Unplugged Canada's mission is to **educate parents** about the risks of **early smartphone use** and **inspire a collective commitment** to restore childhood.

Through **advocacy**, **resources**, and an **online pledge**, we empower parents to **unite** to **delay smartphones till at least 14**. By signing the pledge, families join a **supportive community** dedicated to prioritizing their children's mental health.

unpluggedcanada.com

3,200+ pledged

un-plugged

We are calling on the Government to prioritize these key actions to protect children's mental health

✓ **Raise the age of social media to 16 and require strong age verification.**

✓ **Implement age verification requirements to restrict minors' access to explicit content.**

✓ **Expand public education on the impacts of smartphones, social media and digital addiction in schools and communities.**

unpluggedcanada.com/call-to-action/

~1,000 signed

Children and Teen in Care

Children and teens in care often face unique challenges that make them more vulnerable to the harms of smartphones, social media, and online content. This guide is designed to help foster parents navigate tech use with empathy, structure, and safety in mind.

Connection First, Then Correction

Kids in care may turn to their phones for comfort, distraction, or validation. Start tech conversations with curiosity, not criticism:
• "What do you like most about this app?"
• "Have you seen anything online that made you feel uncomfortable?"

Build Trust with Clear, Compassionate Boundaries

Instead of sudden removals, co-create boundaries:
• Set tech-free zones (e.g., no phones at bedtime or in bedrooms).
• Agree on phone-free hours (e.g., during meals, after 9pm).
• Use apps like Bark or Canopy to monitor gently while maintaining trust.

Children and Teen in Care

Choose Tech That Helps, Not Harms

There are alternatives to a smartphones that can help parents and kids stay connected without the risk of harm.

• Smartwatches (e.g., Garmin Bounce) – GPS and messages to caregivers only. .

• Flip phone – basic communication, no apps or browser.

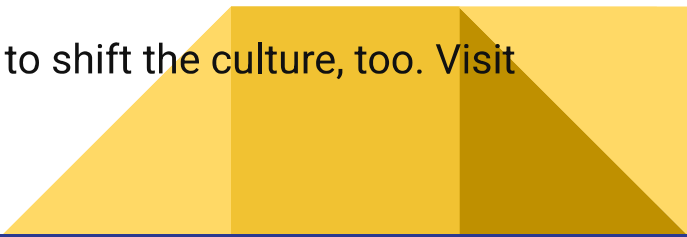• Pinwheel Phone – a smartphone with no browser or social media, with safety controls.

Support Sleep and Emotional Regulation

Poor sleep worsens anxiety and behavior. Remove screens from bedrooms and encourage wind-down time.

• Use an old-fashioned alarm clock.

• Offer alternatives like reading, drawing, or journaling before bed.

Remember: You're Not Alone

This is hard, but you're doing sacred work. Many other families are trying to shift the culture, too. Visit unpluggedcanada.com for more resources and community support.

The Four New Norms

To give back a play-based childhood

1. Delay **smartphones** until high school
2. Delay **social media** until 16
3. Phone-free **schools** (bell to bell)
4. More **independence**, free play and responsibility in the real world

anxiousgeneration.com
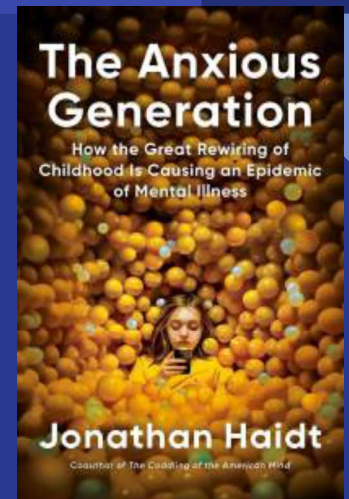
In this episode of The Ezra Klein Show, Jonathan Haidt explains how today's kids are facing a mental health crisis driven by a dramatic shift in childhood — away from real-world play and toward smartphone-based social lives.

He argues that constant screen exposure, social media pressure, and reduced independence have rewired how kids grow up, making them more anxious, less resilient, and socially disconnected.

