

Loving God,

We gather tonight with shared hope, to protect and guide the children in our care. Give us open hearts as we listen and the wisdom as we make choices for our families.

Help us to work together to create a safe, supportive digital world for the children at St Dunstan's now and for the future.

We ask this through Christ our Lord

Amen

We want to start by saying this isn't a lecture, and it's definitely not about judging anyone's parenting. We are here as educators and as fellow parents/ adults who know how challenging the world of smartphones can be. We are all here for the same reason, the children.

Our aim is simply to:

- share helpful information
- open up space for conversation
- and support you in making the choices that feel right for your family

Whether you leave feeling more informed, inspired or simply reassured, we hope tonight gives you a useful moment to reflect on what you want for your child.

We are really glad you are keen to be part of the solution and want to work together as a school family.

“When we were 8....”



Reflection prompts on chairs-

What was your favourite thing to do when you were 8?

What did you spend hours doing without being told?

What distracted you the most in school?

If smartphones had existed when you were 8, how might they have changed those moments?

What are our shared aims for our children and their childhood?



I guarantee we all want very similar outcomes for our children's childhood. Think of 3 words you would use.

- happy, successful, and safe
- Safe, good relationships, healthy
- Kind, friendly, happy
- Active, carefree, creative

Smartphones

Choose the emoji that matches how you feel about smartphones in the lives of primary aged children.



Relaxed/
confident



Curious



Worried



Overwhelmed



I invite you to raise your hand to show where are you in your feelings towards smartphones.

There are a range of feelings.



We all want our children's childhood to be a happy, safe and successful one. However, there is growing evidence to show that smartphones and social media make these very reasonable goals **so** much harder to achieve as parents and as educators.

Look at these two images.... The phone on the left, a mobile phone. It does what its name states – it is a phone used to make calls or send texts- direct communication in a mobile form. The first game was snake!

The modern smartphone on the right, is an incredible piece of technology. However, it is not really a phone at all! It is a super computer, with 24/7 internet access. The purpose is not direct communication anymore. It helps us to navigate the world, stay in touch, capture memories, and manage our lives. For most adults, they've become an essential tool – and in many ways, they make life easier.



HMD poll of 10,000 parents. June 24

I hear this from parents of children in Year 5 and 6. It changes their personality. But as parents today, many feel trapped and overwhelmed about making the decision of when to give their child a smartphone, even when they would prefer to delay this decision. The fear of social exclusion of their child, peer pressure and concerns over safety for example, walking home- often leads parents to give in to the pressure, earlier than they would like.

XX% of children now have a smartphone before they reach secondary school.

XX% of children aged 4 to 7 own a smartphone

XX% of children aged 3 and 4 year olds own a smartphone

As a result, of pressure on parents..... What do you think the statistics are?

90% - Secondary School

c25% 4 to 7 yr olds

c20% 3 and 4 year olds

AND, every year the age of first smartphone ownership is getting younger! If 50% of parents feel it has changed their children's personalities, WHY?

The smartphone has a strong emotional pressure on all of us. Can I ask that you take your mobile phone out of your bag, pocket. Hold it in your hands, it fits really well, it feels really comfortable being there. I wonder how many of your brains have switched to thinking about the notifications, the emails, the messages that are within the phone. Now imagine, you are going to swap your phone with the person behind you/ in front of you, with me or one of the teachers.

How did this make you feel? Horror, worry, fear, uncomfortable?

Smartphones have reshaped childhood!

Smartphones have been with us for barely 15 years, and we're only now beginning to see the impact of these devices on a generation of children.

The age of owning/ using a smartphone is going down but the apps and platforms are becoming ever more sophisticated in capturing attention and keeping people online and the volume of harmful or inappropriate content has grown exponentially.

This has and will continue to reshape our children's childhood.

Smartphones have reshaped childhood!

35 hours a week

The average time UK teens spend on their smartphones – equivalent to a full-time job

The University of Birmingham, 2025

30%

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

Mullan, 2019

65%

The amount of time teens spend with friends daily has dropped 65% since the launch of the iPhone

American Time Use Survey



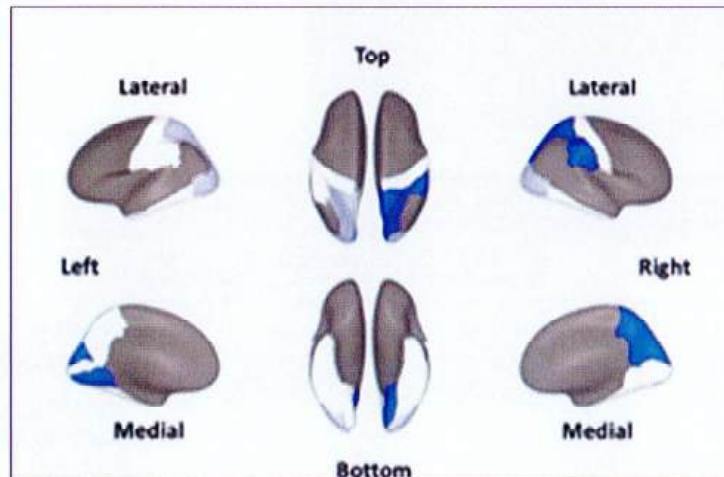
AC: Lost childhood

The impact of smartphone/ internet use is felt both at home and in school. These statistics clearly show the impact of internet access/ social media/ smartphone use on learning, wellbeing, friendships and behaviour.

