SMARTPHONE
FREE CHILDHOOD
Smartphones
&
Digital Safety
PARENT PRESENTATION JUNE 2025

IN TWO DECADES, EVERYTHING'S CHANGED

2004 → 2024

2004
Nokias ruled

2007
The first iPhone launches

2008
Apple app store opens

2012
4G launches in the UK, enabling internet everywhere

2024
89% of 12-year-olds own a smartphone, permanently connected to the internet via 4g/5g

THEY'RE NOT REALLY 'PHONES' AT ALL

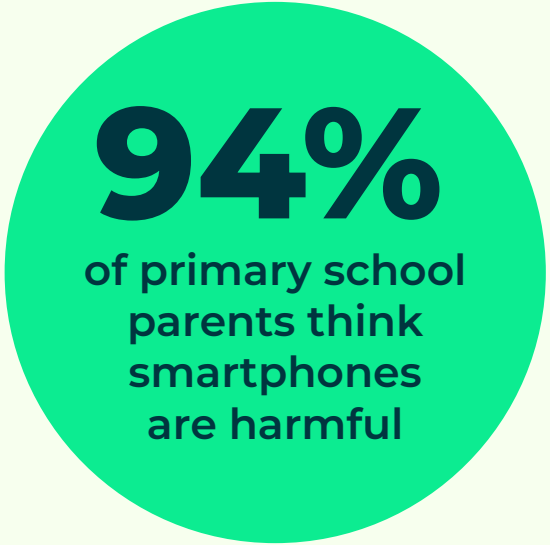
MOBILE PHONE

Make calls, send texts, play Snake

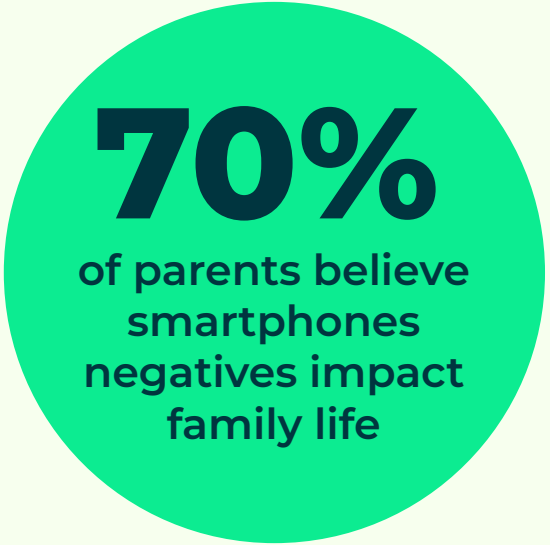
POCKET SUPERCOMPUTER

24/7 access to the internet in your pocket

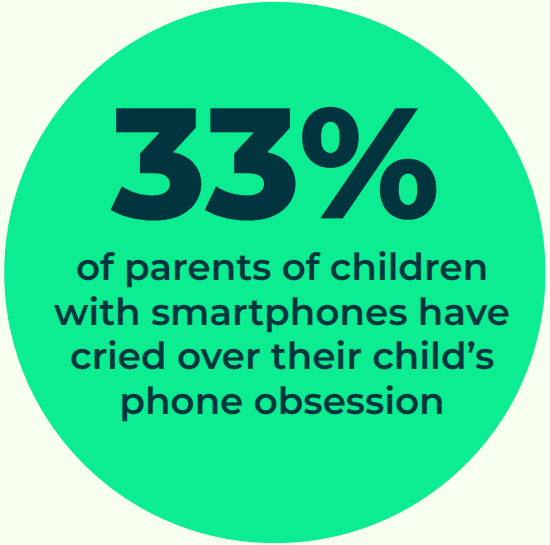
PARENTS WISH THINGS WERE DIFFERENT



Parentkind nationwide poll of 2,496 people, April 24

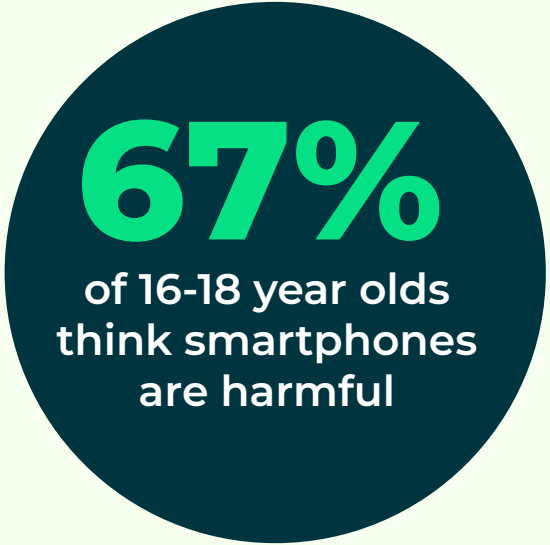


HMD poll of 10,000 parents, June 24



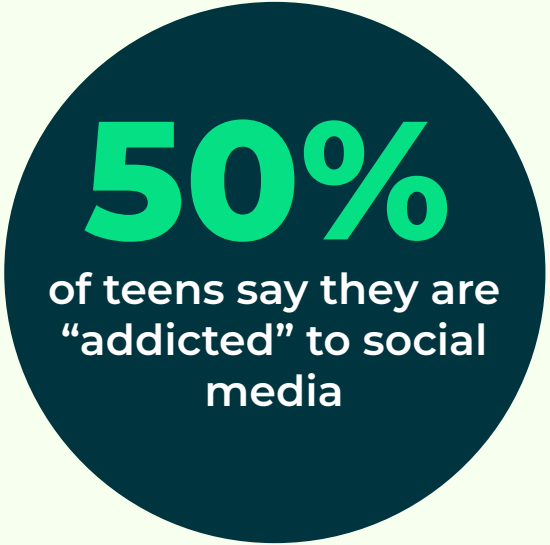
HMD poll of 10,000 parents, June 24

YOUNG PEOPLE WISH THINGS WERE DIFFERENT



Parentkind poll, 2024

Parentkind poll, 2024



Millennium Cohort Study, 2024

YET SMARTPHONES HAVE BECOME THE NORM

25%

of 5-7 year olds in the UK own their own smartphone

89%

of 12 year-olds in the UK own their own smartphone

SOURCE: OFCOM Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes April 24

EVERYONE'S GOT ONE BECAUSE EVERYONE'S GOT ONE

Most parents believe smartphones are harmful, yet almost all children have them by Year 7

