



**SMARTPHONE
FREE CHILDHOOD**

Let's talk: raising kids in the smartphone era

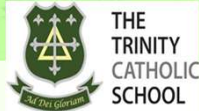
PARENT TALK - 2026



Secondary School Policy Overview



In bag
switched
off



No phones
allowed



In bag
switched
off



In bag
switched
off



Lock
Phone
Pouches



NOTTINGHAM
HIGH SCHOOL

Locker
Based
System



In bag
switched
off



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



In two decades, everything's changed

2006



2026



2006

**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**

2026

**Smartphones have
transformed
society... and
childhood**



Smartphones have become 'normal' for kids



Age
12

90%
of children have
a smartphone



Age
9

Average age
a child gets a
smartphone in
the UK



Age
6-7

1 in 3
children have a
smartphone



Nobody has been 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

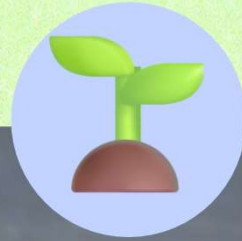


We all want the same for our children



**Happy
today**

*Enjoy a happy,
healthy childhood*



**Thriving
tomorrow**

*Grow into confident,
capable adults*



**Safe
always**

*Stay safe as they
explore the world*

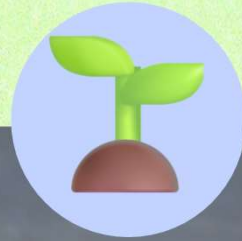


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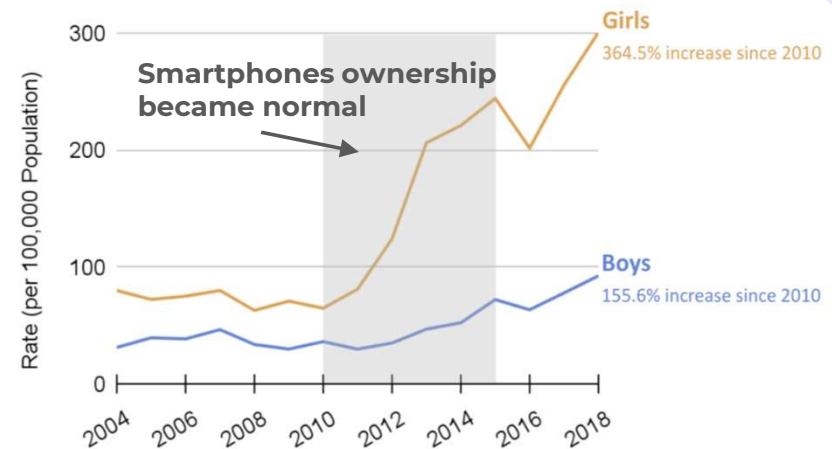
Smartphones make this all harder – and the data shows it



**Happy
today**

We've been facing a teen mental health crisis

UK 10-12 year olds, self-harm episodes



Cybulski et al, 2021



**Happy
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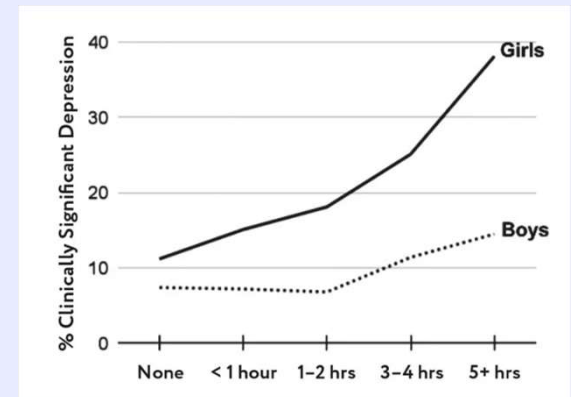
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3x

**Depression risk
& 2x anxiety risk**

Among teens with
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King's College London, 2024



