

WHY IS EVERYONE TALKING ABOUT KIDS ON SMARTPHONES?

THE AVERAGE
12 YEAR OLD
SPENDS 29 HOURS
A WEEK ON THEIR
SMARTPHONE

THAT
EQUATES TO
2 MONTHS
OF THE YEAR

You may have heard people talking about whether children should have smartphones or whether there should be an age limit on this.



HEALTH PROFESSIONALS FOR SAFER SCREENS



VISIT HPFSS

As a society we got this wrong and we're sorry. We didn't know the harm smartphones and internet-connected devices were going to cause children and young people. Now we do and we cannot ignore it. Your parent may have previously given you a smartphone but now we need to think about how to keep you safe whilst using it. You may be upset for a while but hopefully the information in this leaflet that has been put together by a group of doctors, nurses and psychologists will reassure you. We want to give you your childhood back.

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

We know schools and parents have told you about some of the issues you can have using the internet.

The years from age 8-16 are hugely important as your brain is busy rewiring, changing from what you need to be able to do as a child into how it needs to be able to function as an adult. Things like having good relationships with family, friends and at work and being able to make good decisions. It needs to work out which nerve pathways to make stronger and for this it needs real world experiences, not virtual ones.

Having access to the internet and in particular social media can cause problems for some children. This is not the fault of the kids, it is a failure of the adults in charge of technology companies to make sure the internet is a safe 'playground' for you. We know children don't go looking for a lot of the inappropriate stuff they are seeing, it just gets served up to you. This is an unsafe environment to spend your time.

Children and young adults who have grown up using social media tell us these are some of the problems they have seen or experienced:



Cyberbullying, when someone picks on someone else online, often saying things they would not say face to face.

Coming across content like pictures, videos or information that really should only be seen by those over 18 years of age.

Being sent or being asked to send unwanted images, this can be naked or explicit pictures or videos as well as scary or violent ones and can come from people you know as well as some you don't.

Seeing unrealistically wonderful lives which make you feel like you are not good enough.

Being shown health hacks that can make your mental and physical health actually worse.

Lots of young adults now tell us they wish they had delayed having a smartphone and social media until they were older. We feel it is important to listen to these young people and share what they have to say with you.



5 'SUPERPOWER' BENEFITS OF BEING A SMARTPHONE FREE KID

- 1 Developing real life** social skills, which helps you develop in confidence.
- 2 Better mental health**, less time scrolling means less anxiety, less comparison and more joy.
- 3 Focused learning**. Smartphones lead to fractured attention. Without one you can think more clearly.
- 4 Proper sleep**. No doom scrolling before bed or overnight leads to a brighter mood, meaning you're more ready to take on the day.
- 5 More time**. The average UK teen spends 35 hours a week on their phone. You can have all this time back for play, friendships, creativity and discovery. Having time allows you to work out who you are without the internet or an algorithm telling you who you are.

YOUR TIME - YOU DECIDE HOW TO USE IT!

We know that 12 year olds in the UK who own a smartphone usually use it **4-5 hours a day which if you scale up the numbers means 29 hours a week, more than some adults work in a job!** This is the same as 2 months of a year - longer than the school holidays! This often surprises children and adults and makes us wonder what you would like to do if you had 2 extra months free a year - would you choose to spend it with family, friends, nailing your baskets or jump kicks, perfecting your dance routine or starting a band?

Social media is free to download onto a phone. This is not because the technology companies are being nice to us, it is because they make money out of us another way. The apps grab our attention and make it hard to ignore them by using notifications, likes and streaks. These keep pulling us back to an app.

Adults and children sometimes do not realise how long they have been on a smartphone as they get lost scrolling. Young people who found this happening to them describe it as 'brain rot' and when they stop they tell us they feel odd, have fuzzy heads and feel lost. Sometimes they feel angry but are not sure why. Young people are also telling us that watching lots of short videos means they find it difficult to concentrate on longer movies and school work. Setting limits on when and how you use social media means you remain in control.



THERE ARE OPTIONS



Whilst we wait for the adults in charge to try to work out the best way to keep the internet safe for kids, **you can chat with your family** about what you want to do together. There are lots of options and different ones work for different families.

Some families have decided to use a basic mobile phone. These are the original mobile phones that can make calls and texts and keep us in contact with who we want but cannot access the internet. They come in lots of colours and some have cool retro games on them! Even if you already have a smartphone, you and your family may decide to swap to a basic phone until you're older.

Remember that you may still encounter internet harms on other devices like tablets, laptops and via internet gaming. Some families are choosing to not allow social media yet. Social media includes apps like Snapchat, TikTok, X, WhatsApp, YouTube and gaming apps like Roblox as well as other messaging apps.

You may worry about missing out and not having the same as your friends - knowing why your family has made a decision and what the plans are in the future can help with this. We think having that extra time to be a kid without online pressures gives you something others are missing out on by getting lost in their devices. Not having to deal with the online dramas is also a bonus! Maybe your family can link up with another family making similar decisions to make it easier.



What should I do if I see something that concerns or worries me?

Turn it off,
look away,
tell someone

If you see something that concerns you this is not your fault.

It is very easy to be tricked by someone online and you will not be blamed at all for this. It is never too late to tell someone. Speaking out is hard sometimes so find an adult you trust or contact:

NSPCC on 0800 1111 or through their website www.nspcc.org.uk

Some children find that their experience online plays on their mind. This can sometimes result in feeling worried, feeling low, making your heart race, making your breathing change, giving you a tummy or headache or stopping you from sleeping. It might change how you feel about going out or going to school. If you find this happening to you please chat with your family or an adult you trust about it.

If you are worried about how much you are using your devices try our quiz :

<https://healthprofessionalsforsaferscreens.org/understanding-your-relationship-with-your-smartphone/>

for advice and support.



TOP TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE

Set privacy settings on your phone - only message online to people you know in person and like.

Do not meet people in person who you only know from online.

Set time limits to stop you being dragged into endless scrolling brain rot.

Try an app that encourages you to not use your phone!
Some of these apps mean you can help grow trees in the real world.

Be in control of your device, not the other way around
Can you challenge yourself to delete your favourite app for 12 hours? 24 hours? 2 days? Forever? Prove you remain in control of the device.

Charge your phone and other internet devices outside your bedroom
This will help you sleep better and removes the temptation to look.

Useful links to make devices safe:

www.teched-off.com - videos of making iphone and android devices safe as well as Roblox, Snapchat, TikTok
www.internetmatters.org - guides on setting controls on devices, apps and games
www.CEOPeducation.co.uk - advice regarding child sexual abuse online and how to talk to kids about the risks
www.nakedtruthproject.com - advice on making devices safe from 'XXX' content

This leaflet has been developed by clinicians from Health Professionals for Safer Screens, led by Dr Louise Milne, Consultant Paediatrician. For more information and advice visit www.healthprofessionalsforsaferscreens.org.



HEALTH PROFESSIONALS FOR SAFER SCREENS