Because resisting peer pressure becomes almost impossible when children's social lives migrate online

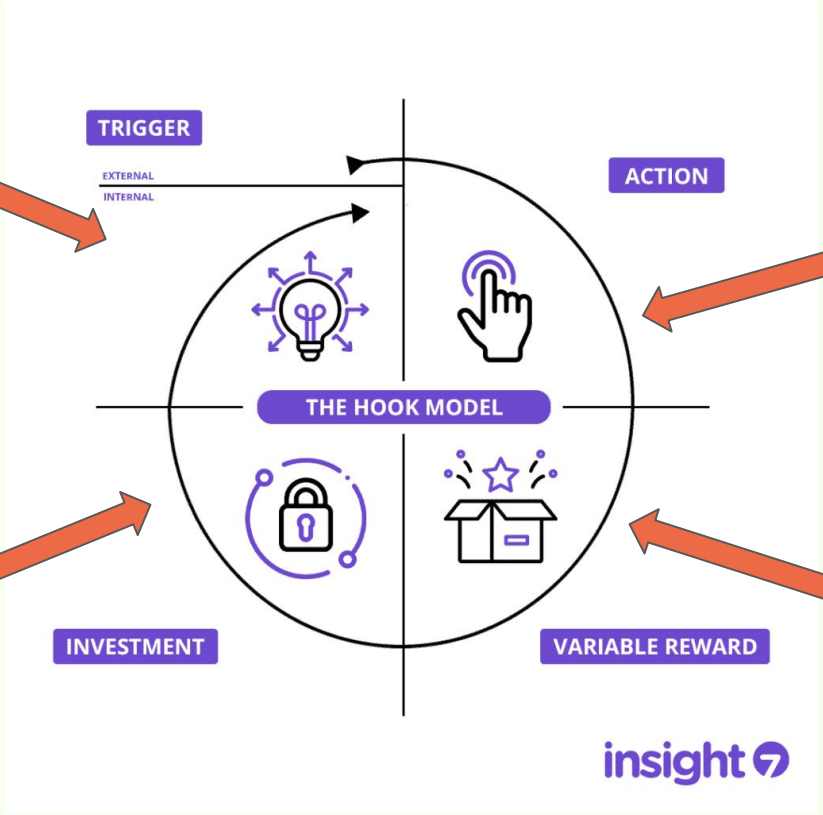
The powerful network effects of smartphones and social media mean parents and young people feel like they have no choice

The only winners are the tech companies

The status quo only benefits the most powerful companies on the planet - who make billions from capturing our kids' attention

Push notifications…external trigger becomes an internal trigger over time

"Creators of apps use every trick in the psychologists' toolkit to hook users... their desires are being hacked and their actions are being manipulated"
Jonathan Haidt



Engage with the notification to open the app

Increased likelihood of remaining engaged - scrolling, posting etc

An interaction - a post engagement, like or comment - deliberately may be positive or not

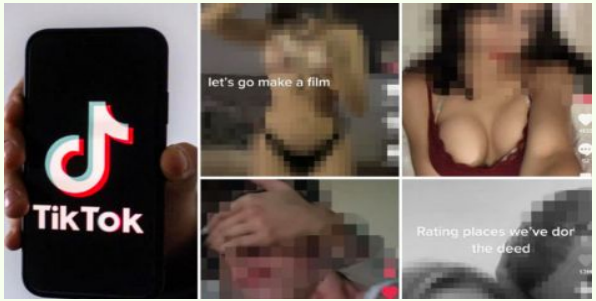
The Hook Model is used by app and web designers to guide them through the loop they need to create if they want to build strong repetitive habits in users.

When children first started getting smartphones in the early 2010s we didn’t understand their impact.

Now we do, and the evidence is overwhelming.

So what exactly
is the problem?

The three major concerns

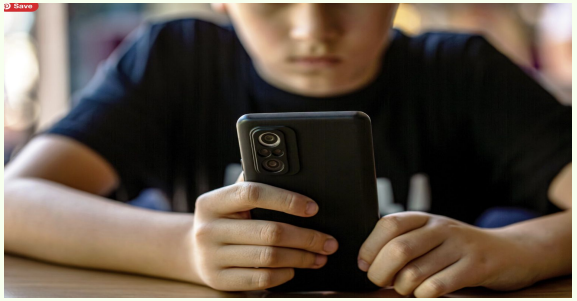


CONTENT

Smartphones are gateways to extreme content and viewpoints that we'd never expose children to in real life.