Millennium Cohort Study

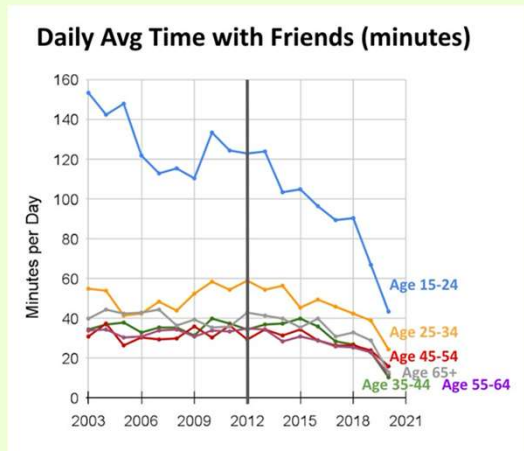


Thriving tomorrow

Smartphones displace real world activities & connection

↓ 65%

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



Since smartphones became common in the 2010s

American Time Use Study



**Safe
always**

Smartphones have increased the risk of online grooming

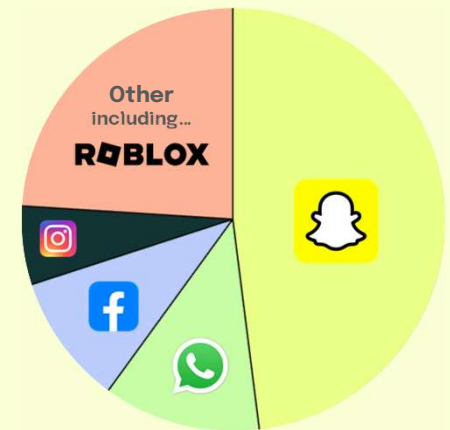
A child is

60x

**more likely to be
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abducted from the
street**

Groomers go where kids are

% of reported incidents



NSPCC FOI, 2023/4
(7,062 reported online grooming cases);
Home Office / PACT / CEOP
(116 estimated stranger child abductions 2024/5)

NSPCC 2024



Smartphones make all these things harder



Happy today

**Drives the teen
mental health crisis**

Steals time from childhood

**Exposes children to violence,
porn, and extreme viewpoints**



Thriving tomorrow

**Replaces real-world socialising
with screen time**

**Disrupts focus, sleep, and
concentration**

**Undermines
academic outcomes**



Safe always

**Makes online bullying constant
and inescapable**

**Enables sharing of nudes with
peers and strangers**

**Creates widespread risks of
grooming and child sextortion**



It can feel like an impossible position

Either we...

Give our children a harmful product



Or we...

Risk them being socially isolated



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



**This problem is
why SFC exists**



Smartphone Free Childhood has grown into an incredible grassroots community

Feb 2024

SFC began after a WhatsApp group went viral in Feb 2024



Hundreds of thousands of parents



Famous supporters



2,000+ local organisers

16,000
Schools covered

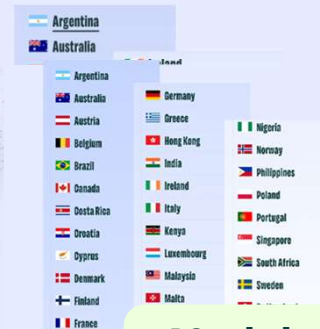
Parents in 55% of UK schools

July 2026

300,000 parents engaged in our communities



Every UK county



40 global groups



And this year SFC changed the political debate

**250,000
MP letters
sent in one week**

MPs emailed:
650 of 650

Emails sent:
252,816

Average per MP:
389



FINANCIAL TIMES

Parents force Starmer into
embracing social media ban

Prime minister set to announce restrictions this month
despite previous opposition



⚡ **Our voice became impossible to ignore** ⚡



The UK Government is taking bold action

- **A ban on under-16s using major platforms** (YouTube, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, X)
- Likely **exceptions: music** streaming and **education** (definitions TBC)
- **“Australia Plus” approach also includes:**
 - live-streaming for 16-17 yr olds
 - restricted stranger contact in gaming
 - first curbs on harmful “romantic” AI chatbots
- **Aim:** regulations passed by end of 2026, in effect early 2027





This new law is a huge victory but it needs all of us to make it work

- ✓ **Everyone now agrees** that social media is **not safe** for kids
- ✓ The most **harmful platforms** will be **restricted**
- ✓ **Millions of kids off social media**, even more never exposed to it
- ✗ **Big Tech** will say it's **too hard to enforce**
- ✗ Tech-savvy kids will find **workarounds**
- ✗ The **peer pressure** won't **disappear**

