

PAPAYA

Let's talk about our kids and their tech

KATE MEZGER

Choosing a different path for your family

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

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

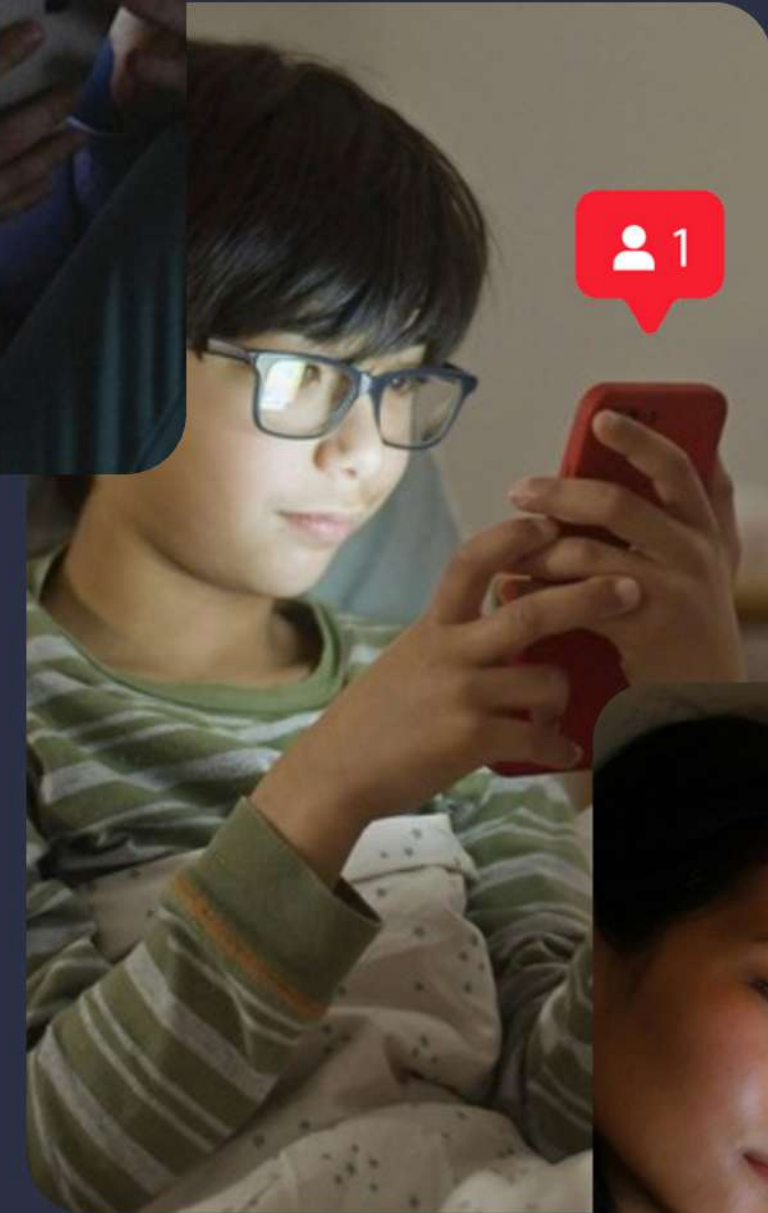
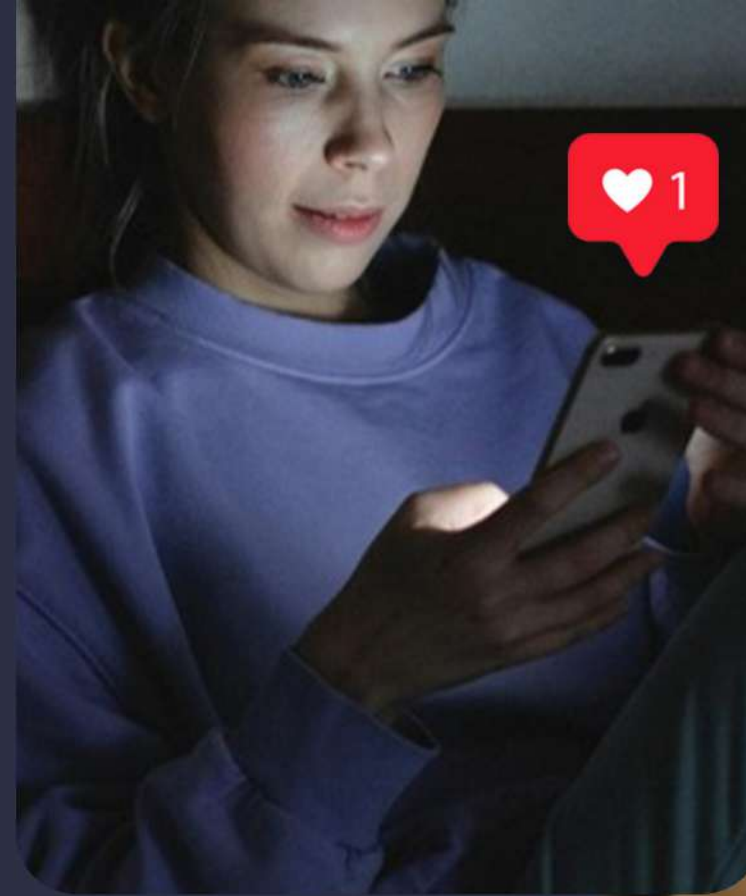
*Ofcom 2025

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.

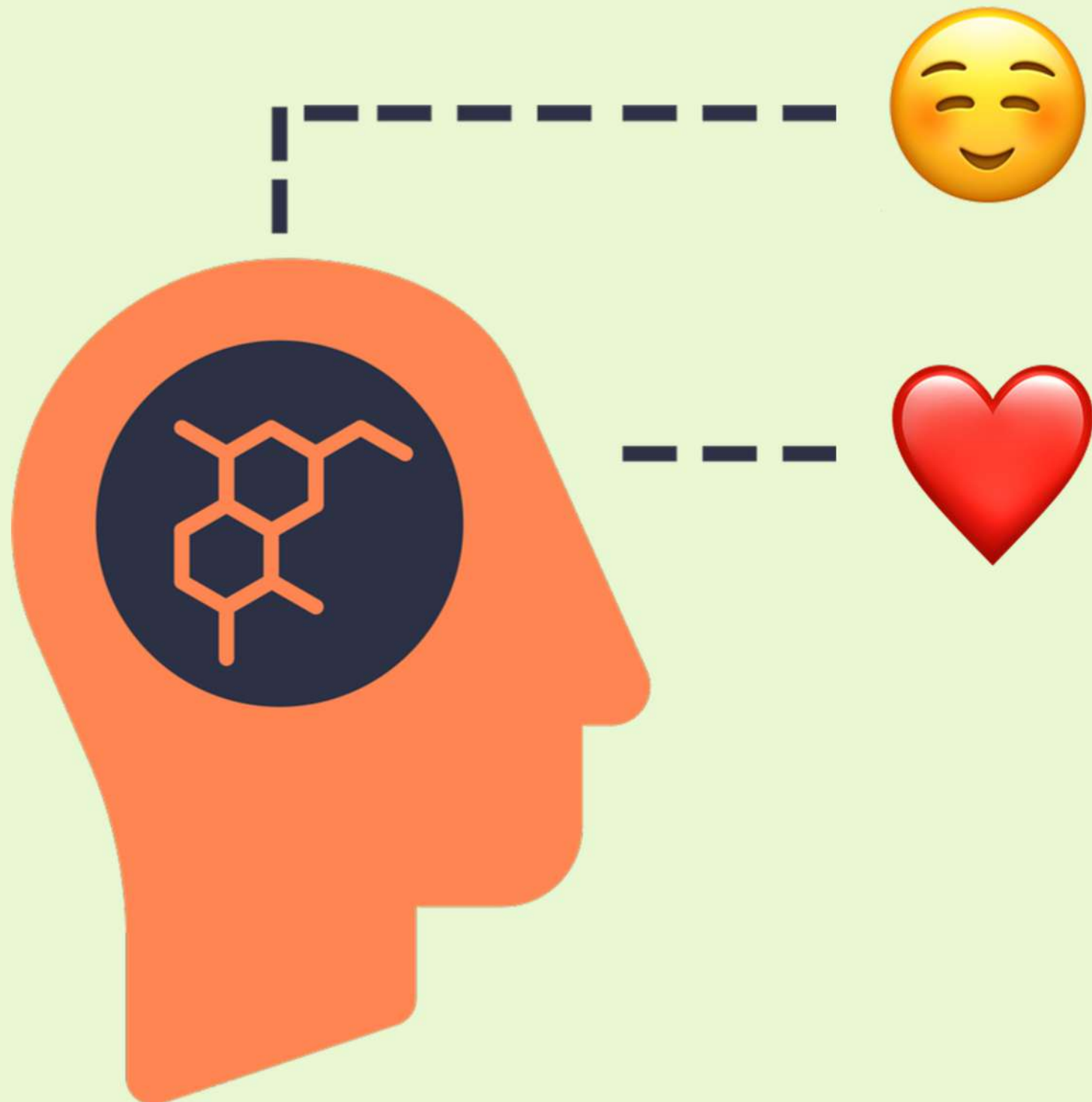
Persuasive design

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 akin to involuntary hypnotism.