Listen Now

The New York Times

OPINION
THE EZRA KLEIN SHOW

'Our Kids Are the Least Flourishing Generation We Know Of'

April 1, 2025

Actions you can take

If your kid doesn't have a smartphone yet

- Delay until they're at least 14+
- No social media until at least 16
- Tech together on a shared family laptop & teach digital safety
- Get a simple phone for keeping in touch only when they truly need it
- Create opportunities for free play and in-person time with friends
- Join the 2,300 other parents who have signed the Unplugged pledge

If your kid already has a smartphone

- Make a 'no phones upstairs' rule: alone in their bedrooms is where harm takes place unnoticed
- Use strong parental controls to make the device as safe as it can be
- Regularly check their phone & usage
- Teach digital safety & create more opportunities for in-person screen-free time with friends
- Create a safe space for conversation so they can come to you with concerns

SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD

Engaging other parents

★ Start a **book-club** - Read the Anxious Generation together & discuss

★ Recommend others watch **Adolescence** or **Childhood 2.0** to open the conversation

★ Talk to your **SAC/PTA** about raising awareness with parents at your school

★ Tell them about **Unplugged Canada** & our upcoming events to join!

Five Foundational Harms of Smartphones

Attention Fragmentation

Disrupt focus and attention spans, making it harder to engage deeply with tasks or real-world interactions

Sleep Deprivation

Devices encourage late-night use and emit blue light, suppressing melatonin production, delaying sleep onset

Social Deprivation

Social media fosters unhealthy comparisons and amplifies feelings of inadequacy, leading to increased loneliness.

Behavior Addiction

Designed to capture attention and keep it, exploiting the brain's reward system, creating dependency and irritability when separated from devices

Opportunity Cost

Devices have replaced opportunities for free play and independent activities, crucial for healthy emotional & social development.

Many more physical and mental impacts...

MYOPIA
Cases of short sightedness has risen by 300% in recent years due to increased screen time

BULLYING
84% of bullying now takes place on a device

DISTRACTIONS
On average teens are bombarded by over 500 smartphone notifications a day

DOPAMINE DRAIN
Kids begin to crave these dopamine hits & may develop a dependency on them to feel good

NECK PAIN
53% of 9 to 17yr olds report neck pain or aches due to screen time

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
Test scores are plummeting across the globe since 2010

Options to consider before a Smartphone

Likes to listen to music?

Consider a screen-free music player - Mighty 3

Home alone after school?

Consider a cost-effective home phone - Fongo

Feel the need to check-in?

Consider a parent controlled watch - Garmin Bounce

Options to consider as the child grows

Need occasional access to internet?

Consider a family laptop or desktop in a shared space

Ready to give them their own phone?

Consider a basic flip phone - Alcatel /TLC

Ready to start introducing more?

Consider a phone without harmful apps - Pinwheel

Consider being "Tech Intentional"

"Being tech-intentional™ means only using screen-based technology that enhances, nurtures, and supports yourself, your child, or your family in a way that aligns with your values, and resisting, delaying, or limiting screen use that interferes with healthy mental, physical, cognitive, and emotional development."

- Emily Cherkin - Screentime Consultant

TL;DR

Less is more.
Later is better.
Relationships and *skills* before screens.

First think of why they're using Tech
Three C's of Technology Use

Creating

Active use of their brains to learn something new and develop skills

Connecting

Leveraging technology to connect and build relationships

Consuming

Consuming content to avoid boredom, taking away from sleep, social interactions

Think about **how** they're using tech

Consider Location

Are they using devices in open spaces (supervised) or are they plugged into a personal device alone in their room?

Consider Medium

Watching content on a TV in a room reduces risk of nearsightedness & neck issues compared to watching on a small device

Consider Frequency/Time

Occasional use for short periods of time provides exposure to tech without taking away too much time from other activities

Why 'stories' are a bit different

Story Time

Movies, books and TV shows follow a coherent narrative arc.

This structure engages our emotions, builds suspense, and fosters empathy as we connect with characters.

Watching a film requires sustained attention, training the brain to focus and process information deeply.