The law now gives parents backing. *But we still have to hold the line.*

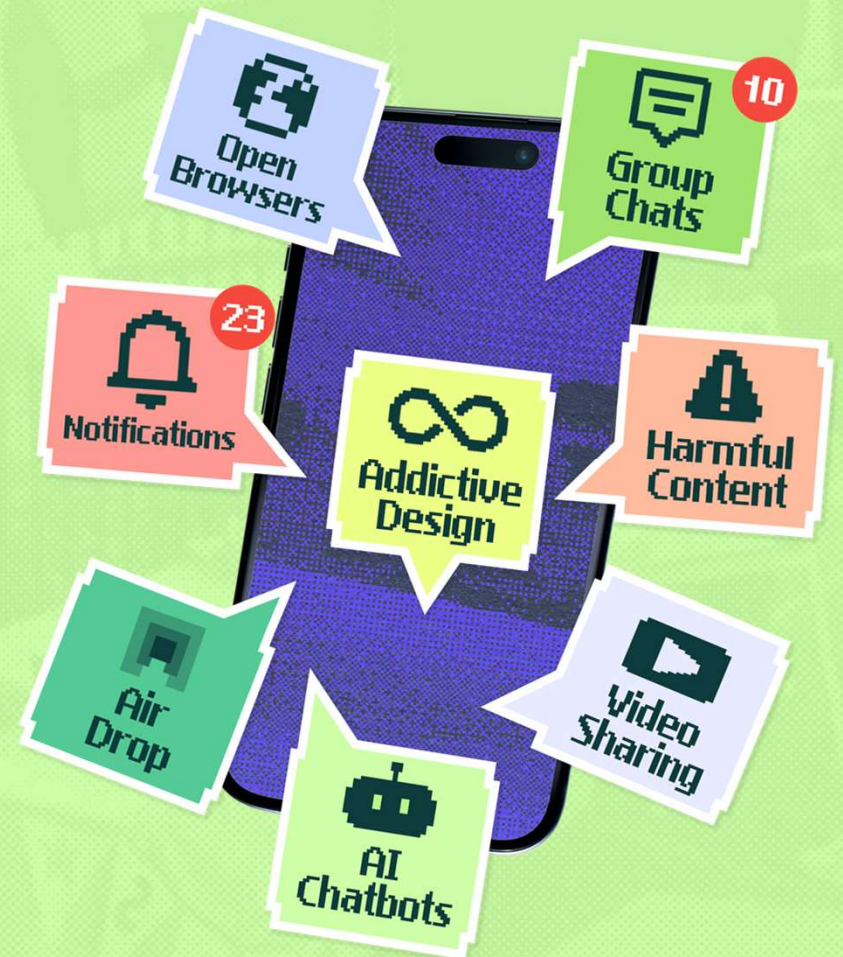


Social media has only ever been one part of the picture

Once you hand over a smartphone, **parenting gets harder.**

Open internet, group chats, harmful content, AI chatbots, addictive design... all in your child's pocket.

Smartphones are still the gateway to so many risks and potential harms





The moment a child gets a smartphone, childhood changes

They can quickly become the centre of children's lives, shaping:

- Where they **spend their time**
- How they build **friendships**
- Who they **learn** from
- How they **see themselves**
- Who they **become**



Delaying smartphones delays this change



Delaying gives more time for childhood



01. More friendship

More face-to-face conversation and connection.



02. More confidence

More chances to solve problems independently.



03. More freedom

More space to become themselves.



04. More focus

More attention for learning, reading and creativity.



05. More sleep

Fewer interruptions and better quality rest.



06. More play

More time outdoors, moving and imagining.

⚡ But don't kids need a smartphone to get ahead?



The skills kids need in an AI-powered world:

Social skills
Emotional Intelligence
Resilience
Creativity



How children build them:

Human interaction
Real life experiences
Challenge
Play
... not scrolling.

The most valuable skills will always be deeply human ones



The “tech bros” don’t give it to their kids

STEVE JOBS

“We don’t allow the iPad in the home. We think it’s too dangerous for them.”