CONTACT

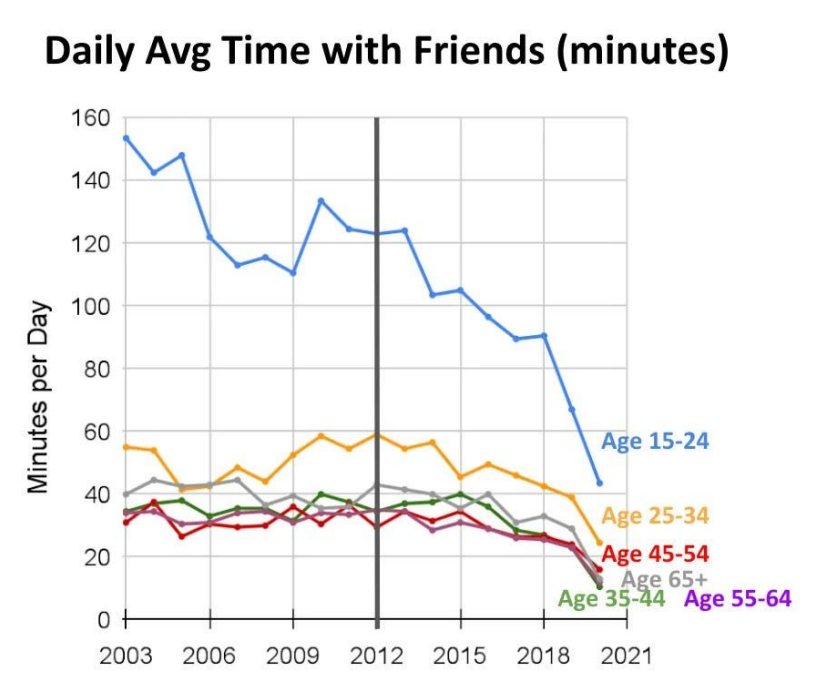
Sites like TikTok, Snapchat and Roblox are used by sexual predators to target children with their first smartphones.



TIME

Smartphones are fundamentally changing childhood - distracting children from engaging in real world activities.

Smartphones are rewiring childhood



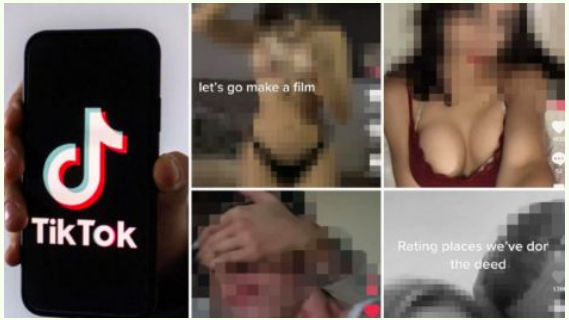
35 hrs

the average time British teens spend on their smartphone per week

SMARTPHONES EXPOSE KIDS TO HARMFUL CONTENT

Having unrestricted access to the internet in your pocket creates a gateway to extreme content and viewpoints that we'd never dream of exposing children to in real life.

Hardcore pornography, extreme political views, sexualised and violent imagery, trolling and material promoting suicide, self-harm and eating disorders have become part of the fabric of modern childhood.



51%

of UK 11-13 year-olds have seen hardcore pornography online

British Board of Film Classification Report, March 2022

75%

of UK 15 year olds questioned had been sent beheading videos

Digital Childhoods, children's commissioner report, 2022

90%

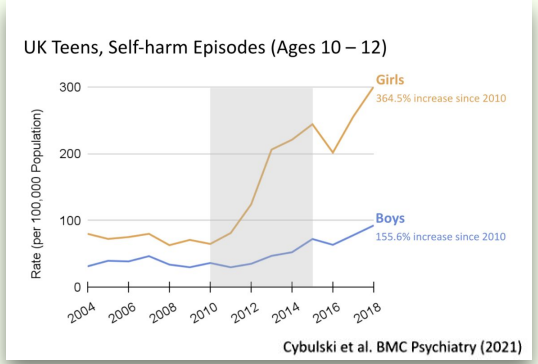
of girls and 50% of boys say they are sent unwanted explicit content

Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools, 2021

SMARTPHONES ARE FUELLING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm and even suicide among teens have all dramatically spiked globally since 2010 – when children started getting smartphones.

A 2023 global study of 27,969 young adults from Sapiens Labs showed that the younger they got their first smartphone, the worse their mental health today.



3x

Teens with problematic smartphone-use are twice as likely to have anxiety and three times as likely to have depression

King's College London, 2024

1 in 5

UK 16 to 18 years olds say that their social media has made them feel that 'life is not worth living'

Parentkind Poll, 2024

53%

The number of children referred to emergency mental healthcare in England has soared by 53% in three years

Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2024

“The mental health crisis among young people is an emergency. It is time to require a warning label on social media platforms.”

Dr Vivek Murthy
US Surgeon General, 2024

“We’ll look back in 20 years and be horrified by what our children were exposed to”

Dame Rachel de Souza
Children’s Commissioner for England, 2022

SMARTPHONES APPS ARE ADDICTIVE BY DESIGN

Tech companies spend billions on making apps and devices as addictive as possible because ‘maximising engagement’ is the fundamental objective of their business model.

So it’s little wonder that many children are routinely ‘spending six, seven, eight hours a day on social media – often more’ (Ofcom, 2024).

