



The Smartphone Free Superpower

LUKE ROBERTS

Assistant Headteacher

Ashlyns School



Ashlyns School Phone Journey

Previously
*'Never Seen,
Never Heard'*



Currently
Prohibited Item
*Lockable Phone
Pouch*



Sept 2026
(New Year 7's)
*'No
Smartphones'*
Lockable Pouch

First phones

For children aged 11–14 starting secondary school and travelling independently, these non-smart phones keep things simple: calls and texts only, with no social media or open web browsers. A gentle step towards independence – and a way to stay connected without the pressure of a full smartphone.

Nokia 105 2g



TCL 4022S



Doro 6820



Nokia Flip



Karri



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

Screen Time

The average amount of time a teenager spends online in the UK

4.54 hrs

34.3 hrs
per week

75 days
a year

14.3
years in a lifetime

Timeline

EARLY 2000'S



2007-2008



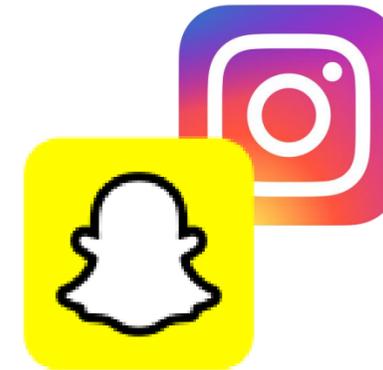
2009-2010



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

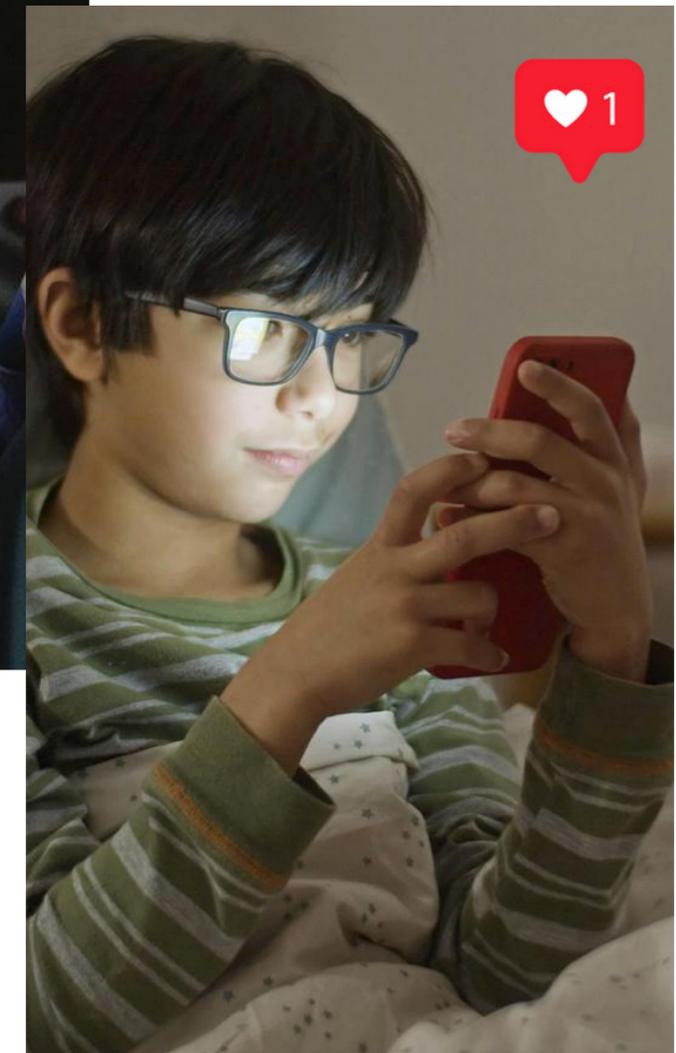
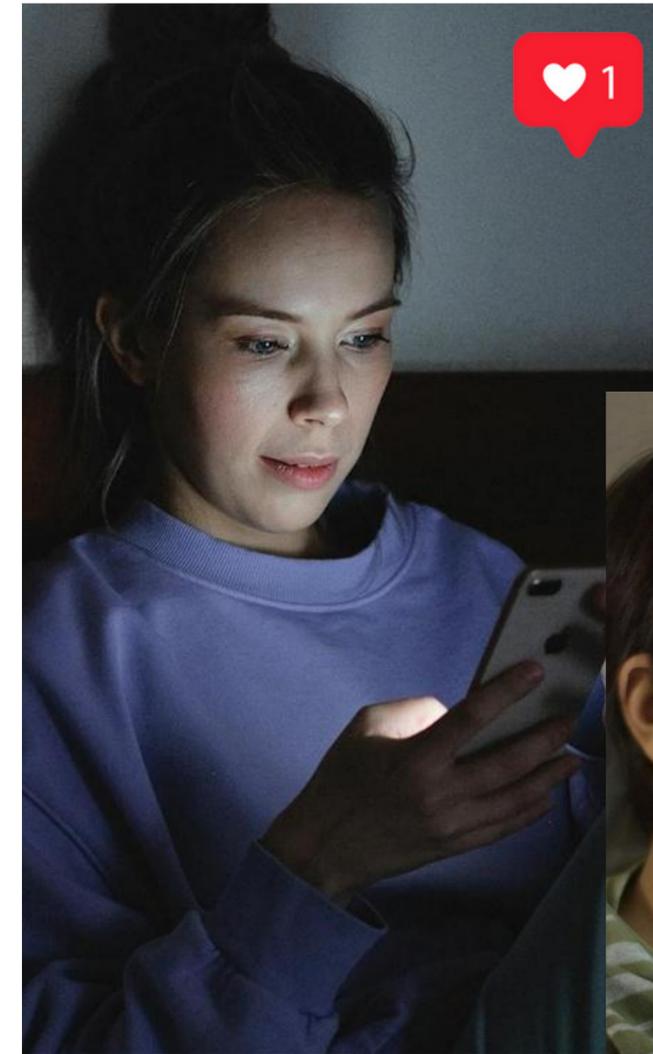
**97% of UK 12yr
olds own a
smartphone**