Fragmenting Time

Short-form content (TikTok, Reels, Shorts) deliver bite-sized dopamine hits in seconds, training the brain to expect instant gratification.

Scrolling activates the dopaminergic reward system, similar to slot machines.

It rewires the brain for constant novelty, making longer, more meaningful activities feel "boring" in comparison.

Consider Access over Ownership

Give a child access to a family device on your rules - whether it's a family computer, shared phone or tablet for occasional use.

Consider delaying getting children their own device and social media accounts.

When a child creates an account on social media, the recommendation algorithms begin to take effect and these can get dark very quickly on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram.

*It changes the **psychology** when a child thinks they **own a device** instead of simply being **allowed to use it***

Documentaries & Films to Watch
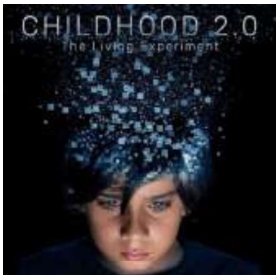
Childhood 2.0 is a documentary that examines the profound negative impacts of technology, smartphones, and social media on children and teenagers, addressing issues such as cyberbullying, online predators, and rising mental health concerns, while highlighting the urgent need for parental awareness and intervention.

Watch Now!   childhood2movie.com
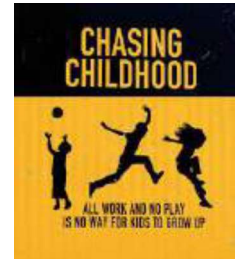
"Chasing Childhood" explores the impact of modern parenting practices on children's development, highlighting the shift from free-range play to over-scheduled and highly supervised lives. It critiques "helicopter parenting," which has contributed to rising anxiety and depression among kids, and contrasts this with the more independent childhoods of previous generations. chasingchildhooddoc.com

Watch Now!

In Smartphones vs Smart Kids, bestselling author and social psychologist Jonathan Haidt shares research findings from his global best selling book, The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness. He addresses the many unsettling connections between social media and the wellbeing of today's students—with a call to action to rescue our kids

Watch Now!

In Kids vs Screens, a documentary from The Nature of Things, guest host Dan Riskin, a biologist, science journalist and author, explores the latest research to discover how "digital babysitters" can affect children's development, learning abilities and mental health

cbc.ca/kids-vs-screens

Watch Now!

Documentaries & Films to Watch

Watch Now

Adolescence is a Netflix mini series that follows 13-year-old Jamie Miller who is arrested for the murder of a classmate. The series delves into the impact of societal pressures on young boys, including peer influence, internet culture, and exposure to extremist views.

Watch Now

"The Instagram Effect" is a documentary on the impact of Instagram on young users. Instagram has shaped culture, trends and the way we live our lives. But its impact on society is increasingly being questioned. In this revealing social media documentary, the platform's role in causing issues around body image and self-harm for younger users is explored. Former Facebook/Meta employees speak for the first time about their concerns.

Watch Now

"Brain, Heart, World" is a three-part documentary series produced by Fight the New Drug, aiming to shed light on the multifaceted impacts of pornography on individuals, relationships, and society. Each episode combines expert interviews, personal stories, and research findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Watch Now

"The TikTok Effect" is a documentary that explores the rise of TikTok, its powerful algorithm, and its impact on culture, society, and young users. It examines concerns around privacy, misinformation, and mental health while also highlighting the platform's influence on trends, politics, and digital communities.

Resources

Empathy Breeds Empathy. Boys and young men are most vulnerable to being pulled into manosphere, especially when they feel insecure, rejected, or unsupported. By creating a world where they can feel valued, heard and respected, we can prevent them from falling into hateful online communities.

