

SCREEN smart



What age should you let your child get a smartphone?

At whatever age you want their childhood to end.

Experts are realizing that when children get a smartphone, it changes their lives forever. They play less, sleep less, and become more anxious and depressed—to name just a few of the changes.

This shift from a “play-based childhood” to a “phone-based childhood” has led to an adolescent mental health crisis. Anxiety and depression rates have surged, and self-harm and suicidal ideations have increased.

But the situation is not hopeless. As a parent, you can make a difference. Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist and author of *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, is one of the most influential voices in the conversation about how smartphones affect kids and teens. He offers the following recommendations as a starting point for parents:

1| Delay giving your child a smartphone or “smart” device.

Let your child get past the vulnerable years of puberty before they are exposed to powerful socializing agents like TikTok and Instagram. **A growing number of parents are choosing to give their children a basic “dumb” phone or smartwatch that allows calls and texts but avoids full internet access.** Talk to other parents and encourage them to delay smartphones too.



The more parents who do this in your community, the better. If you give your child a basic phone but their peers all have smartphones, your child is certain to plead, "But all my friends have smartphones!" As much as possible, coordinate with other parents to normalize basic phones in childhood.

2| Learn how to use parental controls and content filters.

Someday your child will have to learn to navigate the internet without controls and filters, but that day is not today.

Children under the age of 18 need a parent's help to avoid the tricks that tech companies use to hook kids and lure them into

constant scrolling and staring at screens. The frontal cortex of a child's brain isn't up to the task, so help them by setting parameters on what they can see and for how long.



3| Create compelling real-world experiences.

Help your child and their friends have adventures away from screens. **Try activities such as**

hiking, mountain biking, backpacking, rock climbing, swimming, canoeing, etc.

Choose activities that inspire a sense of excitement, wonder, and competence. These experiences help kids feel more confident and more connected to people and the real world. As the saying goes, "Do more things that make you forget about checking your phone."



LEARN MORE
ABOUT WHAT
YOU CAN DO
AS A PARENT

For specific recommendations and additional ideas, visit **Jonathan Haidt's website, anxiousgeneration.com**. He shares detailed information about how to incorporate these and other suggestions into homes, schools, and communities.