46%

of teens say they use the their phones “almost constantly”

Pew Research Centre, Aug 2022

29 hours

Per week is the average British 12-year-old now spends on their smartphone

Childwise Monitor Report, 2021

2 in 3

of 11-17 year olds ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ find it difficult to put down their phone

Common Sense Media, 2023

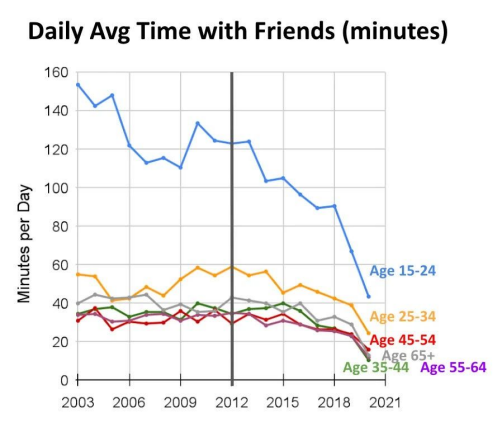
“Behind every screen on your phone, a thousand engineers have worked to make it maximally addicting. Children are particularly susceptible to this kind of manipulative design.”

Aza Raskin
Co-inventor of ‘infinite scroll’, turned campaigner

SMARTPHONES ARE FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGING CHILDHOOD

Smartphones are experience blockers, distracting children from engaging in the real world activities and connections that are crucial to healthy childhood development.

The opportunity cost to childhood is profound. The average UK 12 year-old now spends over four hours per day on their smartphone, displacing the kinds of activities that have shaped childhood for millennia.



43%

of US teenagers waking minutes are spent on screens

Gitnux Marketdata Report, Jan 2024

30%

Since 1975, the daily average time children spend playing outdoors has fallen by 30%, while screen-based activities have risen 23%

Zach Rausch - Mullan 2019

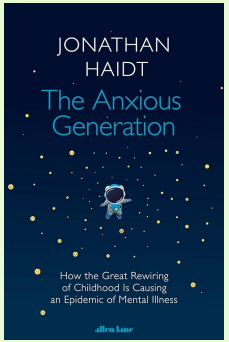
65%

The daily average time that teenagers spend with friends has plummeted by 65% since 2010

American Time Use Study

“When kids are on their phones all day, it’s not just what they're doing on the phone that matters — it’s what they’re not doing. They’re missing out on crucial experiences that help them grow into healthy adults.”

Dr Jonathan Haidt
Professor of Social Psychology, NYU



Dr Susie Davies, founder of Papaya Parents, citing NHS DATA

What are we losing?

Less time outdoors

Less time playing, reading & exercising

Less social interaction and face to face communication

More time scrolling, alone

SADLY, WE COULD GO ON

SLEEP
Bedtime use of smartphones doubles children's risk of poor sleep

BULLYING
84% of bullying now takes place on a device

DISTRACTIONS
On average teens are bombarded by 237 smartphone notifications a day

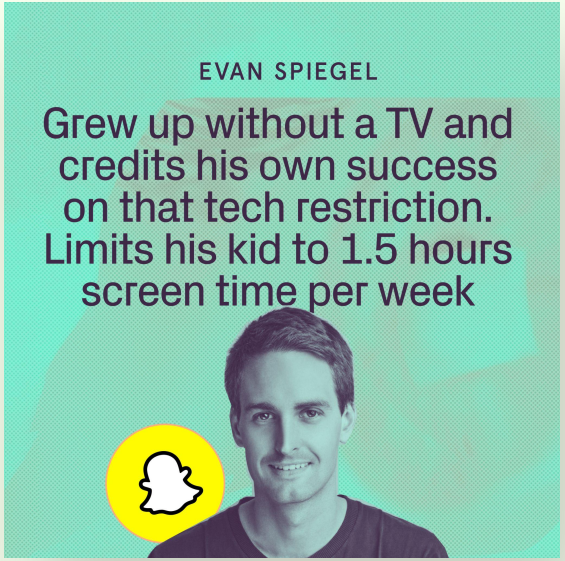
ARGUMENTS
55% of parents say their child’s smartphone use causes big family arguments

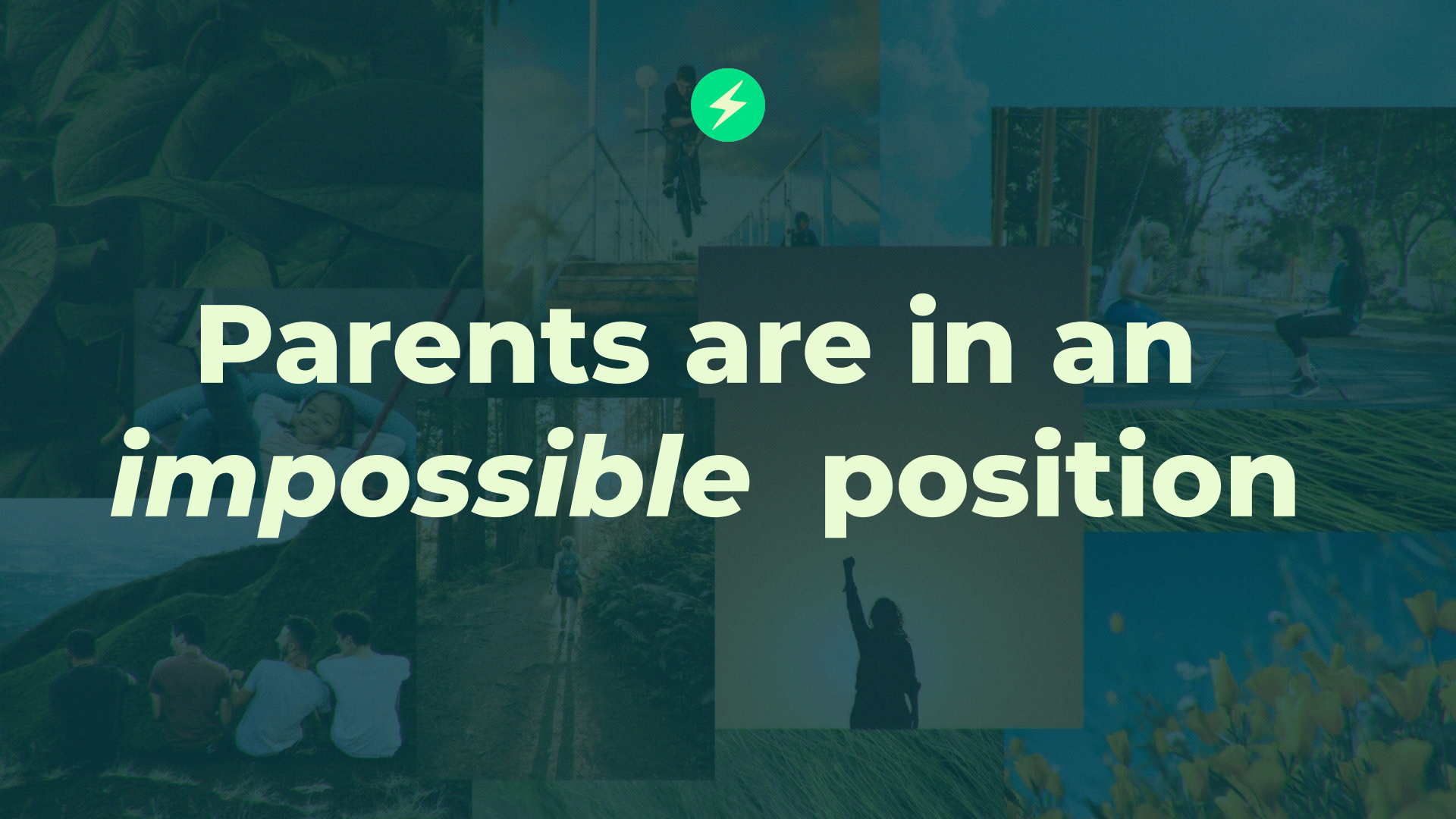
ROAD SAFETY
Mobile phone distraction is a major cause of road accidents involving children