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

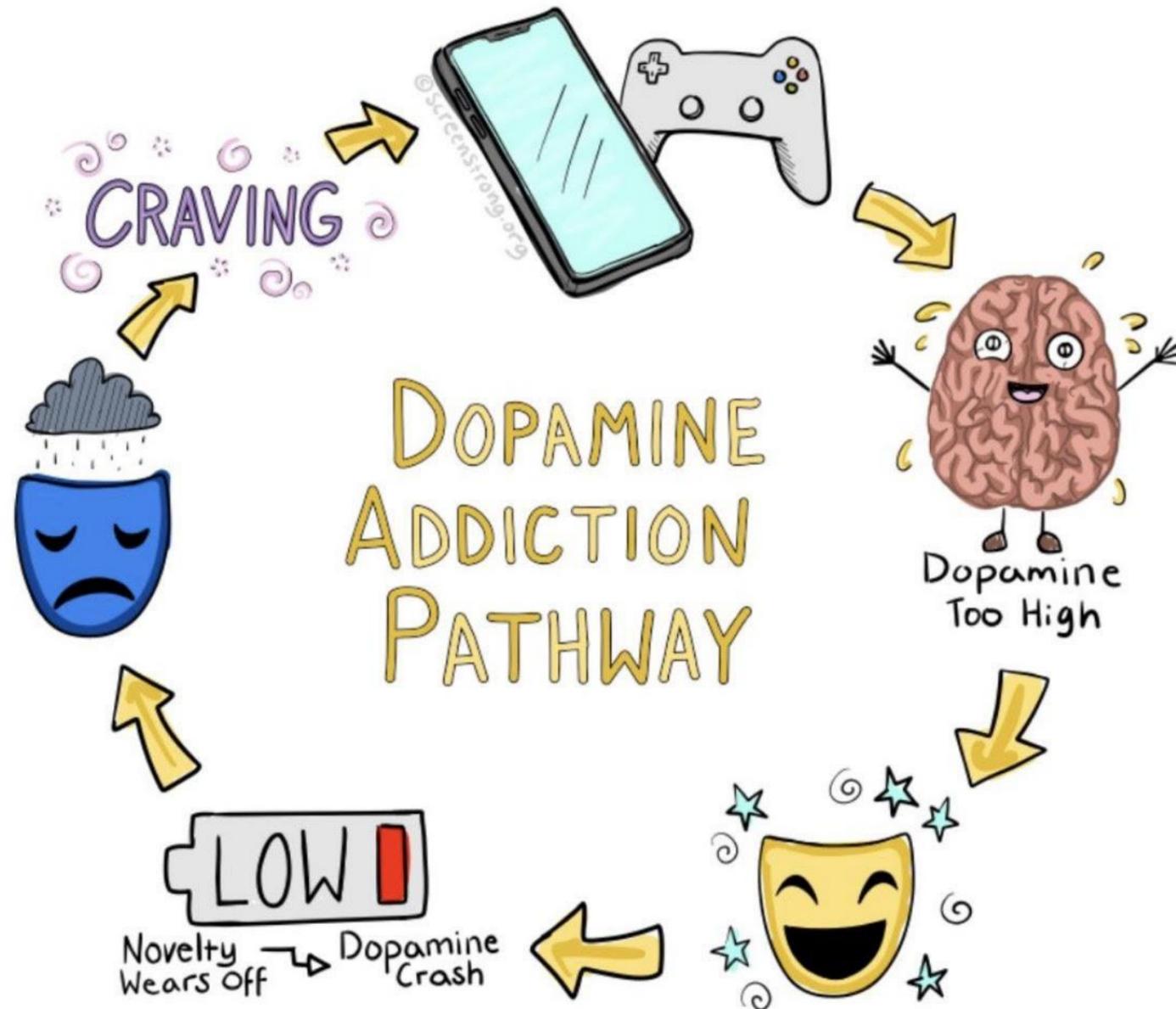
Persuasive Design

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 akin to involuntary hypnotism.