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



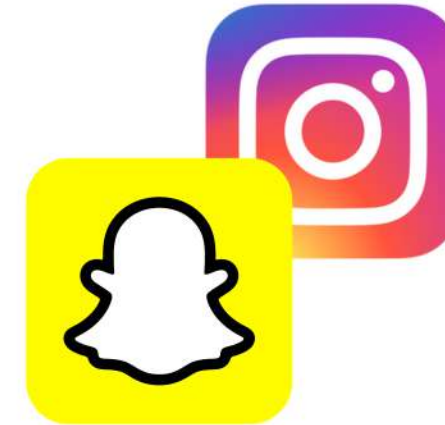
The iPhone 'touch screen'

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

Reuters
Oct. 5, 2021

Frances Haugen

Former Facebook product manager

used to work at facebook

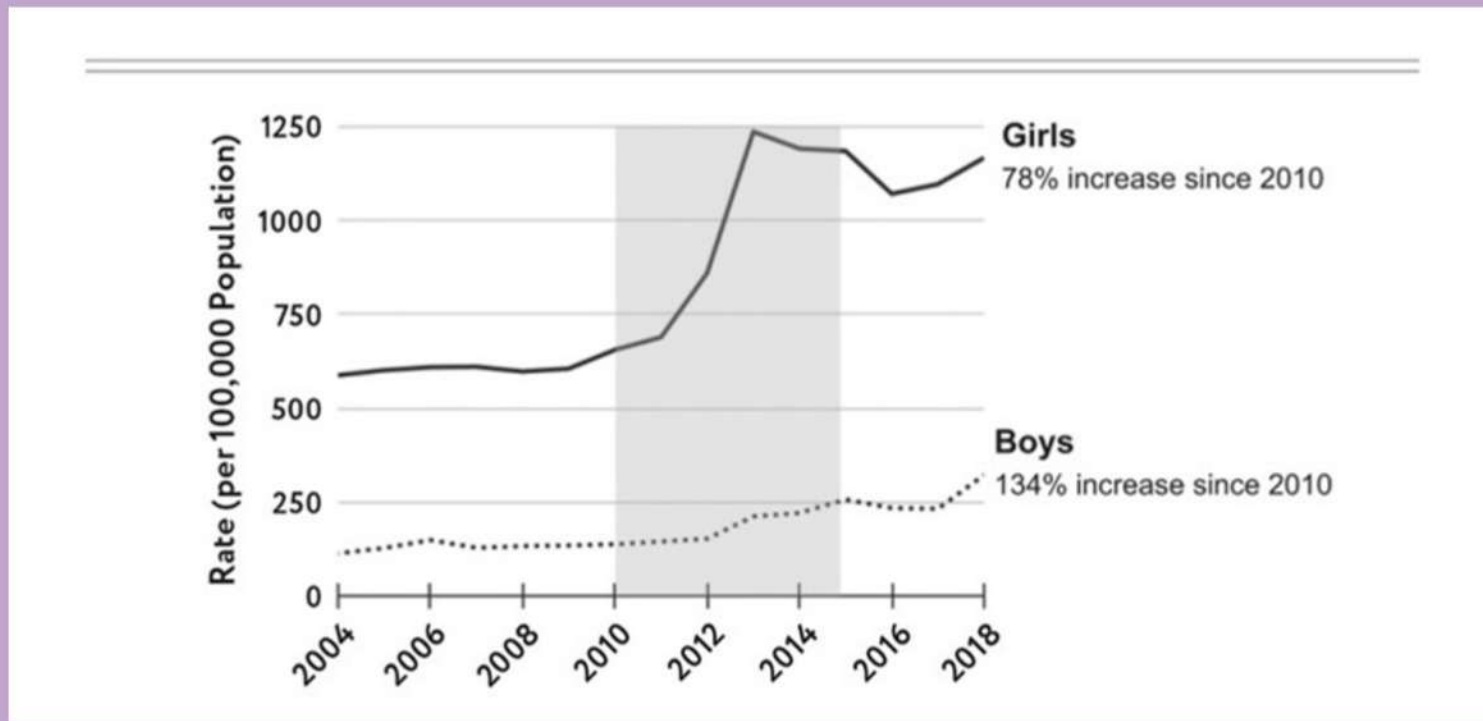


Children with Problematic Smartphone Usage (PSU) are twice as likely to experience anxiety and three times as likely to experience depression compared to children without PSU.

*King's College London, 2024

Mental health

Self Harm in UK teens



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%

We have overprotected our children in the real world while underprotecting them online