CRIME
500 children a day were mugged in 2020 in the UK, almost all for smartphones

1: Jama Paediatrics, 2016; 2: Ofcom, 2022; 3: CommonSense Media, 2023; 4: HMD, 2024; 5: LookUp; 6: ONS, 2020

It’s little wonder that many of the people who created this technology keep it away from their kids




Parents are in an
impossible position

BECAUSE OUR ‘CHOICE’ ISN’T REALLY A CHOICE AT ALL

Either we…

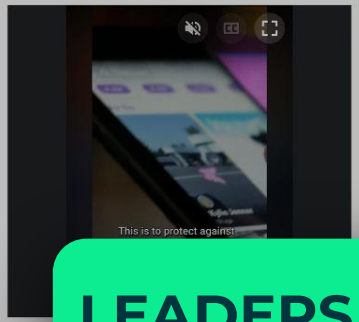
Give our children access to a product that we know to be harmful.

Or we…

Risk alienating them from their peers at a crucial stage of their development.

IT’S A LOSE-LOSE; FOR PARENTS, FOR CHILDREN & FOR SOCIETY

LEADERS ACROSS THE WORLD ARE THINKING ABOUT HOW TO LEGISLATE TO PROTECT CHILDHOOD



it will work

Anthony Albanese has revealed how a nationwide age-based ban on social media accounts, including Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook, will work.

THE IRISH TIMES

Education

Mobile phones set to be banned across all second-level schools under new Government plans

The Minister for Education is planning phones from all second-level schools research which links use of devices t distraction and cyberbullying. Photog Barlow/PA Wire

Carl O'Brien

Figures show that there is a mental health crisis among young people. Ministers believe social media is partly to blame

GETTY IMAGES

The New York Times

California Schools Must Restrict Phones Under New Law Signed by Newsom

Calls for crackdowns have mounted with reports of cyberbullying and studies indicating that smartphones are harmful to children's mental health.

Listen to this article · 4:43 min Learn more

Share full article

Education

Children's exposure to harmful online content a 'public health crisis', says Minister

Stronger laws may be needed to safeguard young people, according to Stephen Donnelly

France

France to trial ban on mobile phones at school for children under 15

'Digital pause' experiment at 200 secondary schools could be extended nationwide in January