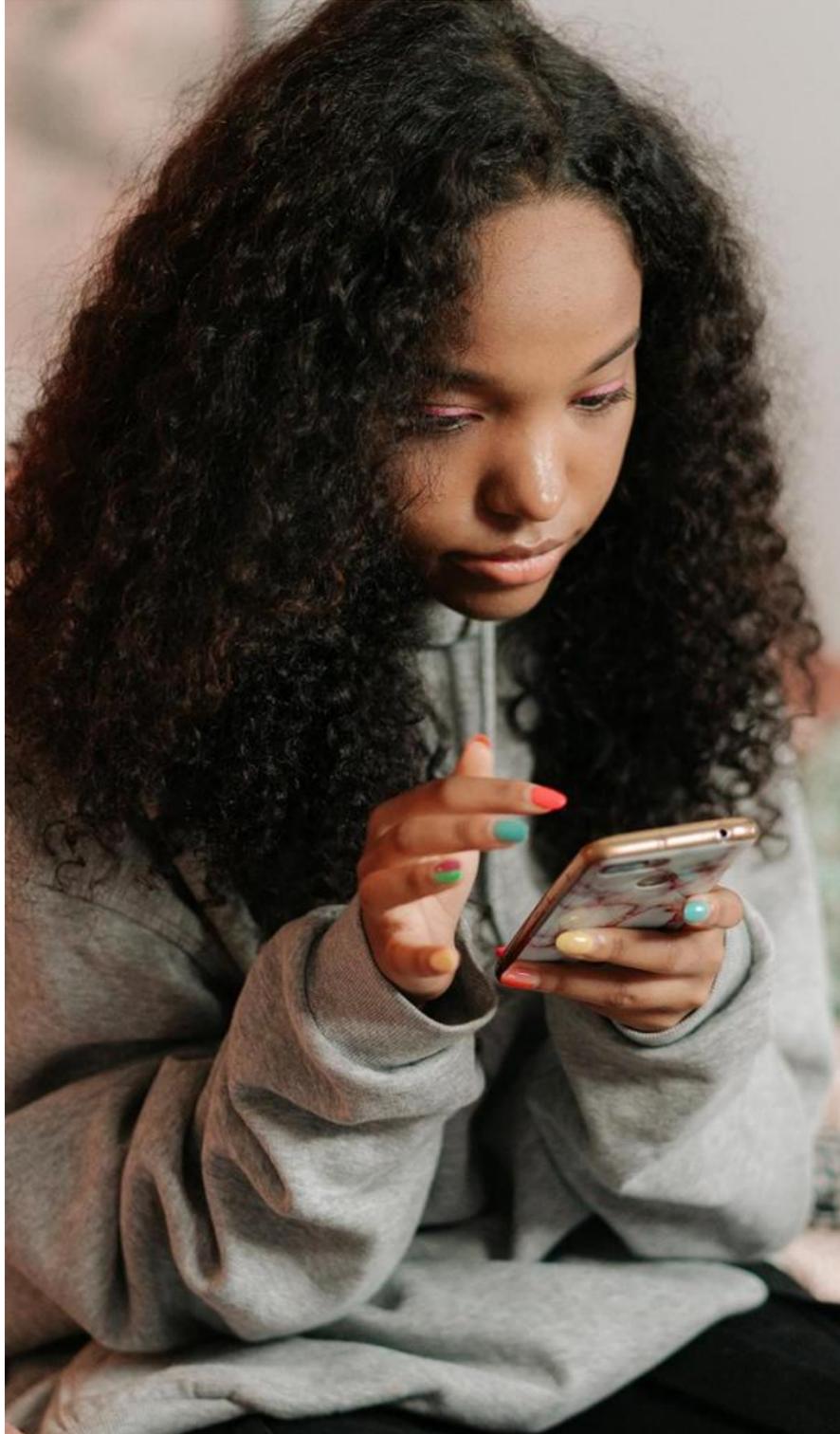
Persuasive Design



Dopamine is released during a reward which provides a learning signal to the brain.

The greater the 'unexpected' reward the greater the learning signal.