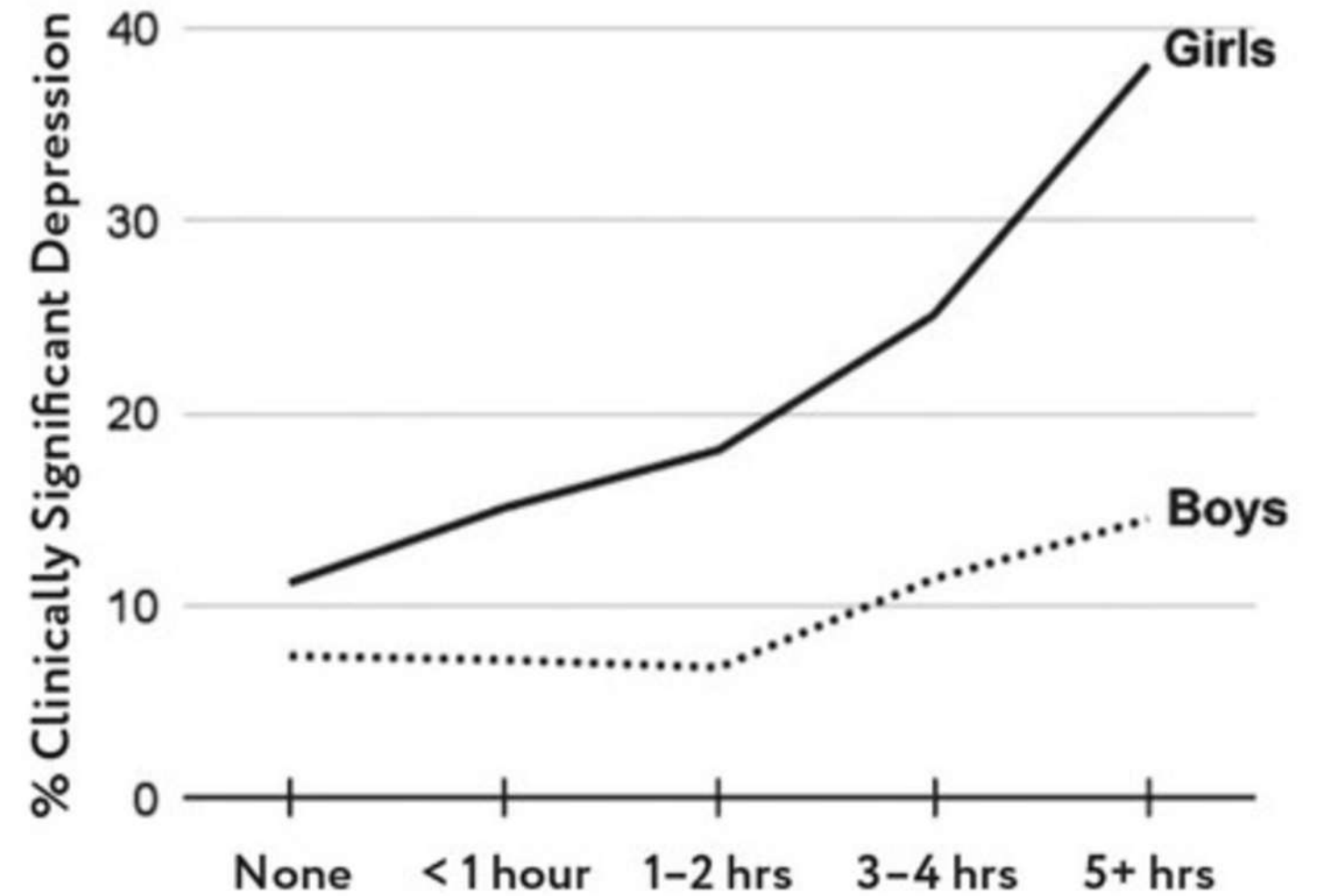
JONATHAN HAIDT



Mental health



Depression and social media use, UK



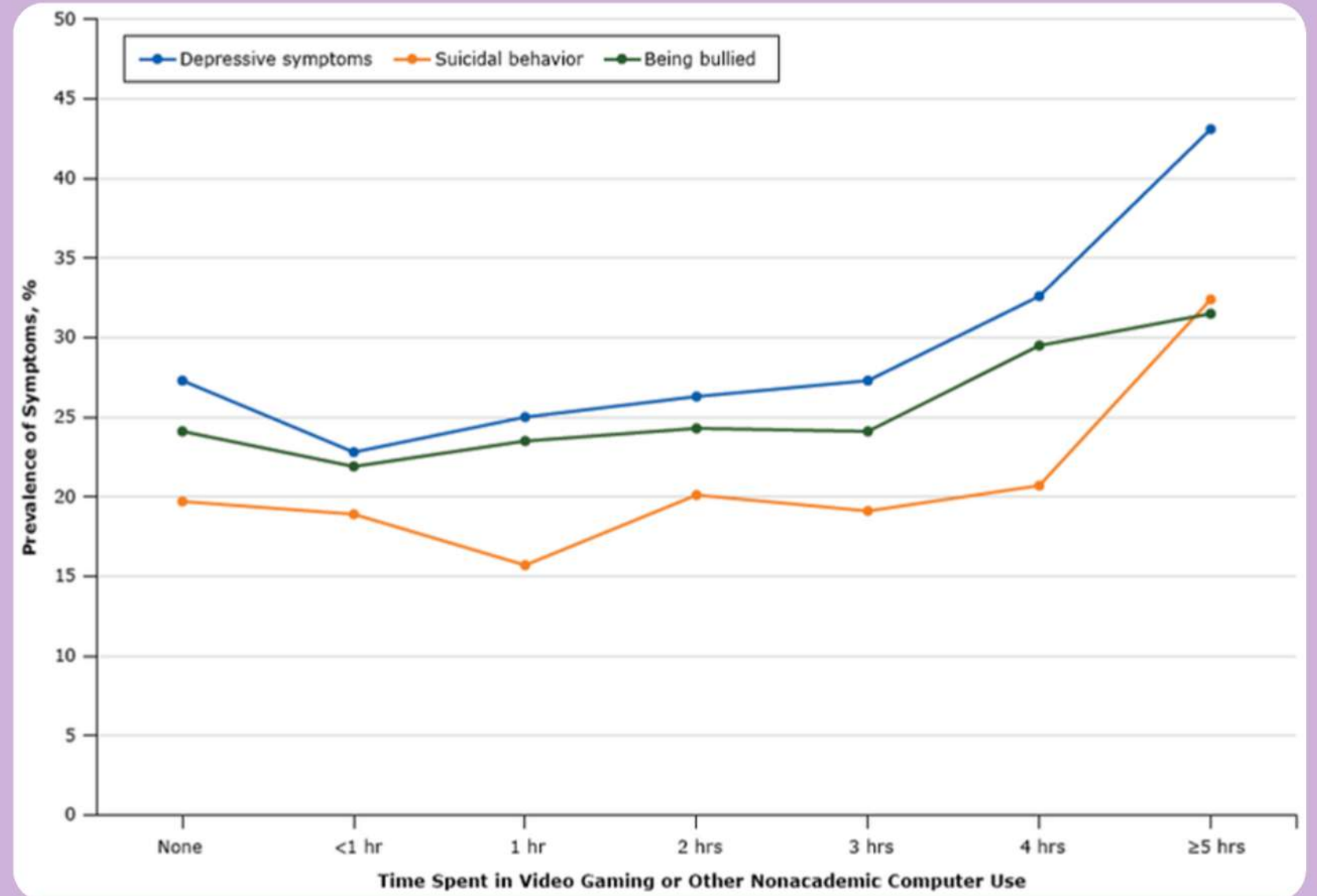
MILLENNIUM COHORT STUDY

Figure from The Anxious Generation, Jonathan Haidt

Mental health



Depression and 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



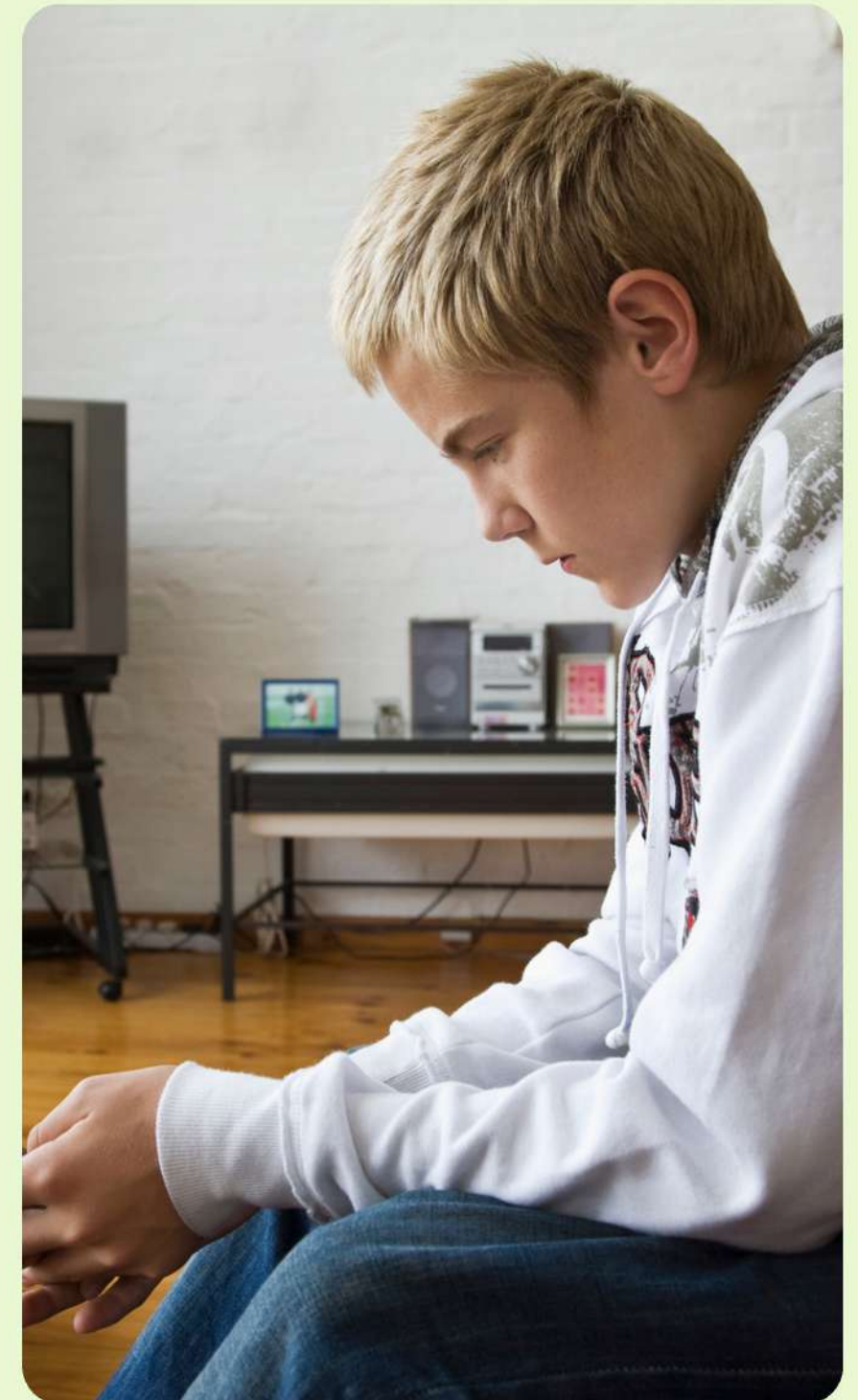
Opportunity costs, loss of other interests and sleep