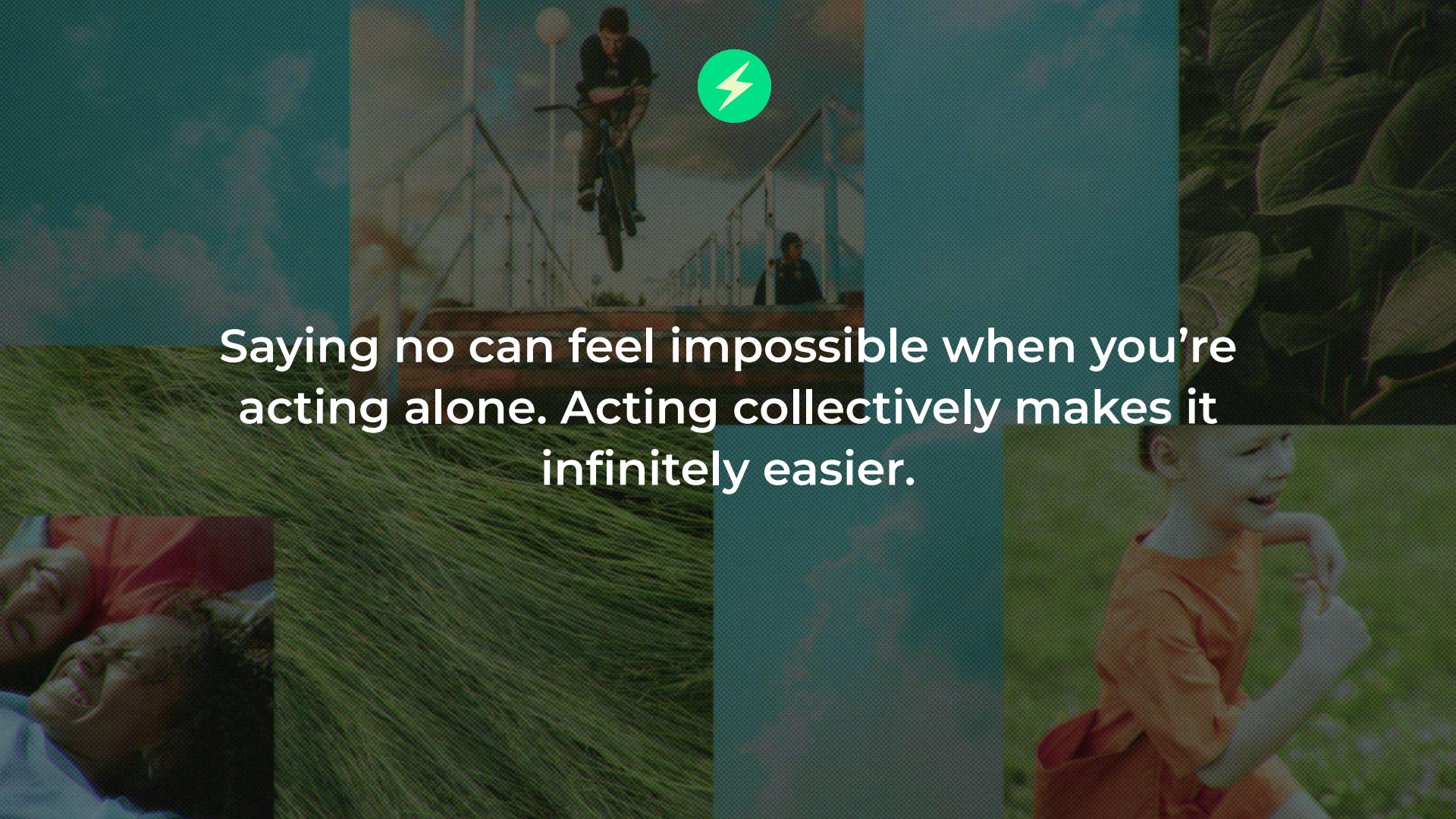
Kim Willsher *in Paris*

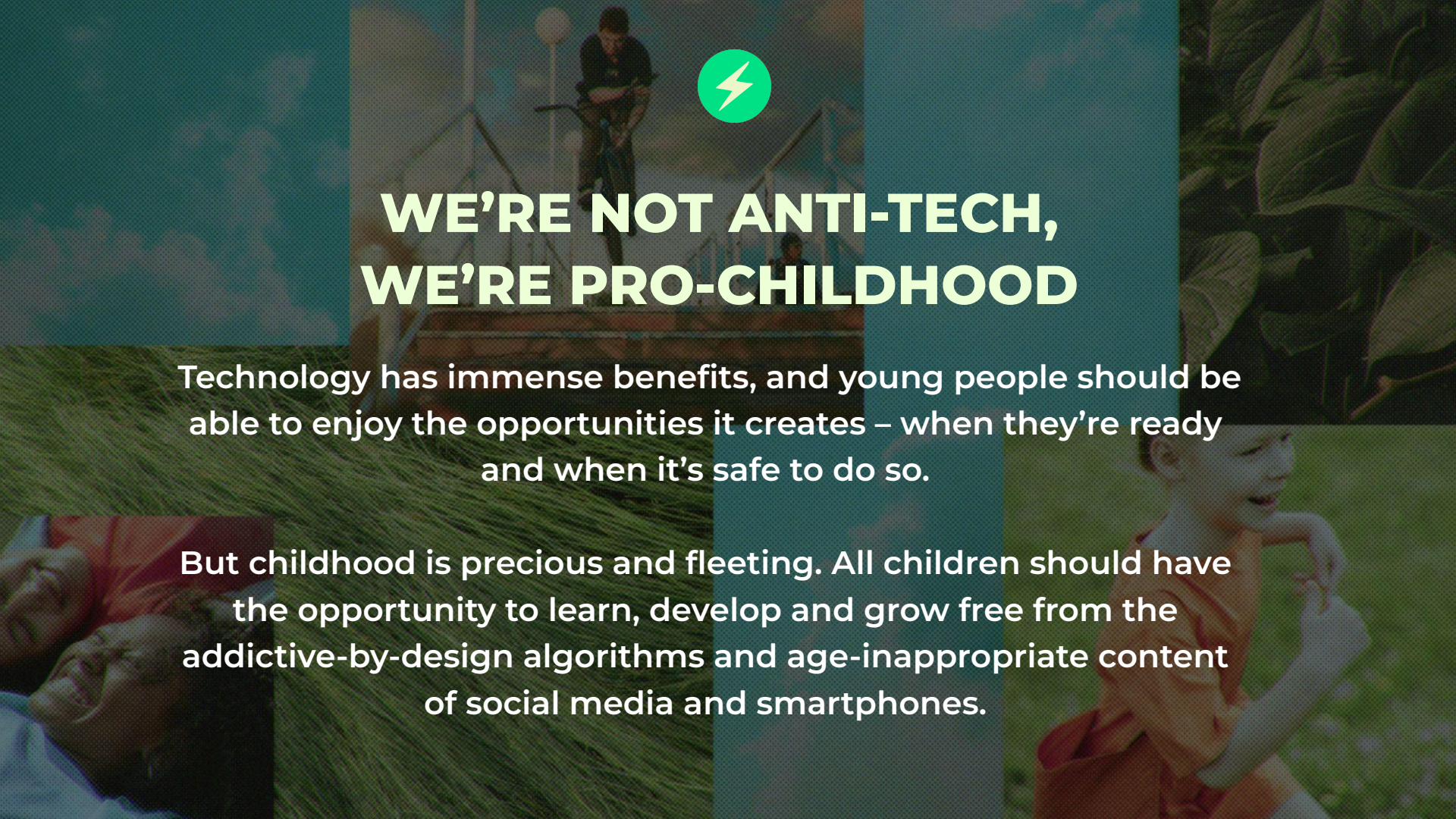
Follow Kim Willsher

LEADERS ACROSS THE WORLD ARE THINKING ABOUT HOW TO LEGISLATE TO PROTECT CHILDHOOD

BUT PROPER REGULATION OF BIG TECH WILL TAKE YEARS, AND WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO WASTE

The solution is to
work together


Saying no can feel impossible when you’re acting alone. Acting collectively makes it infinitely easier.



WE'RE NOT ANTI-TECH, WE'RE PRO-CHILDHOOD

Technology has immense benefits, and young people should be able to enjoy the opportunities it creates – when they're ready and when it's safe to do so.

But childhood is precious and fleeting. All children should have the opportunity to learn, develop and grow free from the addictive-by-design algorithms and age-inappropriate content of social media and smartphones.

OUR RECOMMENDED APPROACH

– Simple phone until Year 9
– Delay social media until 16
– Internet & WhatsApp access via a shared family computer
– Track with an Airtag if you want to know where they are

SMARTPHONE

SOCIAL MEDIA

SIMPLE PHONE

FAMILY COMPUTER

PARENTAL CONTROLS AREN'T THE SOLUTION

– Even the most tech-savvy parents struggle to manage parental controls
– Some apps require updates to hundreds of settings to make them age appropriate
– Even if your child's phone has parental controls, their friends may not so they may be sent inappropriate content regardless