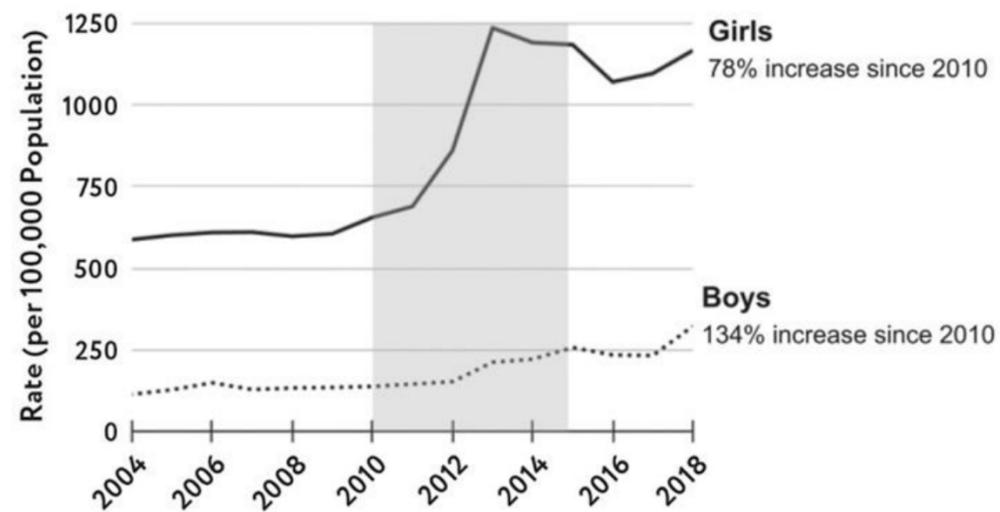
The motivational aspect of dopamine means that it can motivate us to do things that are good for us as well as those that are not.



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



CYBULSKI ET AL, 2021

Figure from The Anxious Generation,
Jonathan Haidt

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

↓ 70%

but self-harm has increased:

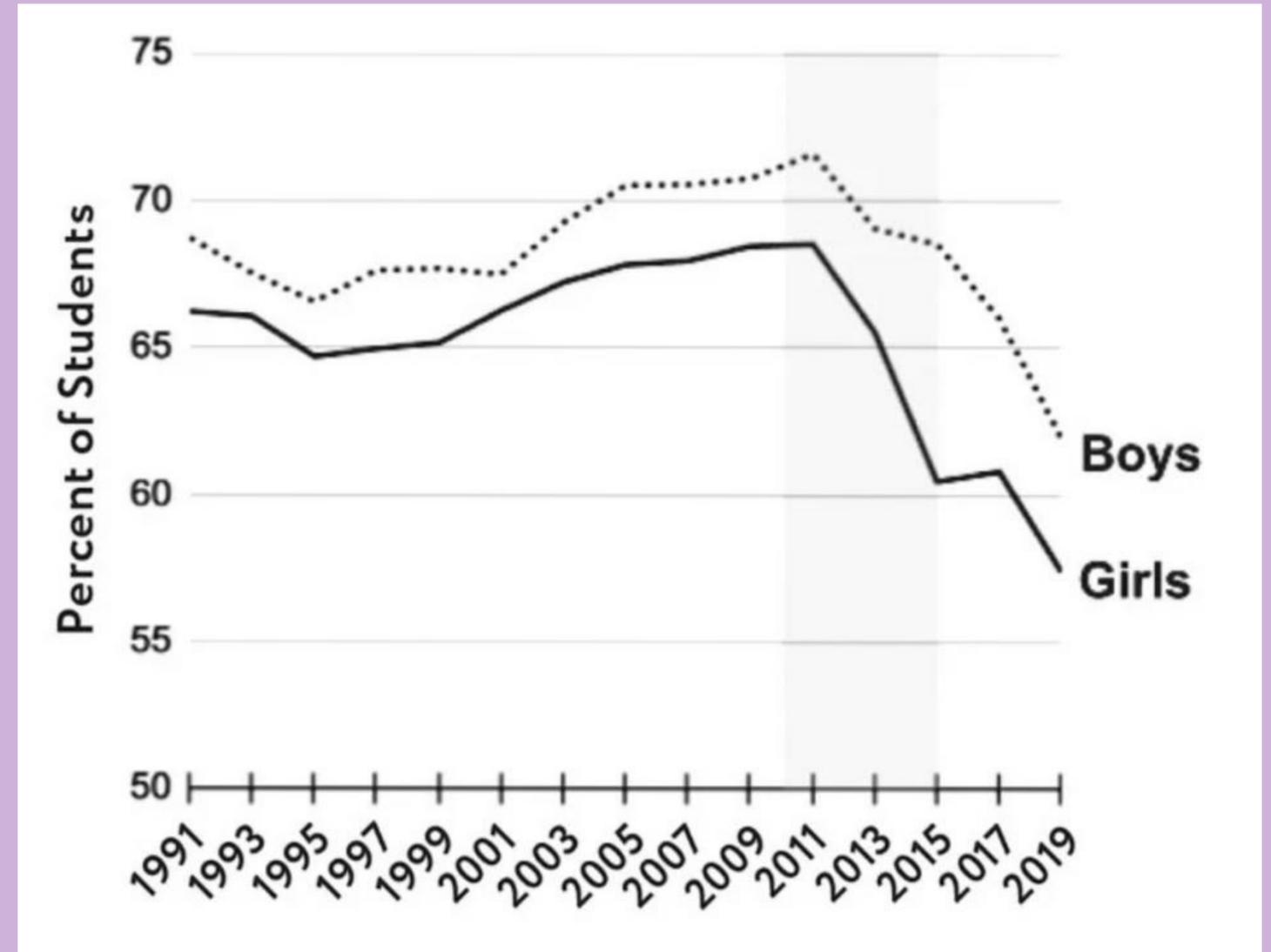
↑ 93%

Comparison

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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