Pornography



Gaming



Self-esteem



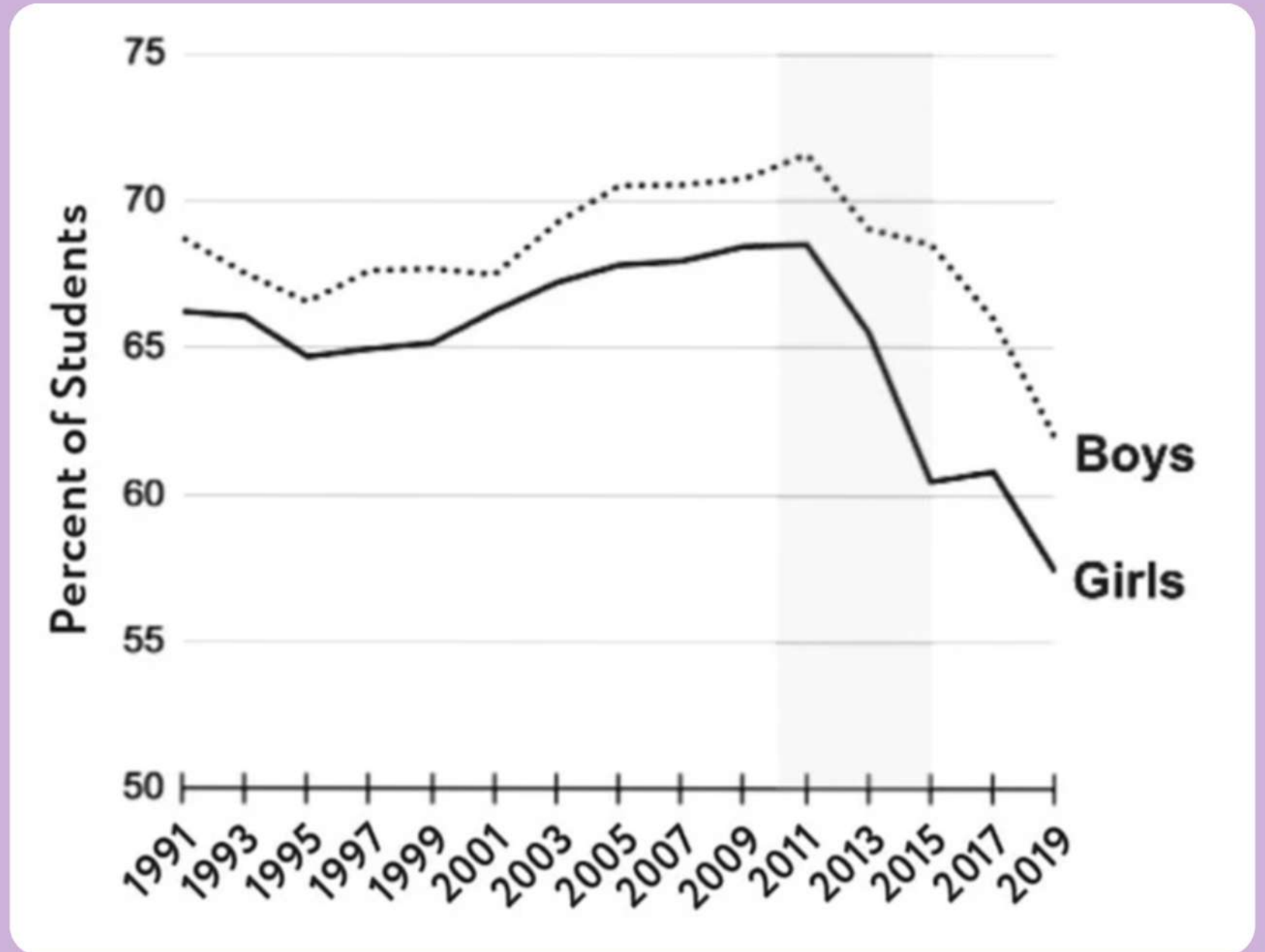
Comparison

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

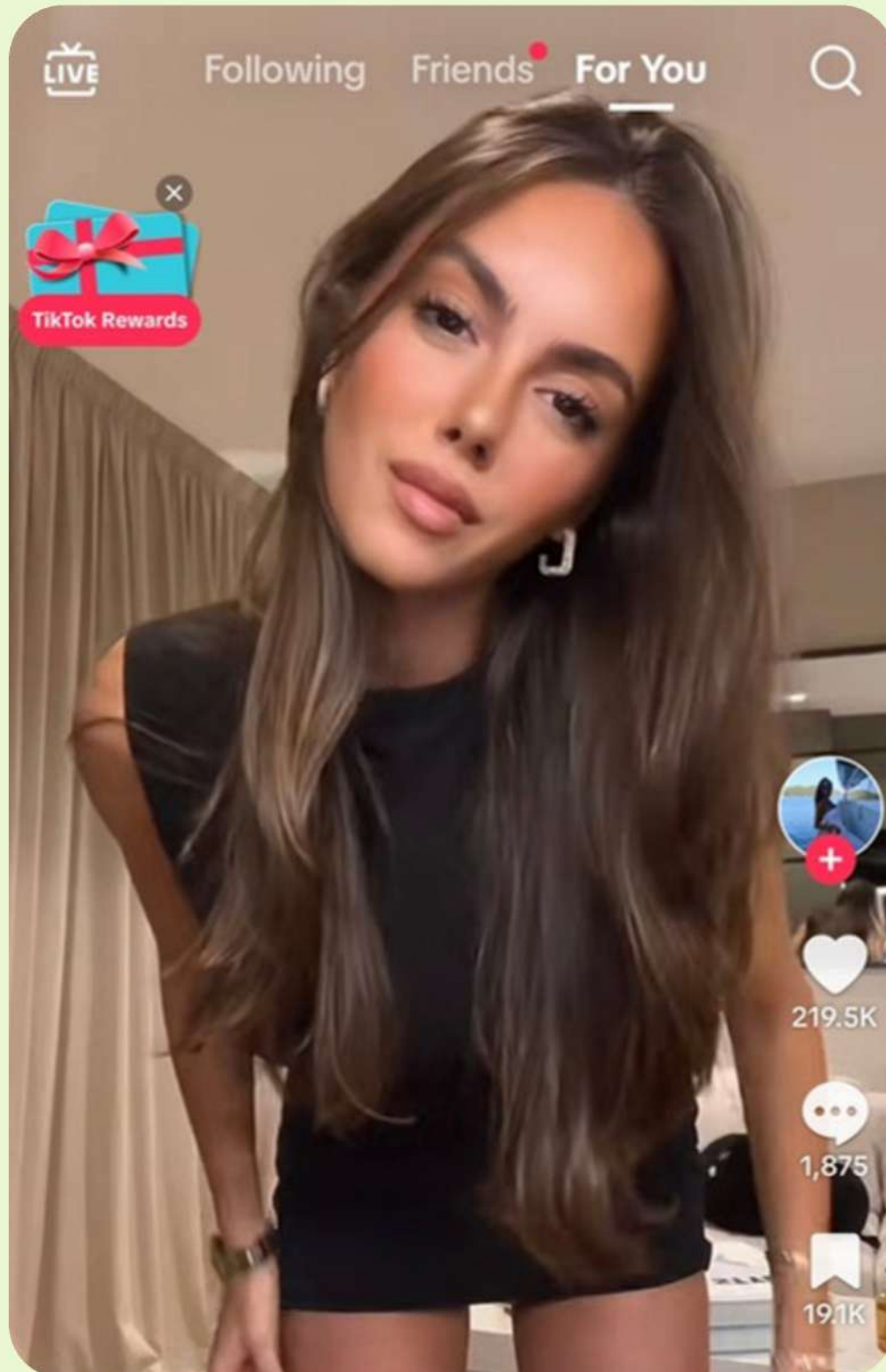


13-17 year olds
are the loneliest group
in society.