Tips to keep boys safe from the manosphere.

whiteribbon.ca

A study using experimental accounts reveals that YouTube's algorithms, especially YouTube Shorts, rapidly promote misogynistic and extremist content to boys and young men. The research found that engaging with recommended videos led to increasingly radical anti-feminist and "manosphere" content being suggested. Alarmingly, YouTube Shorts showed more aggressive optimization, presenting extreme content quickly and making no distinction between underage and adult accounts.
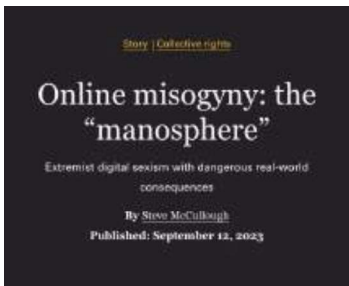
Read Article

The "manosphere" is a collection of online groups promoting sexist and misogynistic ideas, often blaming women and feminism for men's problems. It includes pick-up artists who exploit men's insecurities for profit and incels who harbor extreme resentment towards women, sometimes leading to violence. The article discusses how vulnerable men are recruited into these groups and suggests ways to combat the manosphere, including support for those leaving these communities, platform regulation, and preventive education.

Read Article

Financial sextortion, primarily targeting teenage boys, with organized criminal gangs often posing as young girls online to obtain and then blackmail victims with explicit images. This crime can have severe emotional impacts, potentially leading to self-harm or suicide. Key strategies to combat sextortion include education and awareness campaigns, international cooperation, technological solutions, consistent legislation, improved data collection, and involving young people in prevention efforts.

Read Article

Informative & Helpful Books
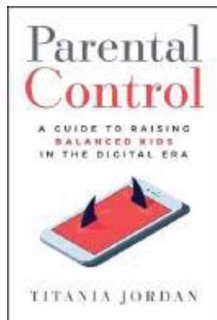
In Parental Control: A Guide to Raising Balanced Kids in the Digital Era, Titania Jordan, a renowned internet and social media safety specialist, tackles the urgent dilemmas of modern parenting head-on. As technology increasingly engulfs the lives of our children, this book emerges as a beacon for those looking to guide, protect, and connect with them in meaningful ways.
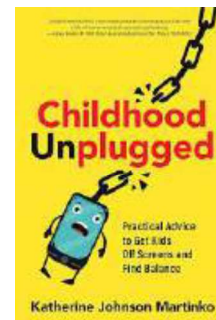
"Childhood Unplugged" by Canadian Katherine Martinko advocates for reducing children's screen time and offers practical strategies to create a more balanced, screen-free childhood. The author draws from personal experience, expert interviews, and research to provide age-specific advice on limiting digital media use, promoting outdoor play, and enriching children's offline lives, aiming to help parents and caregivers reclaim the magic and beauty of childhood in the digital age
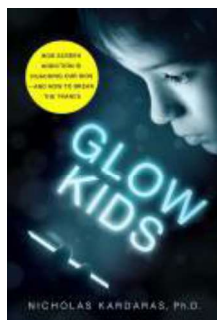
"Glow Kids" by Dr. Nicholas Kardaras explores the detrimental effects of excessive screen time on children's brain development and behavior, likening it to addiction. The book presents research on how prolonged exposure to digital devices can lead to various psychological issues and offers practical advice for parents to address this modern challenge.
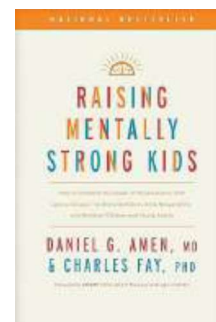
Raising Mentally Strong Kids by Dr. Daniel G. Amen and Dr. Charles Fay offers a comprehensive guide for parents aiming to nurture resilience, emotional intelligence, and responsibility in their children. By blending insights from neuroscience with the Love and Logic parenting approach, the authors provide actionable strategies to support children's mental and emotional development.
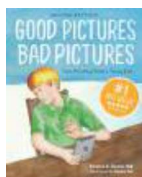
"Good Pictures Bad Pictures" is a book series by Kristen A. Jenson that helps parents discuss pornography with children in an age-appropriate manner. The books provide strategies for recognizing and rejecting inappropriate content, aiming to empower children to protect themselves in the digital age.
View Book

Digital Literacy is very important

Introducing children to technology, smartphones and apps at age and developmentally appropriate stages is important.

Protect Young Eyes aims to empower families with knowledge and tools to protect children from online risks while promoting healthy technology use.