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

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

James Babbage, Director General of Threats at the NCA, Sky News, 25 March
2025



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

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

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

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.

SADLY, WE COULD GO ON



SLEEP

Bedtime use of smartphones doubles children's risk of poor sleep



BULLYING

84% of bullying now takes place on a device



DISTRACTIONS

On average teens are bombarded by 237 smartphone notifications a day



ARGUMENTS

55% of parents say their child's smartphone use causes big family arguments



ROAD SAFETY

Mobile phone distraction is a major cause of road accidents involving children



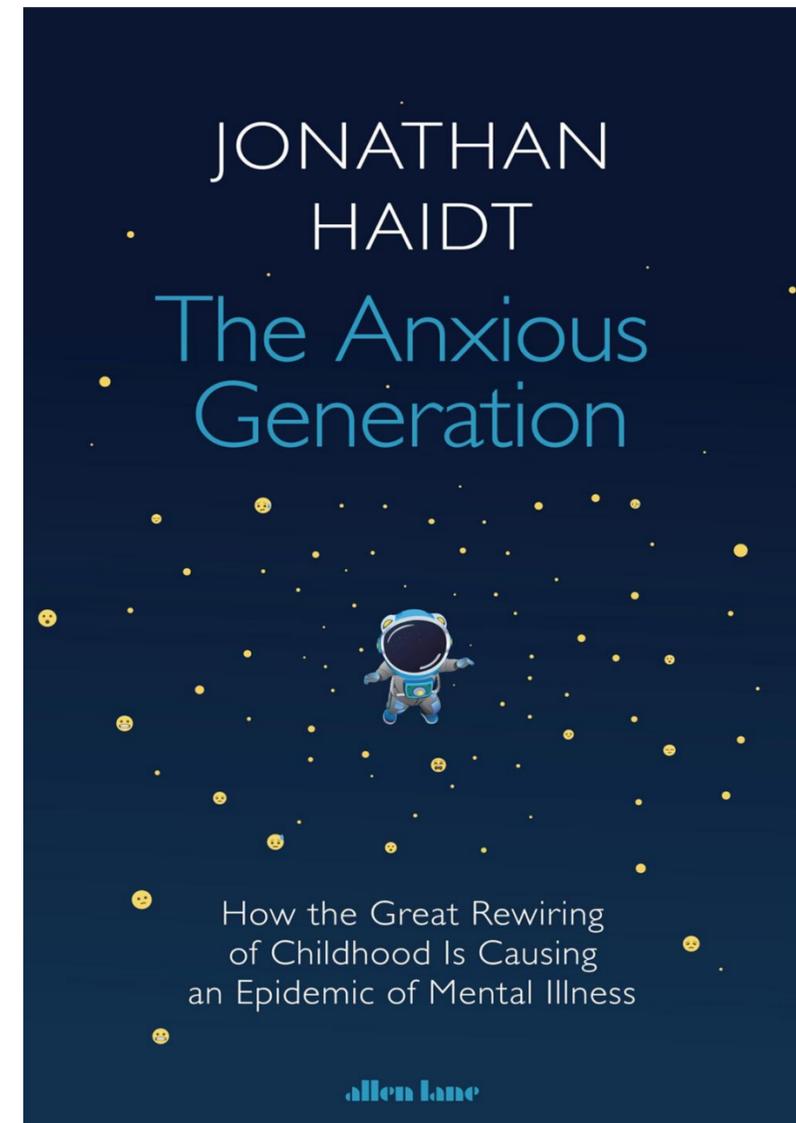
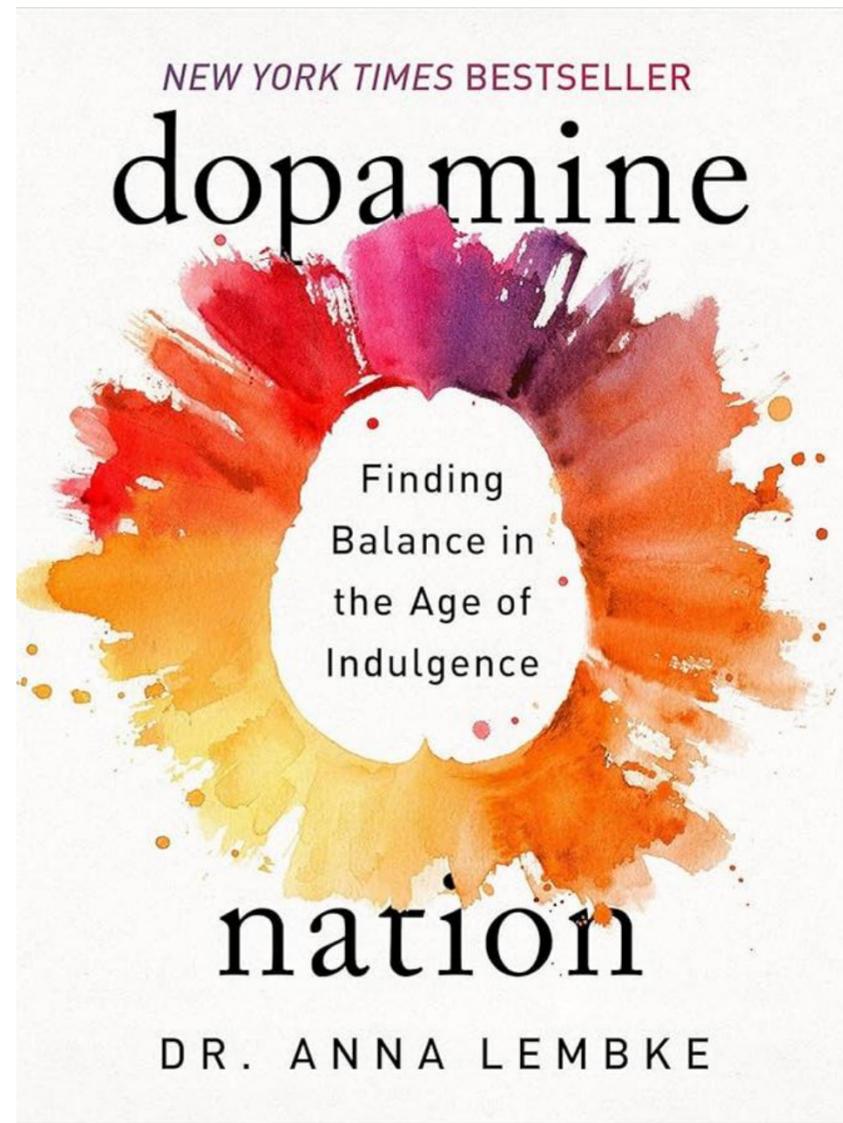
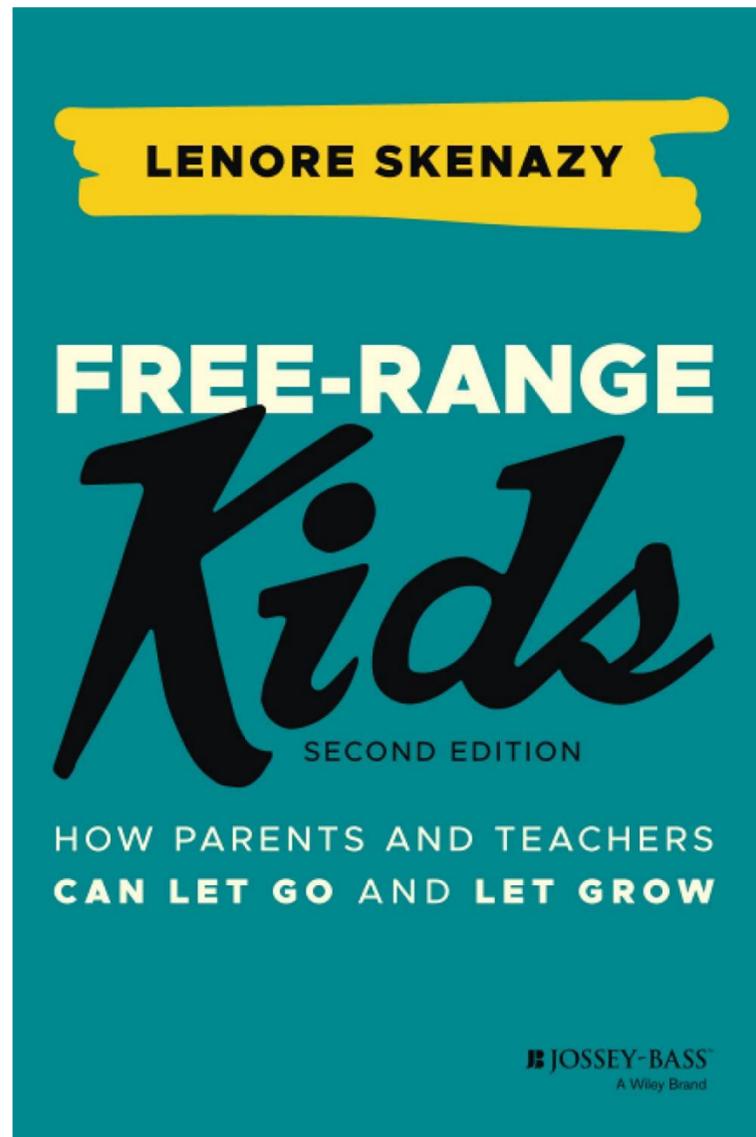
CRIME