1 in 5 teens
report feeling lonely, with
significant negative
impacts on health,
education and well-being.

*WHO, From loneliness to social connection:
charting a path to healthier societies 2025

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

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

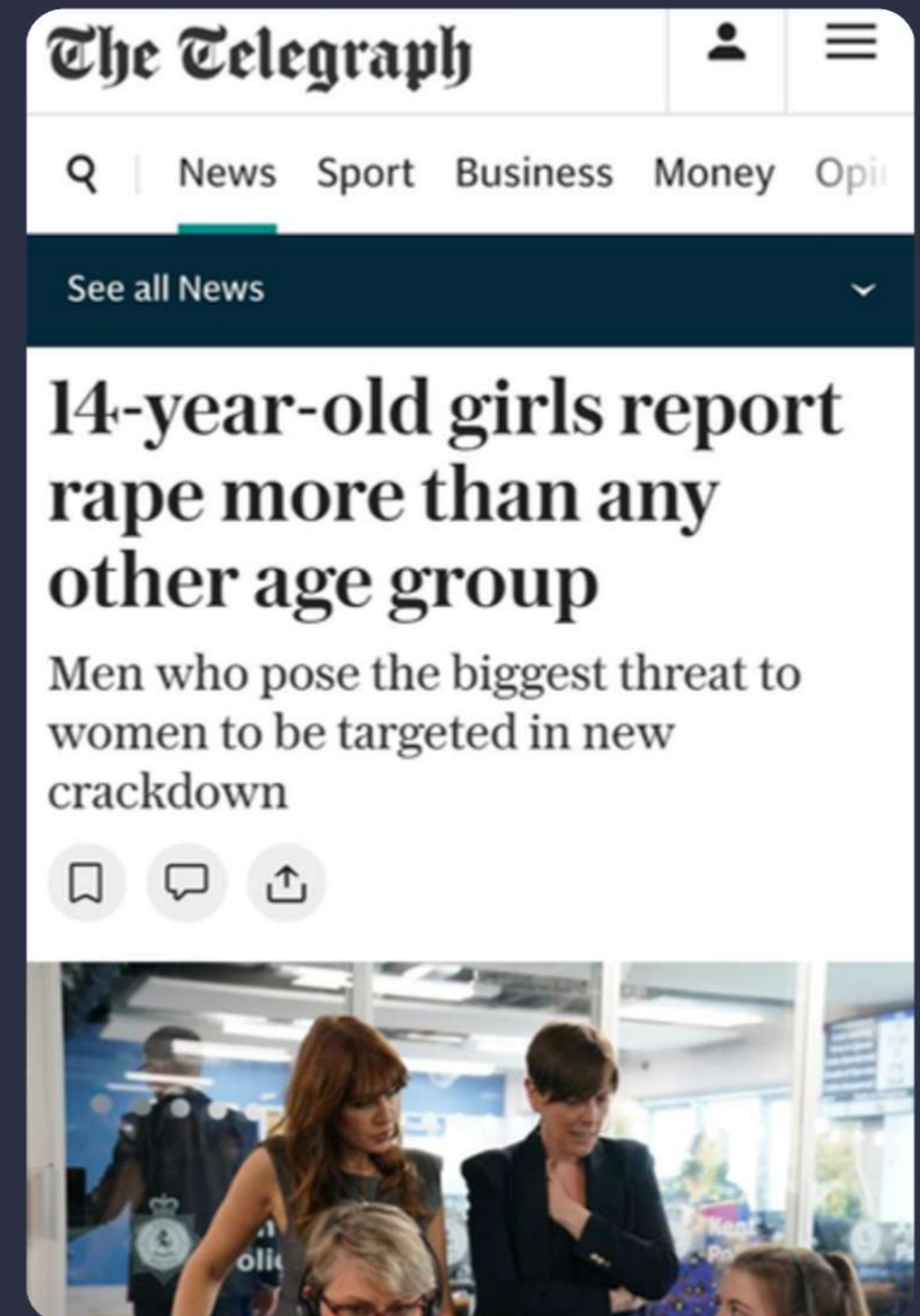
94% of children are exposed to porn by 14.

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:

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

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

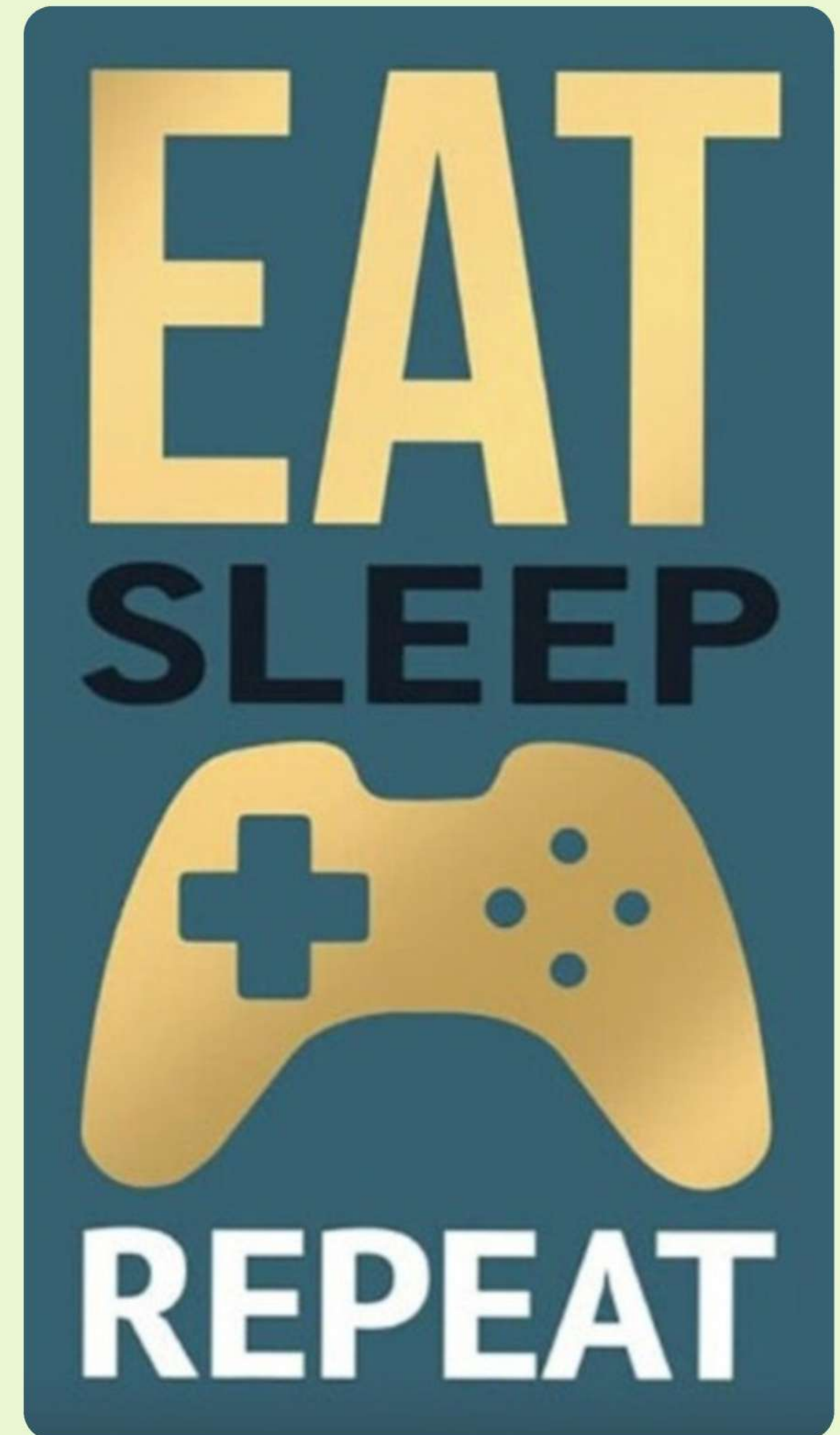
Uswitch 2024

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.



