

3 KEY RISK THEMES	Mental Health 	1 in 5 bullied online + no respite from bullies with 'always on' tech - Extreme content desensitises and miseducates - Addictive social media, gaming & video 'shorts' hack our dopamine reward path but don't satisfy. Social media constant comparison = unhappiness, influencers & behavioural adverts target low self esteem
	Predatory Risk 	- UK Police stats show Snapchat and Meta platforms as most used for grooming 8-10 age group = fastest growing group for online child sexual abuse material - Boys particularly vulnerable to joining predatory groups especially via online gaming communities (e.g. Discord)
	Opportunity Costs 	- Losing equivalent of a night's sleep per week = significant impact to learning 'Always-on' stress and notification bombardment impact ability to concentrate and focus on tasks. Shorts/Reels reduce attention span - Reduced 'in real life' interaction hinders development of emotional intelligence and adventurous play (learning about risk). AI automation = need for more human skills

The most effective risk prevention strategy is to reduce exposure by delaying smartphones, social media and gaming with strangers

This is a hard path to follow on your own. Join forces with others to help shift these risks to an older age (14+), where increasing maturity significantly lowers the risk to your child.

1. Talk to your child. See www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/resource/how-should-i-talk-to-my-child-about-smartphones & Talk to other parents (this is your superpower)
2. Join your local WhatsApp group: www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/find-your-community
3. Sign the Parent Pact: www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/parent-pact



If your child already has a smartphone, social media and/or games with strangers:

1. Talk to your child and other parents about the issues
2. Explore collective ways to reduce screen use and harmful apps (e.g. tech curfews, agree on what apps to avoid)
3. Check that devices and apps are setup safe and continue to be safe (see Top Tips for your Tech)
4. Consider changing your mind - some apps, services, specific features or even the tech itself might be worth removing

Resources for children to explore:



- **Book (8-12 yrs) The Amazing Generation** by Jonathan Haidt & Catherine Price (An invitation to be rebels)
- **Book (12+) The Healthy Selfie** by Dr Susie Davies (Practical guide for teens in the digital age)
- **YouTube/TedX (12+) The Battle For Your Time** by Dino Ambrosi (Exposing the cost of social media)
- **TV (12+) C4: Swiped** (UK Documentary about a school and the impact of smartphones)

Further info for you:

- smartphonefreechildhood.org Explore the problem, the evidence and solutions, join the movement
- humanetech.com Explore societal issues around Social Media and AI by tech experts
- healthprofessionalsforsaferscreens.org Medically backed info by UK Health professionals
- afterbabel.com Jonathan Haidt's Substack that responds to new evidence and developments



- **The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt** US Social Psychologist's book that started a movement
- **Careless People by Sarah Wynn Williams** Former Facebook director reveals why tech is failing our kids.

- **YouTube: A Stolen Childhood** UK Short film exploring mental health impacts by charity Nip in the Bud
- **Netflix: The Social Dilemma** US Documentary looking at addictive by design tech by tech experts



Top Tips for your Tech

1: Reduce Exposure

- Keep internet-connected devices out of bedrooms at night (buy your kids an alarm clock).
- Setup time limits, schedule downtime and encourage the use of 'Do not Disturb' mode. The Forest App is a good example of gamifying 'focus' modes.
- Reduce distraction by removing all but necessary 'push' notifications. Delete or hide distracting apps. Add a flip cover. Switch on greyscale. Turn devices off or leave them in another room.
- Avoid devices during meals and family time, and discourage multi-screening.



2: Control Installs & Setup Safe

- Control all downloads of software and apps. Use a different password to the device, and regularly change it - your child is highly motivated to get hold of this password and will succeed. Watch out for apps/software that are designed to disguise usage, or those that allow workarounds to parental controls and filters e.g. VPNs & Relays.
- Research the app or software that your child wants you to download, so that you know what it does, whether it is appropriate and how to set it up safely.
- Use sites like www.internetmatters.org for step by step guides on setup; teched-off.com has helpful video guides.
- Key settings to look out for: Turning up privacy settings to max (private profile and no to 'personalised recommendations/adverts'); no to contact with strangers; no to location; explicit/adult material off.
- Add in explicit/adult web filtering with your broadband provider & data plans that your child has access to.

3: Monitor & Review

- Review screen use data with your child (Apple Screen Time; Android Digital Wellbeing). Review time spent, notifications and pick-ups. Identify opportunities to improve. Consider incentivisation / gamification.
- Parental Controls can be helpful but are not a substitute for talking. They need to be configured and kept up-to-date, and you need to understand their limitations (e.g. what it can/can't block, what it can/can't see).
- Keep apps & devices updated to ensure parental controls/settings continue to work.



4: Keep Talking

- Cover key issues around mental health and online harms (Dr. Susie Davies - The Healthy Selfie book for 12+).
- Regularly let them know where else they can go for help - You, Teachers, Childline <https://www.childline.org.uk>, and CEOP Police www.ceop.police.uk
- Encourage your child to look out for their friends - they are likely to be the first to notice if something isn't right and should be encouraged to seek help on their behalf.

5: If something does go wrong

- Avoid blame, treat as a learning opportunity - you need your kids to know they can keep coming to you.
- Spot the signs: withdrawal from real world relationships; harmful content algorithmically pushed into their feeds; stranger contact; suicide ideation and self-harm; radicalisation.



• Get Help

- Speak to a **safeguarding officer** at school or club
- **CEOP Police**: Report online sexual abuse on behalf of a victim: www.ceop.police.uk
- **IWF**: Anonymously report any online child sexual abuse material: www.iwf.org.uk/en/uk-report
- **Report Harmful Content**: Although currently limited in ability to escalate reports, it still provides good guidance on where to go and what to do: www.reportharmfulcontent.com
- **NSPCC/Childline**: Lots of support resources for parents (childline for kids) www.nspcc.org.uk
- **ActionFraud**: UK Police reporting Cybercrime and fraud: www.actionfraud.police.uk