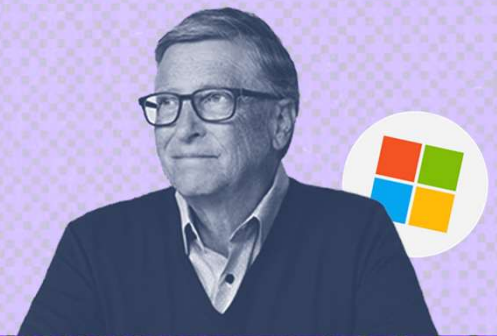
EVAN SPIEGEL

Grew up without a TV and credits his own success on that tech restriction. Limits his kid to 1.5 hours screen time per week.



BILL GATES

Didn’t allow his 4 children smartphones or their own computers until they were 14.





**But how can we fight
the peer pressure?**



If enough of us agree to delay
giving smartphones
the **peer pressure reduces.**

Acting alone can feel impossible,
but **together we're powerful.**



SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD

PARENT PACT

190,681

UK children signed up

16,114

UK schools covered

**The
PARENT PACT
makes acting
together
simple**



THE PARENT PACT

**No smartphone before 14.
No social media before 16.**

Two clear commitments. One plan.

The first delays the device.
The second commits to upholding the ban.

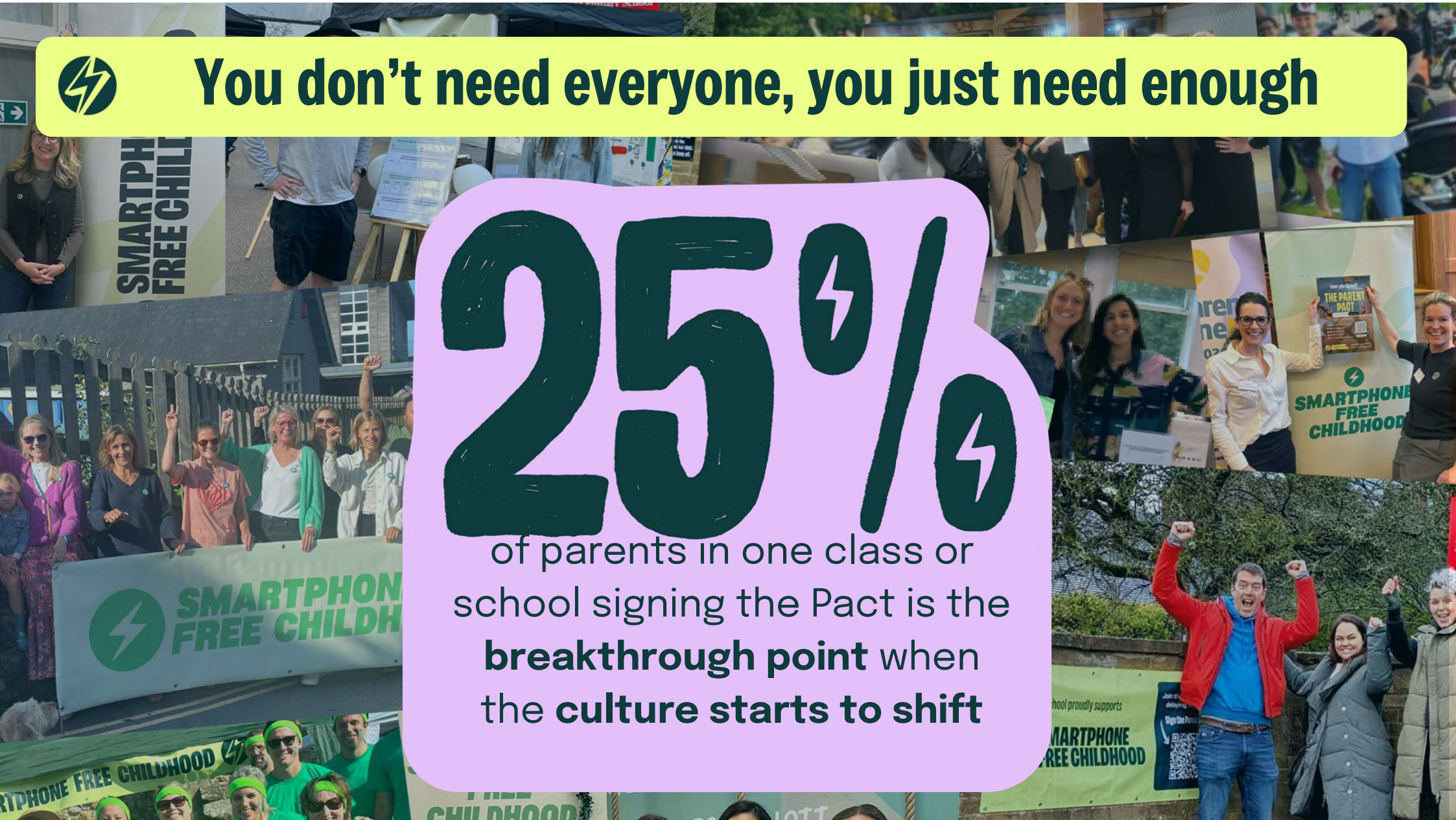
This isn't a restriction. It's a plan for your child's digital life.



