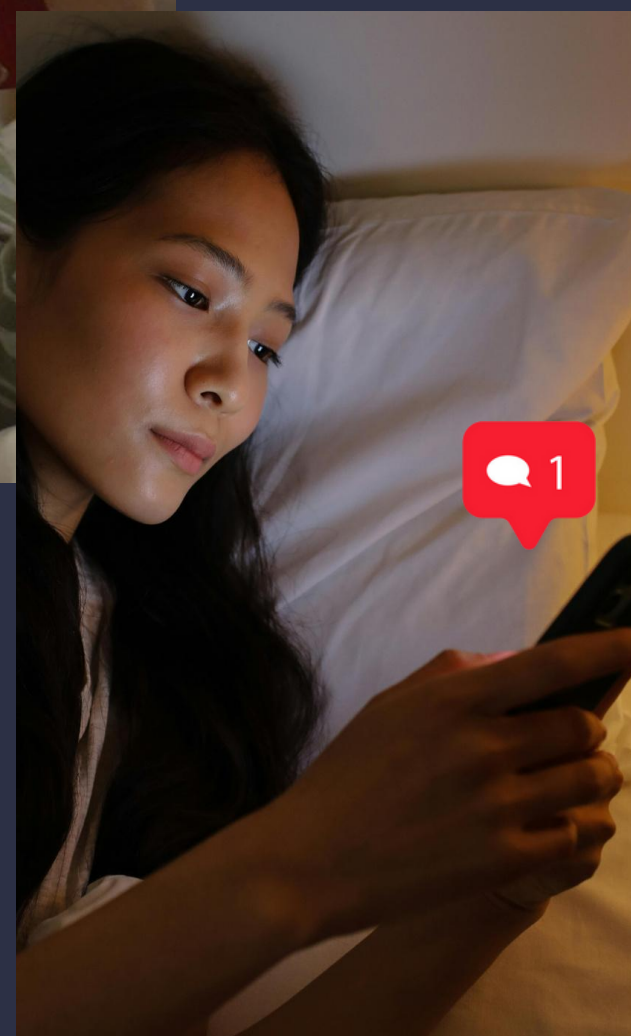
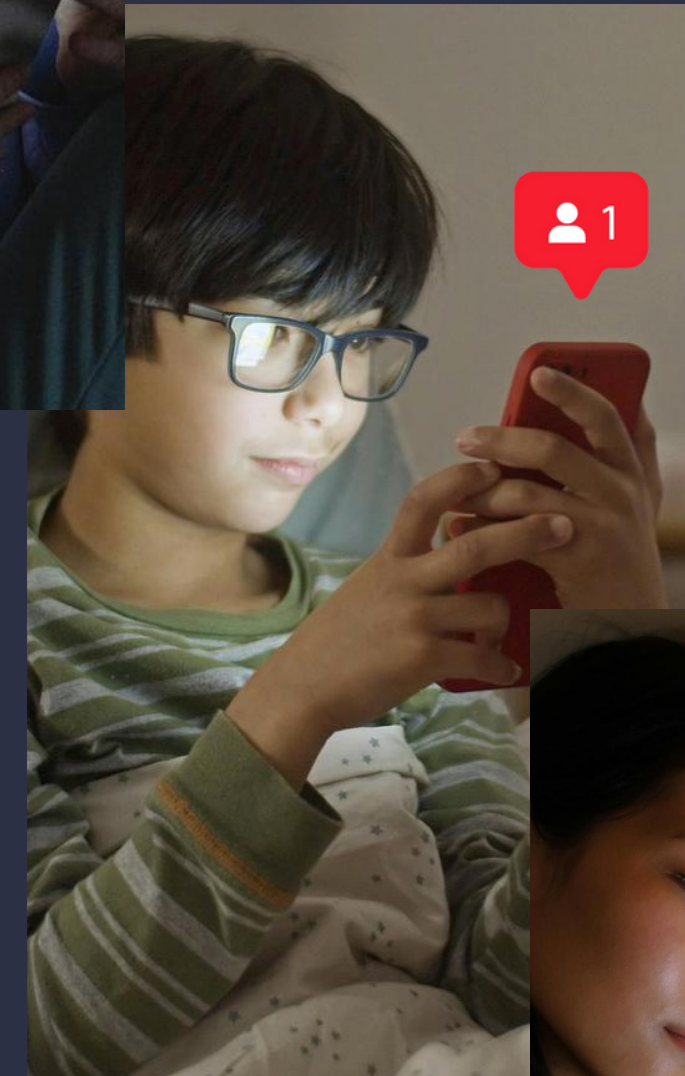
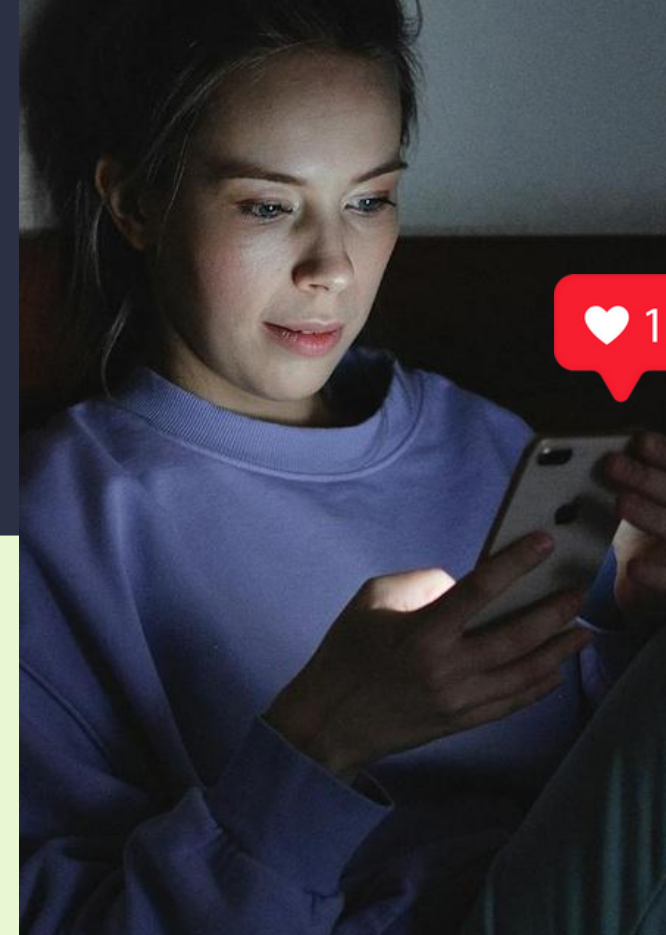
04.