58%

of teens say they've never had controls put on their phone by parents

(Parentkind poll, May 2024)

47%

of teens with controls in place say they have bypassed them

(Parentkind poll, May 2024)

And teens find multiple ways to bypass controls:

- Performing a factory reset
- Using VPN software
- Hacking the WiFi router
- Memorising your passcode

THE PARENT PACT
makes collective
action simple

The Parent Pact is an online tool that helps parents agree to delay with others in your community. The more of us who sign, the more powerful it becomes.

Step 01.

Select your region & child's school

Select your region

Select school

Select school year

Name

Step 02.

Sign the Pact to delay until the end of Year 9

Sign the pact >

Step 03.

View results for your region, school & class

National (UK)

71,077

CHILDREN

9,453

SCHOOLS

THE MOVEMENT IS GROWING ACROSS THE UK

92,120

Parent Pacts have been signed since launching in September

We’re all trying
to do the best
for our kids

“In a world where fast-changing technology is actually impacting the development of our children's brains, it is up to us to stand up for them, and their futures. If not us, then who?”

St. Albans Heads group, May 2024

WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

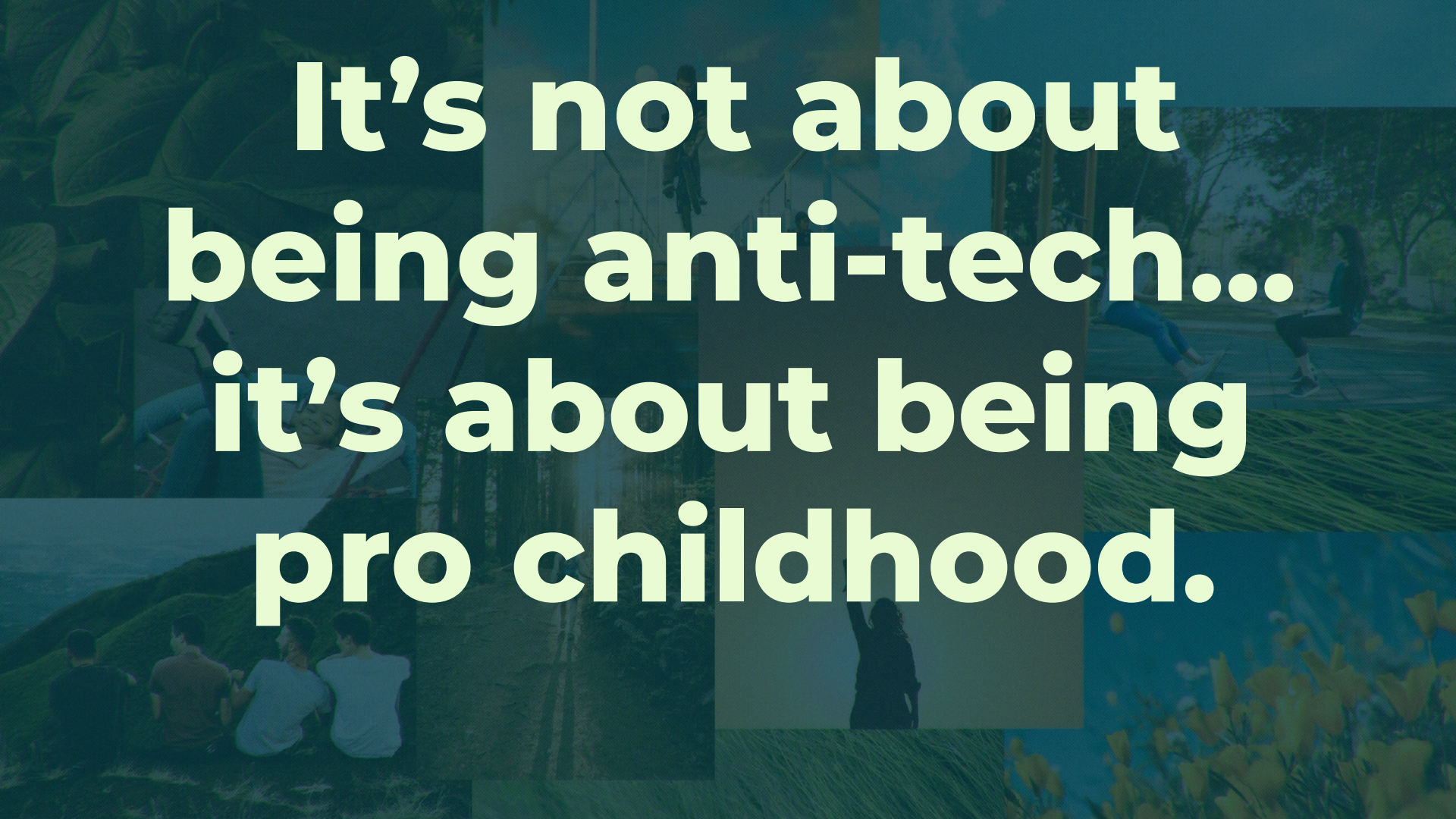
Navigating the fast changing world of smartphones and social media is complex.