They offer resources tailored to help parents and educators navigate the complexities of digital media.

http://protectyoungeyes.com
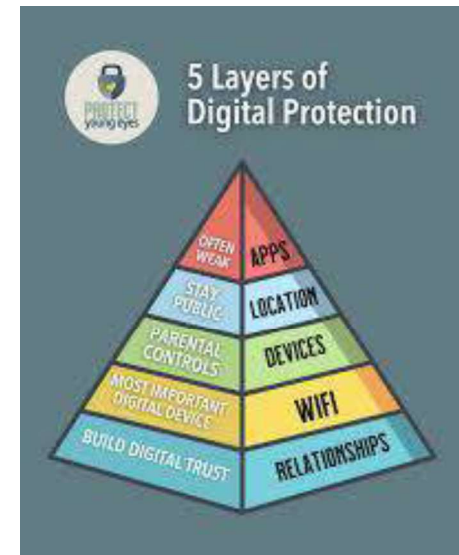
GuardianAI: A digital parenting assistance

GuardianAI helps parents protect kids online by offering simple, real-time guidance for managing screen time, setting parental controls, and handling tough tech conversations.

Ask anything, get a clear answer:
 "How do I block YouTube?"
 "Is Roblox safe for my 9-year-old?"
 "What do I say if my child saw something inappropriate?"

Expert-backed advice. Every answer is grounded in mental health research, safety standards, and digital wellbeing best practices—not random internet opinions.

No app required. Works on any phone, tablet, or computer—just open your browser and go to: mytechguardian.ai

mytechguardian.ai

How to talk about this with your tween

Screen Strong has a wide variety of resources available to resolve screen conflicts and have these conversations with your children.

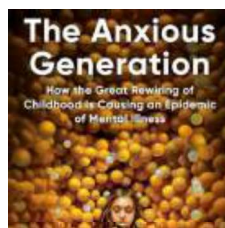Many resources available are created by young people to whom your child can relate.
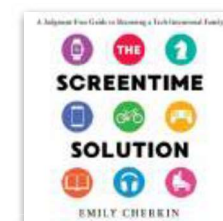
www.screenstrong.org

Resource Sites

unpluggedcanada.com

anxiousgeneration.com

Officer Gomez

scrolling2death.com

thescreentimeconsultant.com

@jonathanhaidt

betterscreentime.com

letgrow.org

waituntil8th.org/
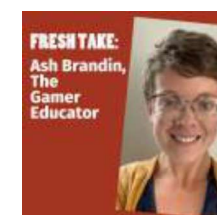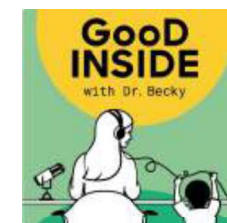
@thesmartphoneeffectmd

@thegamereducator

goodinside.com

protectyoungeyes.com

Parenting In a Tech World

screenstrong.org

smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk

lessscreenmoregreen.org/

Parental Controls on any device

Qustodio is a comprehensive parental control software designed to help parents address various online risks, including cyberbullying, screen addiction, and exposure to inappropriate content

Key features include:
- Web content filtering
- App monitoring and blocking
- Screen Time management
- Location tracking
- Activity reporting (browser history & app usage)
- YouTube monitoring
- Call and SMS monitoring
- Multi-platform support
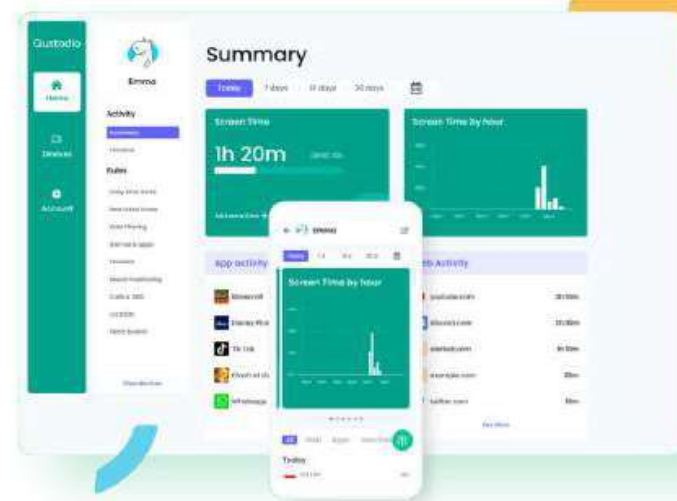
Qustodio
by Qoria