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

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

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

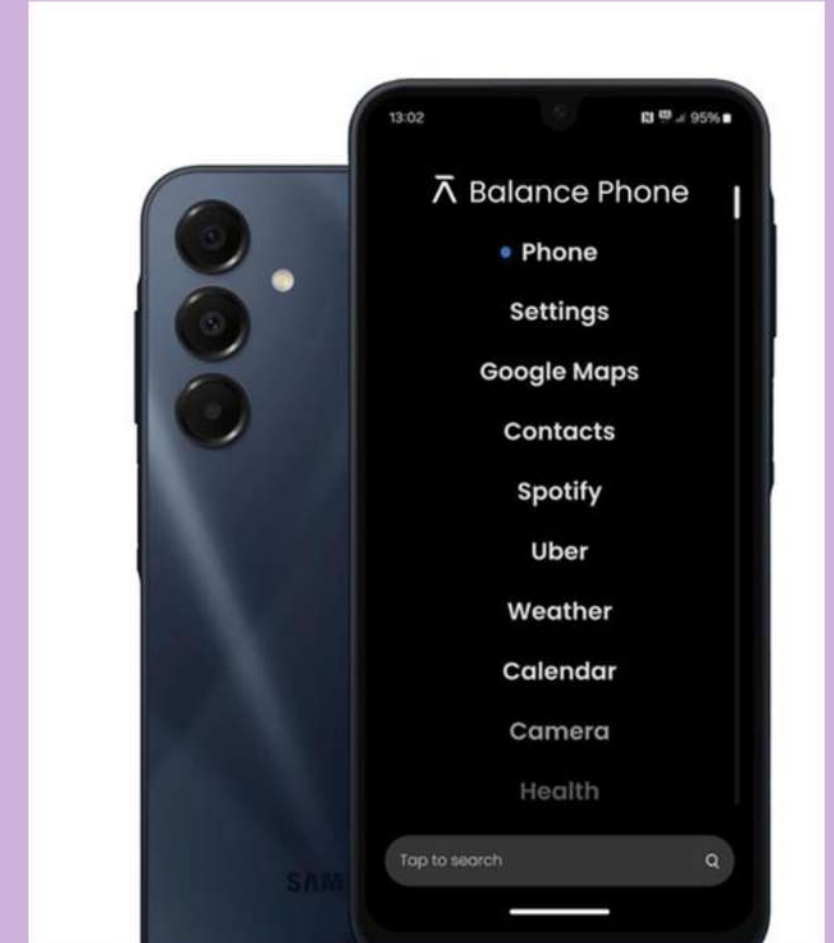
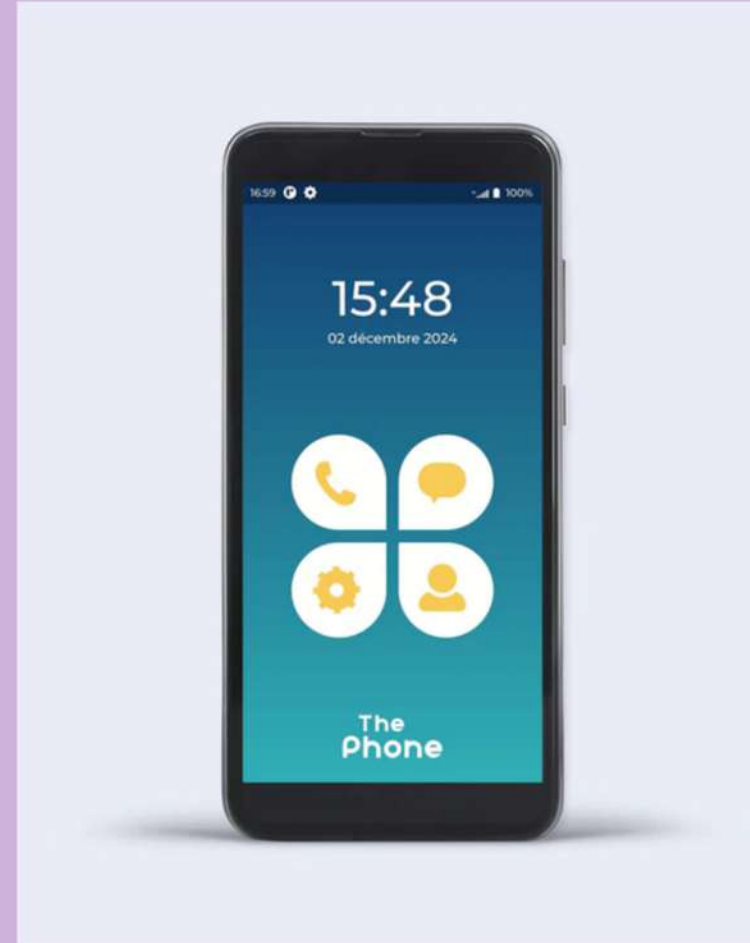
Can't we just use a stripped back
iPhone with parental controls?



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

Basic phones allow children to connect with others via text and calls

New models coming soon



Alternatives

Under 14's

The Phone

Nokia 215

Xplora XG03

Karri Messenger

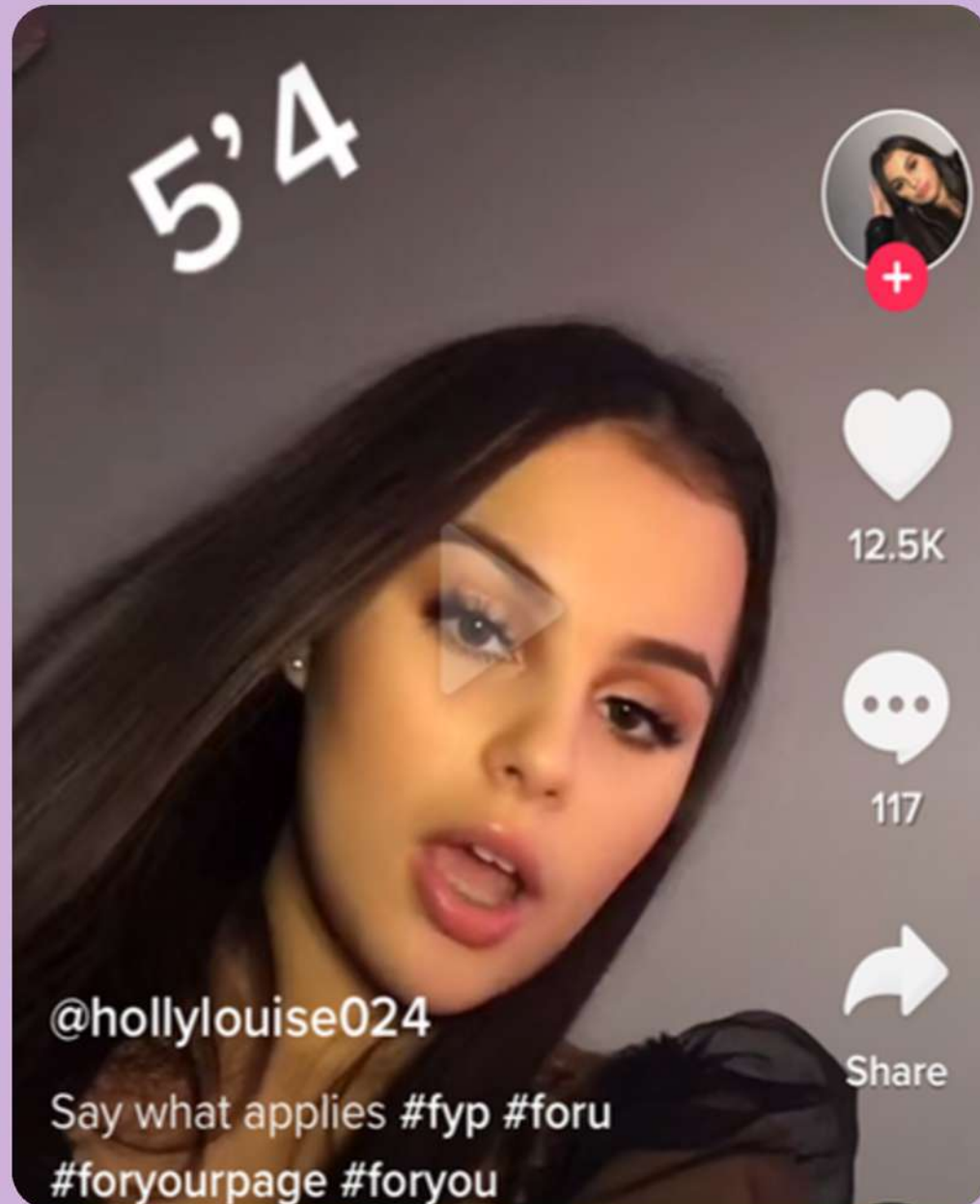
Over 14's

Balance Phone

Pinwheel Phone

HMD Fusion X1

Top tips: Reduce exposure



Delay apps & screentime limits

Set app limits and schedule downtime.
Use Do Not Disturb mode.
Try the Forest app.