This stuff's tricky, the evidence is evolving fast, and every family is different.

Wherever you sit on the spectrum, or whatever decisions you've made for your children, we respect your position.

Every family will come to their own conclusions; we just want to open up a conversation about these issues.

It's a new frontier of parenting, and we're all in it together.


It’s not about being anti-tech... it’s about being pro childhood.

COMMON CONCERNS

I want my child to be tech savvy, I don't want to hold them back.

- Digital literacy isn't achieved through smartphone use

My child isn't safe walking to and from school without a smartphone.

- A non smart phone can enable your child to communicate with you in an emergency.
- Tracking can often erode trust and personal responsibility in children, making them more vulnerable when unsupervised.
- AirTags or similar can help track your child.
- Majority of children walk to and from school from the leisure centre - which is heavily supervised by both staff and the school community.
- Smartphones often make children *less* safe walking to school.

My child needs a smartphone to stay connected to their friends, otherwise they will be socially isolated.

- This is not proven to be the case
- Meaningful and healthy friendships are rooted in real connections and communication

SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD

www.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk

@smartphonefreechildhood

Smartphone Free Childhood is a restricted fund under the auspices of Prism the Gift Fund, Charity Number 1099682.

Online Safety

Parent Workshop

School Curriculum

Years 1 & 2

- identify what things count as personal information;
- identify what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour on the internet;
- agree and follow sensible online safety rules, e.g. taking pictures, sharing information, storing passwords;
- seek help from an adult when they see something that is unexpected or worrying;
- demonstrate how to safely open and close applications and log on and log off from websites;

PSHE - bullying, online safety

Years 3 & 4

- reflect on their own digital footprint and behaviour online;
- identify what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour n the internet, recognising the term cyberbullying;
- agree and follow sensible online safety rules, e.g. taking pictures, sharing information, storing passwords;
- seek help from an adult when they see something that is unexpected or worrying;
- demonstrate understanding of age-appropriate websites and adverts;

NSPCC - Speak Out, Stay Safe

Years 5 & 6

- protect their password and other personal information;
- be a good online citizen and friend;
- judge what sort of privacy settings might be relevant to reducing different risks;
- seek help from an adult when they see something that is unexpected or worrying;
- discuss scenarios involving online risk;

https://www.childnet.com/resources/staff-led-parent-online-safety-presentation/

https://www.papayaparents.com/

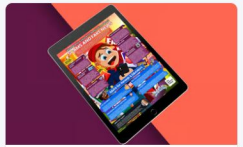
internet matters.org

https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/

NSPCC

https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/

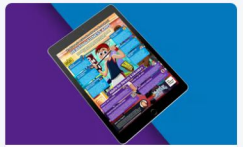
The National College®



Online Safety

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about Fake News & Scams

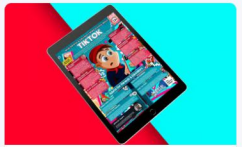
Parent Guide 15min



Online Safety

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about Health & Fitness Apps

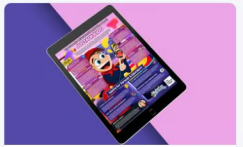
Parent Guide 15min



Online Safety

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about TikTok

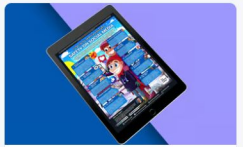
Parent Guide 15min



Online Safety

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about JusTalk Kids

Parent Guide 15min



Online Safety

Top Tips for Staying Safe on Social Media

Parent Guide 15min

Online Safety

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about Snapchat

Parent Guide 15min

Online Safety

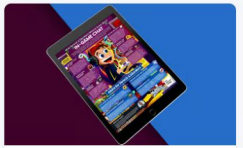
What Parents & Educators Need to Know about Fortnite

Parent Guide 15min

Online Safety

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about Horror Films & Age Ratings

Parent Guide 15min



Online Safety

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about In-Game Chat

Parent Guide 15min

Online Safety

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about Final Fantasy XIV

Parent Guide 15min

Braywick Court School

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https://www.braywickcourtschool.co.uk/Parents/Online-Safety/