500 children a day were mugged in 2020 in the UK, almost all for smartphones

*We have overprotected our
children in the real world while
under protecting 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 safe online

Top Tips from a Cyber Security Expert

1. No exposure to social media.
2. No exposure to anonymous online chat.
3. No use of technology in private areas of the home - public areas only (no bedrooms & no bathrooms)
4. Before you give a smartphone you must educate about the safeguarding risks (sextortion, sexting, grooming)
5. No unsupervised use of youtube.

Young adolescents

“

Everyone
else in my
class has
a phone...

Delay the smartphone

Or consider a smartphone without the internet or a basic phone.

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 thing differently

We live in a digital age, children
need to be able to use technology...



Yes, but now we are aware of the harms we
can take a precautionary approach and
introduce later and with safeguards

But my child needs a smartphone for
train tickets and bus tickets...



You can still buy tickets in person

I need a smartphone to track my child...



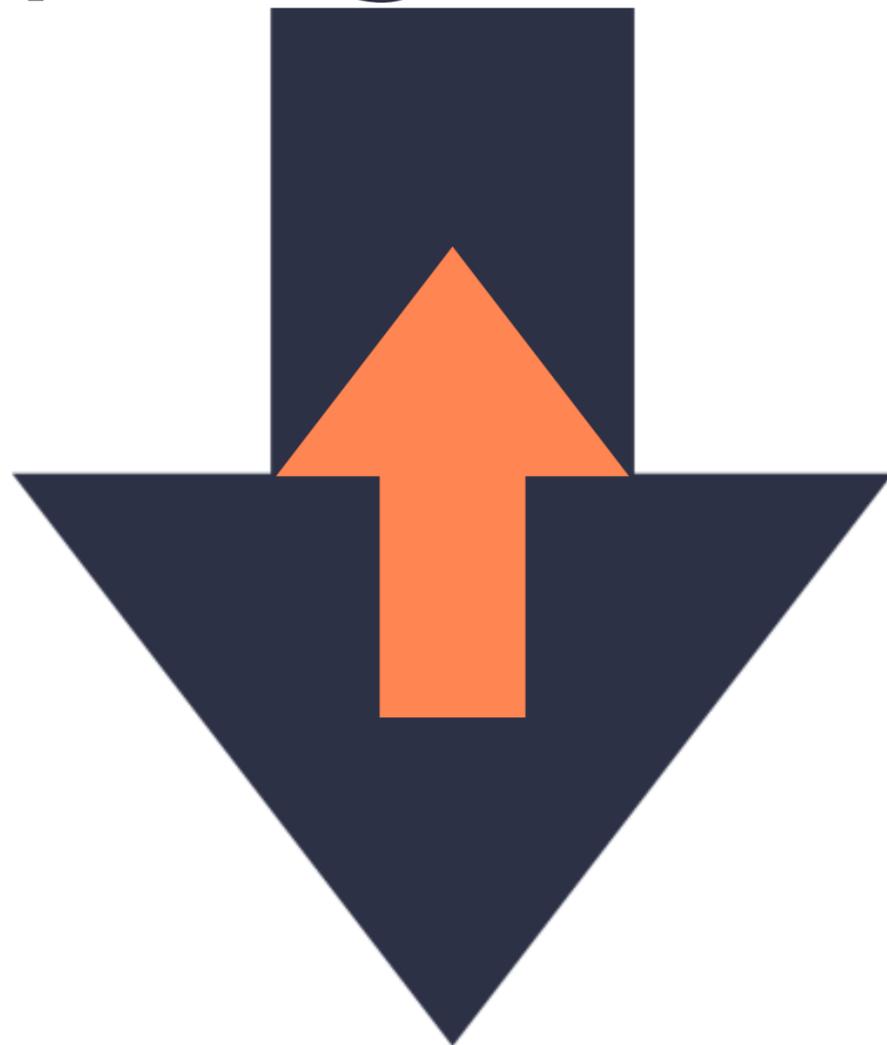
You can use an air tag (or similar)
to track your child

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



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

Step wise progression



01. Delay the first phone.
Consider a basic phone first.

02. 14+ Consider a smartphone
phone with strict controls.

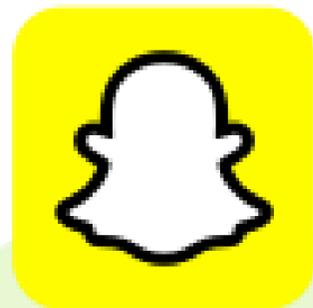
03. 16+ A cautious trial of selected
social media with private
settings and time limits.