Reduce distraction

Turn it off and keep it out of sight.
Reduce push notifications, delete or hide
distracting apps.

Create screen-free spaces

Keep all internet-connected devices out of
bedrooms.
Don't use during meal times.

Top tips: Preventative Action



Control downloads & apps

Control software and app downloads with a password.

Block adult content

Watch our for VPNs

Parental Control Software

Use parental control software

Parental Control Software

The screenshot displays two pricing options for Papaya parental control software. The 'BASIC' plan is priced at £39.95/year (equivalent to £3.33/month) and includes features like games & apps blocking, daily time limits, web filtering, location monitoring, and pausing internet access. The 'COMPLETE' plan, marked as 'MOST POPULAR', is priced at £69.95/year (equivalent to £5.83/month) and includes all the features of the basic plan plus AI-powered alerts, social monitoring, custom routines, app insights, games & apps time limits, calls & messages monitoring, and unlimited devices.

Plan	Price	Features
BASIC	£39.95/year (SAME AS £3.33/MONTH)	Games & apps blocking, Daily time limits, Web filtering, Location monitoring, Pause internet access
COMPLETE (MOST POPULAR)	£69.95/year (SAME AS £5.83/MONTH)	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*

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.



AGE APPROPRIATE APPS



What is the age limit for social media apps?



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.

We have the power



The more of you that decide something, whether that's delaying or which apps to allow, the easier it becomes.

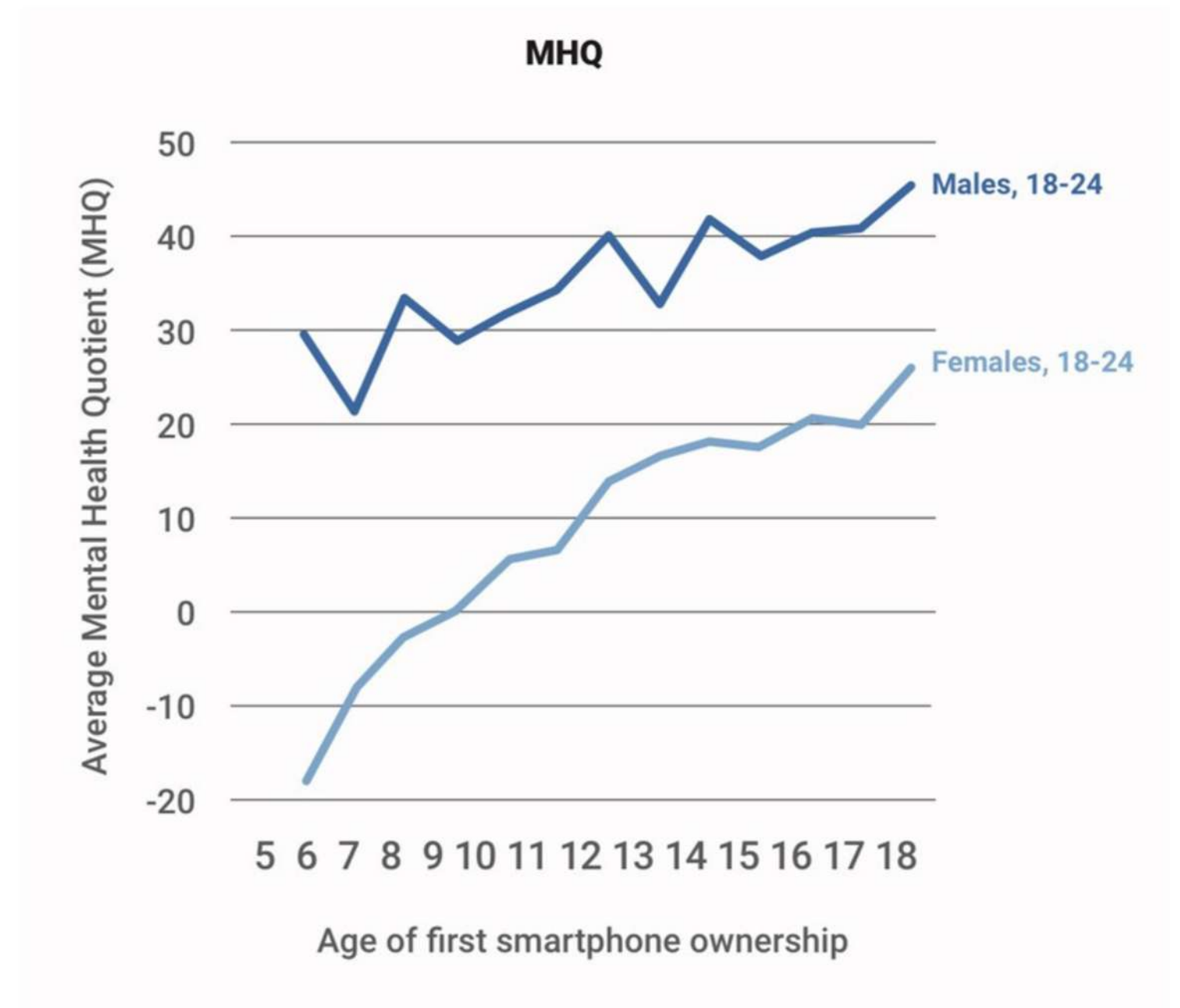
When a minority group pushing change was below 25% of the total group, its efforts failed.

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.