You don't need everyone, you just need enough

25%

of parents in one class or
school signing the Pact is the
breakthrough point when
the **culture starts to shift**





This 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



SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD

PARENT PACT

Nottinghamshire

2,144

Children signed up

213

Schools covered



It's started at Good Shepherd

PARENT PACT

Live leaderboards
← Nottinghamshire

**The Good Shepherd Catholic Primary,
Arnold**

Somersby Road, Woodthorpe, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire, NG5 4LT

22

Children signed up

Year / Age	Pacts
Pre-school (age 3 - 4)	5
Reception (age 4 - 5)	8
Year 1 (age 5 - 6)	1
Year 2 (age 6 - 7)	2
Year 4 (age 8 - 9)	2
Year 5 (age 9 - 10)	3
Year 6 (age 10 - 11)	1



The more of us who sign, the more powerful it becomes

STEP 01

Search for your
child's school



Select your school 

Select your school year

Name

Use the
postcode
if it's a
common
name

STEP 02

Sign the Pact to delay
until at least 14



Sign the PARENT PACT

[Sign now >](#)

STEP 03

View results for your
region, school & class



National (UK)

158,630

CHILDREN

13,750

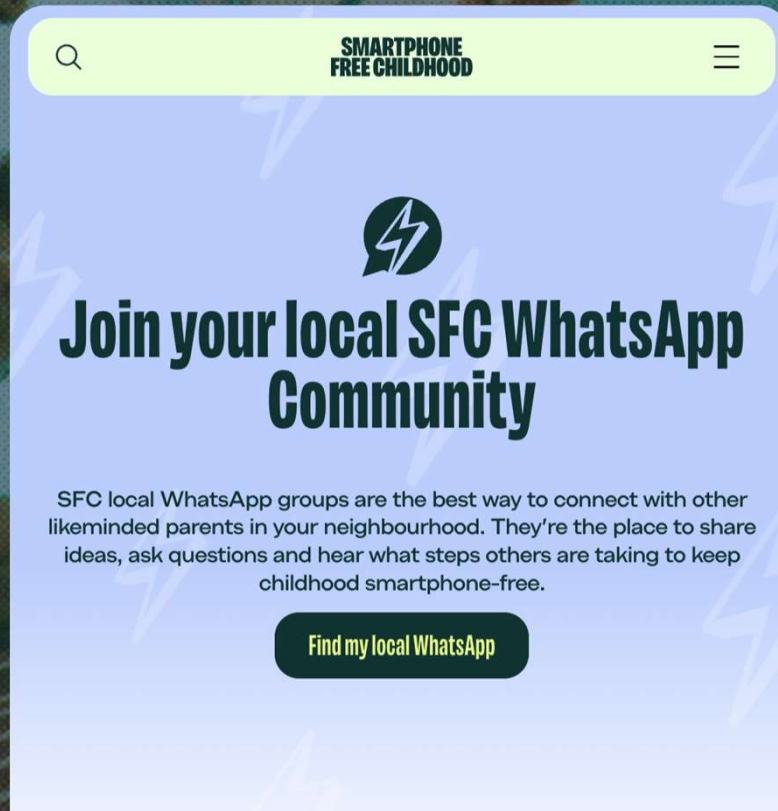
SCHOOLS

Sort by:
[Leaderboard](#)
[Region name](#)

REGION	FACTS
Bedfordshire ↗	937
Berkshire ↗	3286
Bristol ↗	2510
Buckinghamshire ↗	2911
Cambridgeshire ↗	2936



You also have a dedicated SFC Whatsapp group for your school community



- Find like minded parents in your community
- Ask for help from other parents grappling with these decisions and challenges
- Share how you're talking to your kids about it



This isn't just theory, it's working!