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

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05.

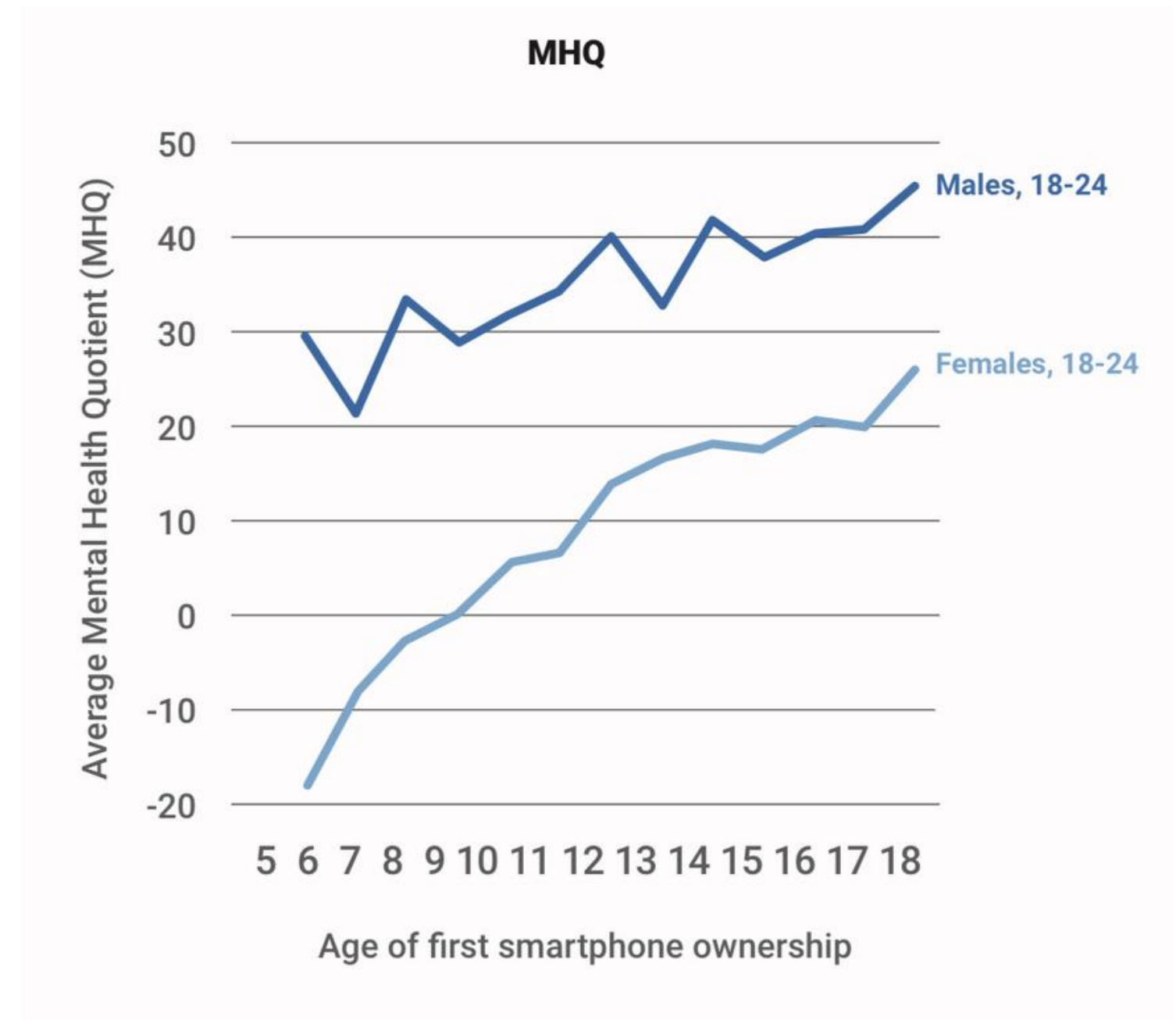
Consider changing your mind....



# 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 background image of two children, a boy and a girl, running and playing happily in front of a brick house with large windows. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark blue filter.

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

C.S. LEWIS