At home Wifi Router for Parents

Recommended by organizations like Protect Young Eyes and Wait Until 8th for its robust parental controls

Key Features include:
- Content Filtering
- Screen Time Management
- User Profiles
- Bedtime and Homework Time
- App Control
- SafeSearch Enforcement
- Browsing History
- VPN Blocking
- Remote Management

GRYPHON®

Scripts to Validate and Empathize with Your Child

"It's **my job to protect you**, and some of these apps don't do a good job at **keeping you safe**"

Resource

"**Social media isn't an option right now**. I know that's not what you want to hear. I know this makes your life harder in some ways, and I know we will get through this. I love you."

"**In our family**, we prioritize connecting around the dinner table, which is why we have phones in another room while we're eating together"

"**I've learned some new things** about [specific app or behavior] and I'm going to change some phone rules. I know this is frustrating, and I know it's important for your safety. I get that this feels annoying to you and will take some time to get used to"

Dr.Becky's Strategies for Tech Boundaries

The Let Grow Experiment

A simple, life-changing homework assignment:

"Go home and do something new, on your own. Climb a tree, run an errand, make a meal… "

The choices are endless and the impact: **immediate.**

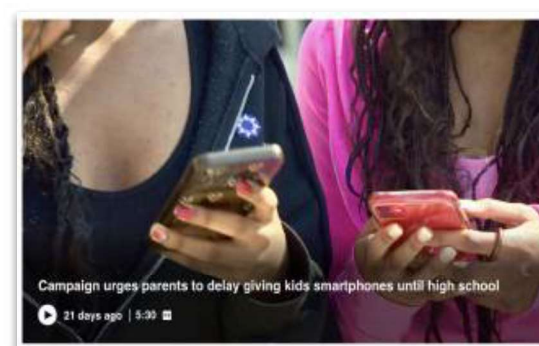# Local Coverage of this topic

Discussion with Preston and Jenna Poste

Interview with Jonathan Haidt

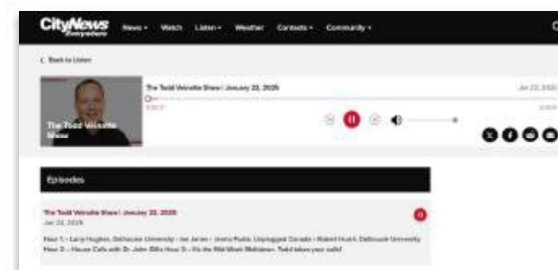CBC Interview with Jenna Poste

CBC Article on NS Chapter Event

Global Morning News

CityTV Todd Veinotte Show

AI Chatbots to be aware of

Character AI is an artificial intelligence chatbot web application & app that generates human-like text and voice responses and engages in contextual conversations. Developed by former Google AI developers, this app has been subject to multiple lawsuits due to encouraging a 14 year old to die by suicide, suggesting kids to self-harm and encouraged a child to kill their parents over screen time limits.

Listen to this episode from Scrolling to Death

SnapChat's My AI describes itself as a virtual friend who is there to chat, provide information, and support users. It talks like a friend would and even has a profile that looks like any other Snapchat user. This presents a problem because unlike real friends, My AI is always available, encouraging, and quick to agree with what it is told, making it an attractive alternative to real human connection. This precarious and confusing dynamic is amplified by Snapchat's younger user base. It has also shown to provide suggestions to kids on how to lie to parents and engage in inappropriate interactions with young users.

Moemate AI Chat has no age verification and any user that logs in is served pre-built AI bots that immediately engage in adult and inappropriate conversations for children. There are no safeguards put in place and even when the bot was told the user was 12, engaged in inappropriate conversation.