I heard a story today from a local school where a Year 7 kid who had an iPhone asked his parents if he could instead have a Nokia because lots of his new school mates had one. It's taking a while but the tide is turning...

19:47



26



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

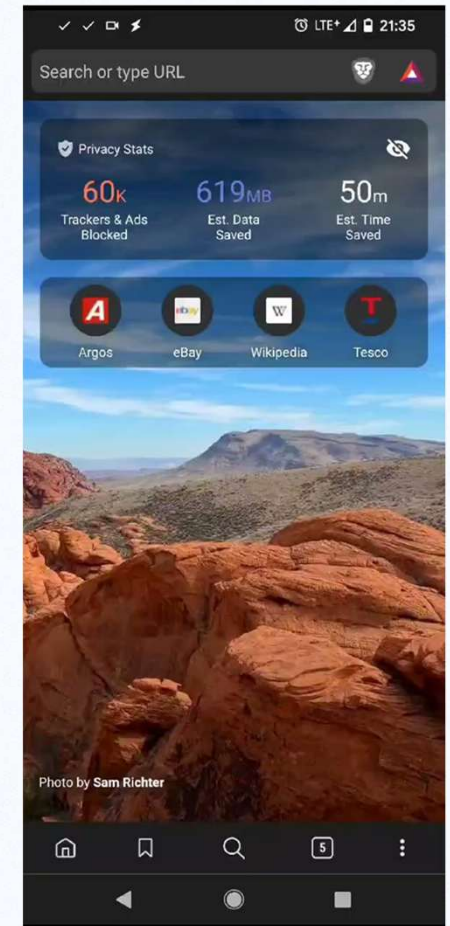
Performing a factory reset

Using VPN software

Hacking the router

Memorising your passcode

Using a proxy





How to talk to your child about this?



10 minute video for
7-12 year olds

Smartphonefreechildhood.org



For age 7-12



The Battle for your Time: a
compelling Ted Talk for teens

TEDx / YouTube



For age 10-16



The Amazing Generation by
Jonathan Haidt

Penguin



For age 8-11



The Healthy Selfie: A guide for
teens on self-worth in the digital
age by Dr. Susie Davies

The Healthy Selfie



For age 12-16

The angle that works best: *“Tech companies stealing their time”*



And if you're looking for an alternative to a smartphone or have other questions



**Sign the Pact and
join your school
Whatsapp Group**



**Answers to
every question**



**Find alternatives
to smartphones**

Visit: smartphonefreechildhood.org



Get involved in the movement!



Become an Active Supporter

Be part of the team engaging parents in this school



Become a School Organiser

Play a role in leading the conversation in each school



Help to drive change beyond your school

Join the team driving change in other schools in your area



If you've ever felt the urge to do more, to contribute to something greater, to be part of the conversation and to help shape the future for our children and society, this is it!

Lisa - SFC Regional Leader, Dorset



Scan here



Prompts for the conversation



What has your experience been?



What are your biggest concerns about managing smartphones and social media?



What are your thoughts about the Parent Pact?



Appendix



Links to the videos

Deeper dive on some of the challenges:

[Nip in the bud: teenagers' experience in their own words](#) (1 min)

[Thames Valley Police: Grooming & Sextortion](#) (1 min)

Using humour to make the point:

[1990s Video Shop with a 2026 twist](#) by Smartphone Free Childhood UK

[Urgent Charity Appeal from Tech Billionaires](#) by Smartphone Free Childhood UK