04. Greater responsibility
and freedom online.

AGE APPROPRIATE APPS



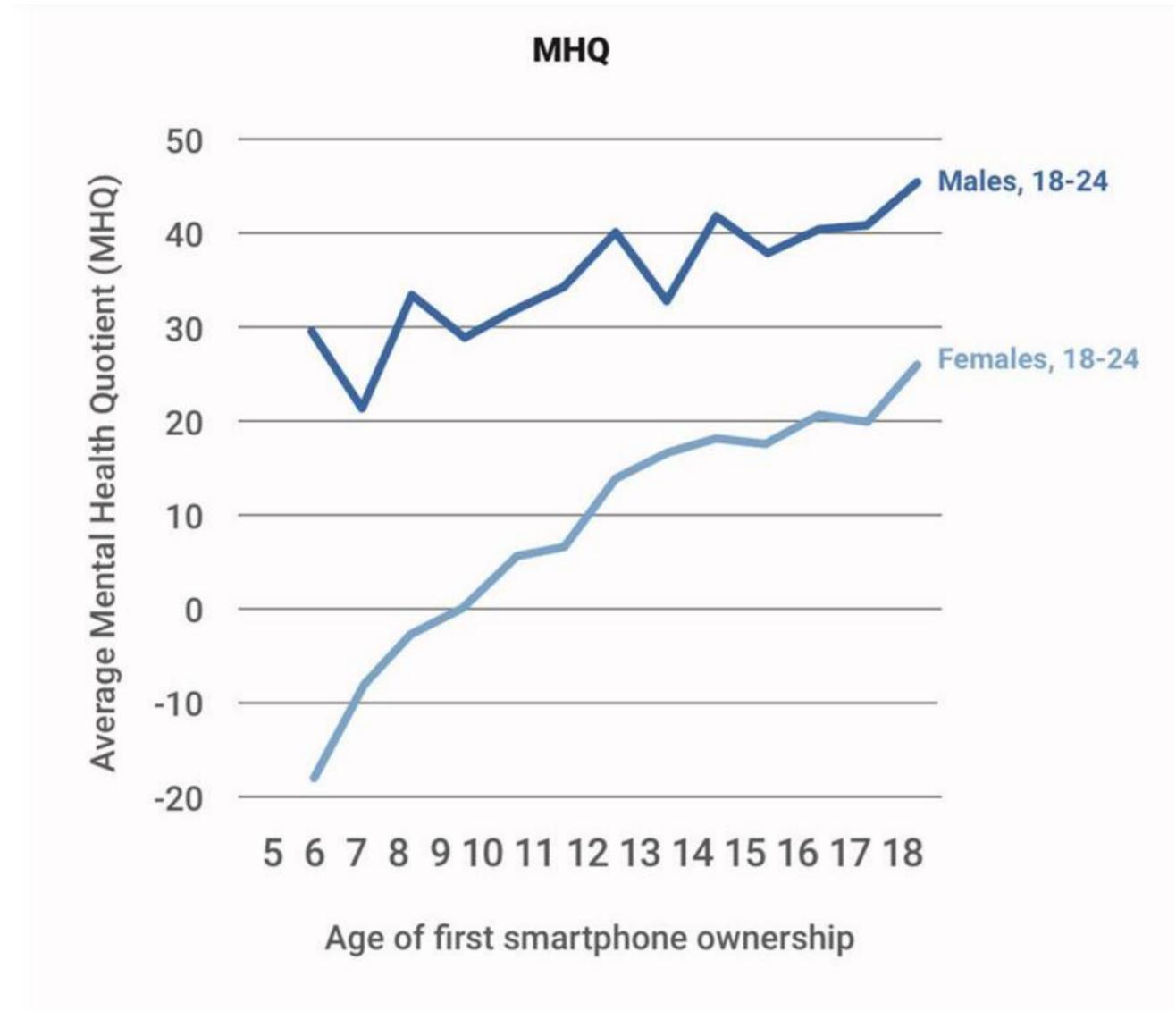
What is the age limit
for social media apps?



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

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

C.S. LEWIS

These slides have been produced in collaboration and with resources provided by Smartphone free childhood and PAPAYA Talks.

For more information about PAPAYA Talks please use the [link](#):

For more information about Smartphone Free Childhood please click the [link](#).

The logo for PAPAYA Talks, featuring the word "PAPAYA" in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font inside an orange speech bubble shape. The background of the slide is a collage of light green, orange, and purple geometric shapes, with a faint image of a woman speaking at a podium in the bottom left corner.

PAPAYA

The logo for Smartphone Free Childhood, featuring a green circular icon with a white lightning bolt inside, followed by the text "SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD" in a bold, green, sans-serif font. The background is a solid light green color.

**SMARTPHONE
FREE CHILDHOOD**