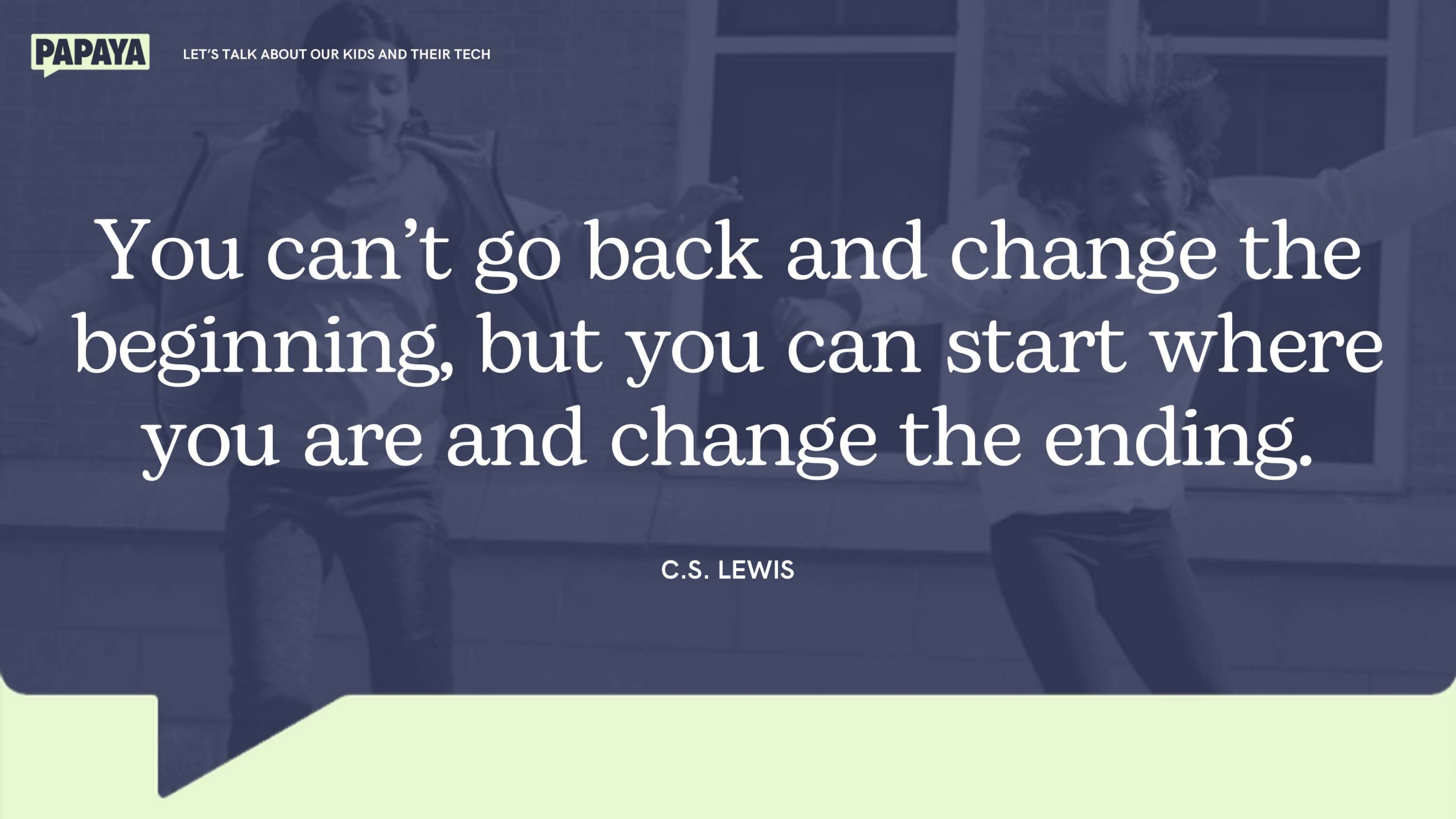
Mental health

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 dark, semi-transparent background image showing a woman on the left and a child on the right, both looking at a tablet or smartphone. The woman is holding the device, and the child is pointing at the screen.

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

C.S. LEWIS

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



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?'

If your child has a phone

01.

Talk to your child and other parents

02.

Keep devices out of bedrooms at night

03.

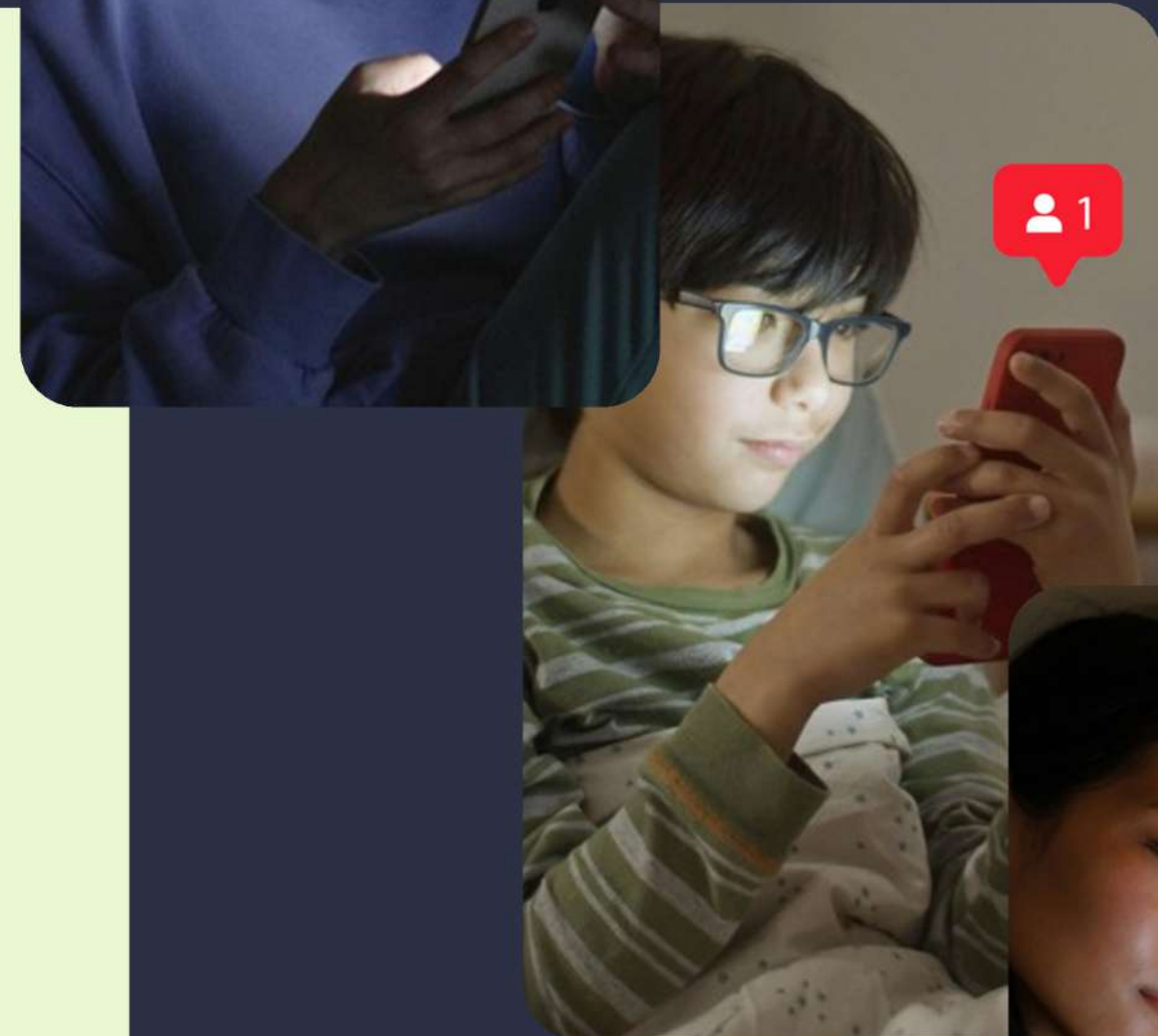
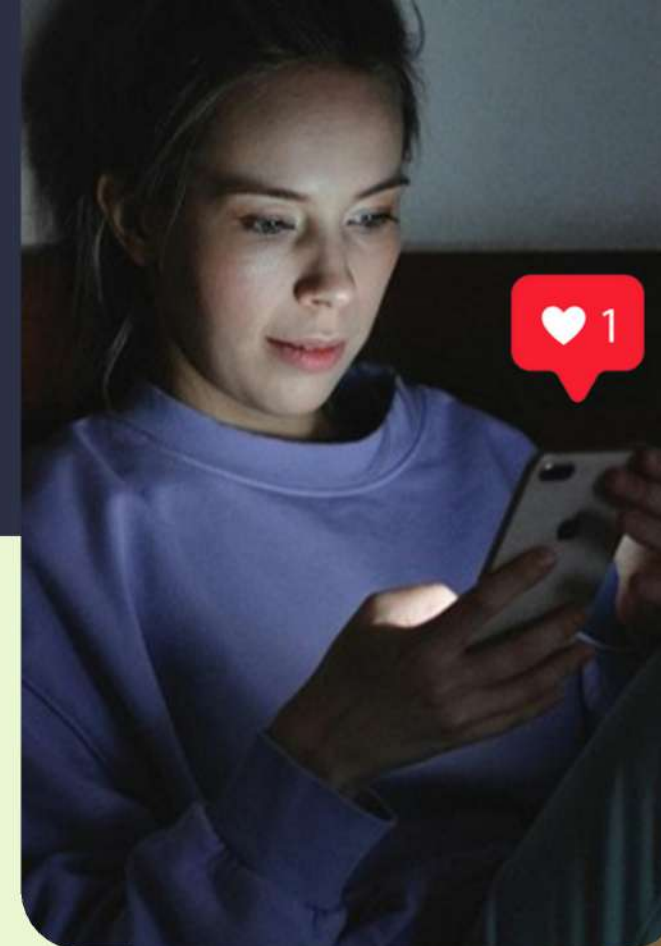
Use filters and parental control apps

04.

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

05.

Consider changing your mind....



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.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

smartphonefreechildhood.org

teched-off.com

healthprofessionalsforsaferscreens.org



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

smartphonefreerating.org

Reflect

What access do you want the internet to have to your child?

What age do you think (play based) childhood should end?