[Let's Change the Norm](#) by Smartphone Free Childhood USA

The risks and harms haven't gone away



Drives the teen mental health crisis

Steals time from childhood

Replaces real-world socialising with screen time



Disrupts focus, sleep, and concentration

Exposes children to violence, porn, and extreme viewpoints

Undermines academic outcomes



Makes online bullying constant and inescapable

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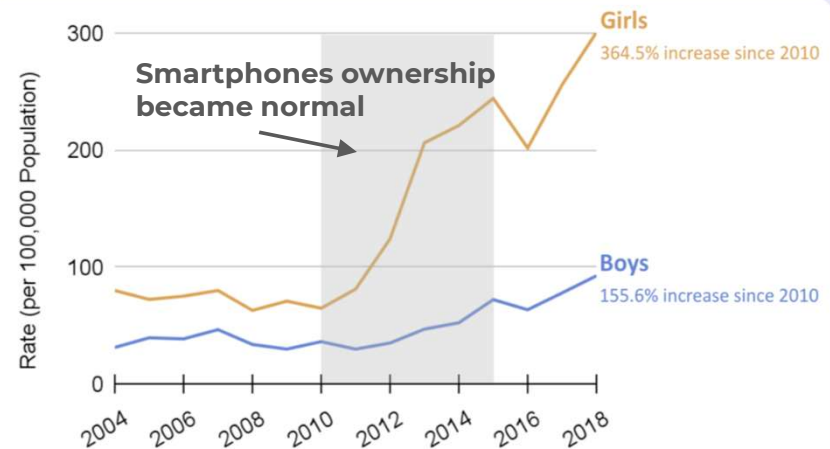
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Cybulski et al, 2021



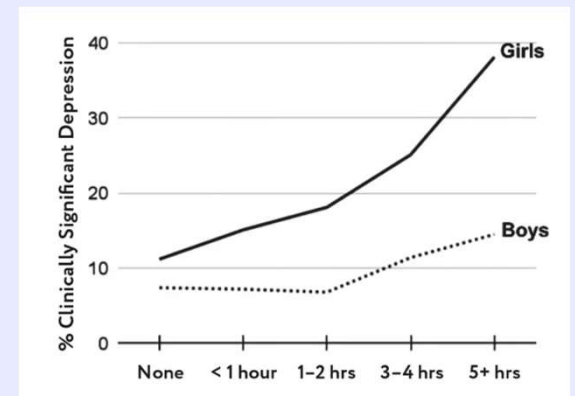
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3x

**Depression risk
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Among teens with
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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 12-15 year olds;
nearly a full-time job

Birmingham University SMART Study, Feb 2025



**Happy
today**

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

51%

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

BBFC report, 2022

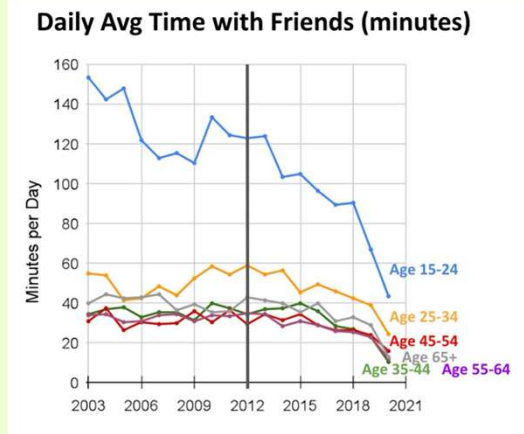


**Thriving
tomorrow**

Smartphones displace real world activities & connection

↓ 65%

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



Since smartphones became common in the 2010s

American Time Use Study



**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

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

**“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.”**

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**

Policy exchange: Disconnected 2024



**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**

Ofsted, 2021



**Safe
always**

Grooming & sextortion are ever present threats



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pRqyWUbGdw&t=1s>



**Safe
always**

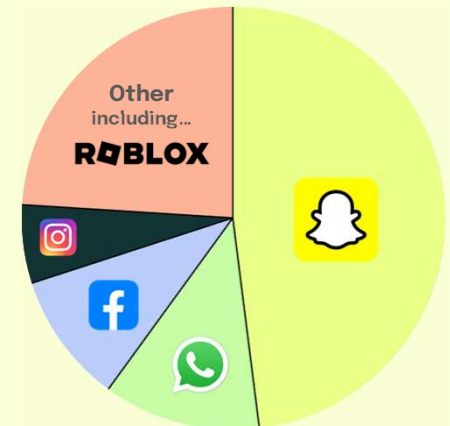
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Groomers go where kids are

% of reported incidents



NSPCC 2024



Smartphone-free kids have more chance to



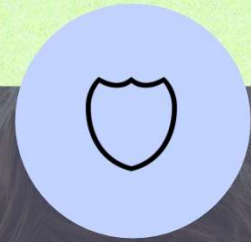
Have happier childhoods

*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*