Perhaps the most serious and overlooked of all impacts is the **opportunity cost** – all the things that children are **not** doing when they're spending hours per day on smartphones.

- Childhood is short, and time is the most precious resource any of us have.
- In the UK, the average 12-year-old now spends 4 hours per day on their phone. This is time when they could be hanging out with their family and friends, playing, reading, kicking a ball – vital real world activities and relationships that enable children to learn the life skills they need to transition into adulthood.
- No child will look back fondly on the childhood memories they made scrolling Snapchat!

Smartphones have reshaped childhood!



AC Physical Health:

Myopia

Each additional hour of daily screen time increases the risk of myopia by 21%.
(JAMA Network Open, 2024)

Consequence of myopia are serious- retinal detachment, early onset cataract, glaucoma, loss of vision

Advice: screens at a distance, TVs rather than phone or table, more time outside

Emotional regulation:

Long hours of screen use can cause physical changes in the brain, including reduced grey matter in areas linked to emotional regulation and impulse control. [MDPI Children, 2023](#)

Smartphones have reshaped childhood!

90%

Of girls and 50% of boys have been sent unsolicited explicit content

Ofsted, 2021

51%

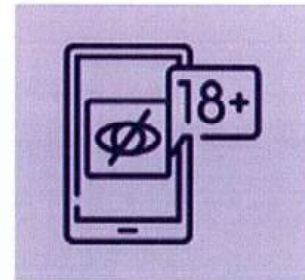
Of UK 11-13 year olds have seen pornography, mostly unintentionally

BBFC, 2022

75%

Of 15-year olds questioned had been sent a beheading video

Digital Childhoods, 2022



Inappropriate content.

This is mainly secondary data: in primary: 33% of 11yr olds- and even 10% of 9yr olds - already have seen pornography!

Smartphones are a gateway to extreme content and viewpoints:

- hardcore pornography to sexualised and violent imagery.
- Extreme political views.
- Material promoting self harm and suicide and eating disorders.

Even if children don't search this content out, they will be served it by the algorithm on social media, and sent it via their friends on WhatsApp.

Once they've seen these things, they can't un-see them.

Being immersed in this sort of toxic content has the effect of normalising it over time for your child. **This content fundamentally change the foundational fabric of childhood.**

“I was 10 when I watched porn for the first time. I stumbled upon it by accident. The website has no age verification, no ID requirement.

Where was my mother? In the next room, making sure I was eating 9 coloured fruits and vegetables.”

Smartphones have reshaped childhood!

8 in 10

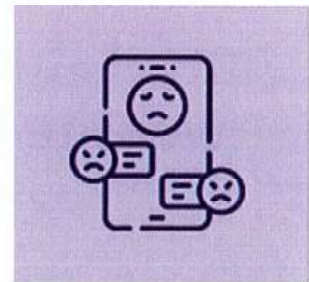
Among children aged 8-17 who are bullied, eight in ten experience it through a device

Ofcom, 2022

3X

Children who are currently experiencing a mental health problem are 3x more likely to have been bullied online in the last year

YoungMinds, 2017



Cyber bullying:

In primary schools, Year 5–6 WhatsApp groups often fuel fallouts, bullying, and inappropriate sharing. Teachers report hours of lost learning time resolving online conflicts.

Smartphones have reshaped childhood!

89%

Online grooming crimes against children in the UK have increased by 89% in six years

NSPCC, 2024

110

The number of child sextortion attempts reported to UK police every month

National Crime Agency, 2025

1000%

Online imagery of primary school aged children being coached to perform sexual acts has soared by 1,000%

Internet Watch Foundation, 2023



AC Grooming:

In 2023, there were 10,000+ grooming offences in the UK.

Nearly half began on Snapchat; others on Instagram, WhatsApp or Facebook

Smartphones have reshaped childhood!

3X

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

Kings College London, 2024

2X

Teens who spend more than 3hrs a day on social media face double the risk of anxiety and depression

Jama Psychiatry, 2019



74%

Of girls who got their first smartphone aged 6 had mental health issues as adults, compared to 46% who got them at 18

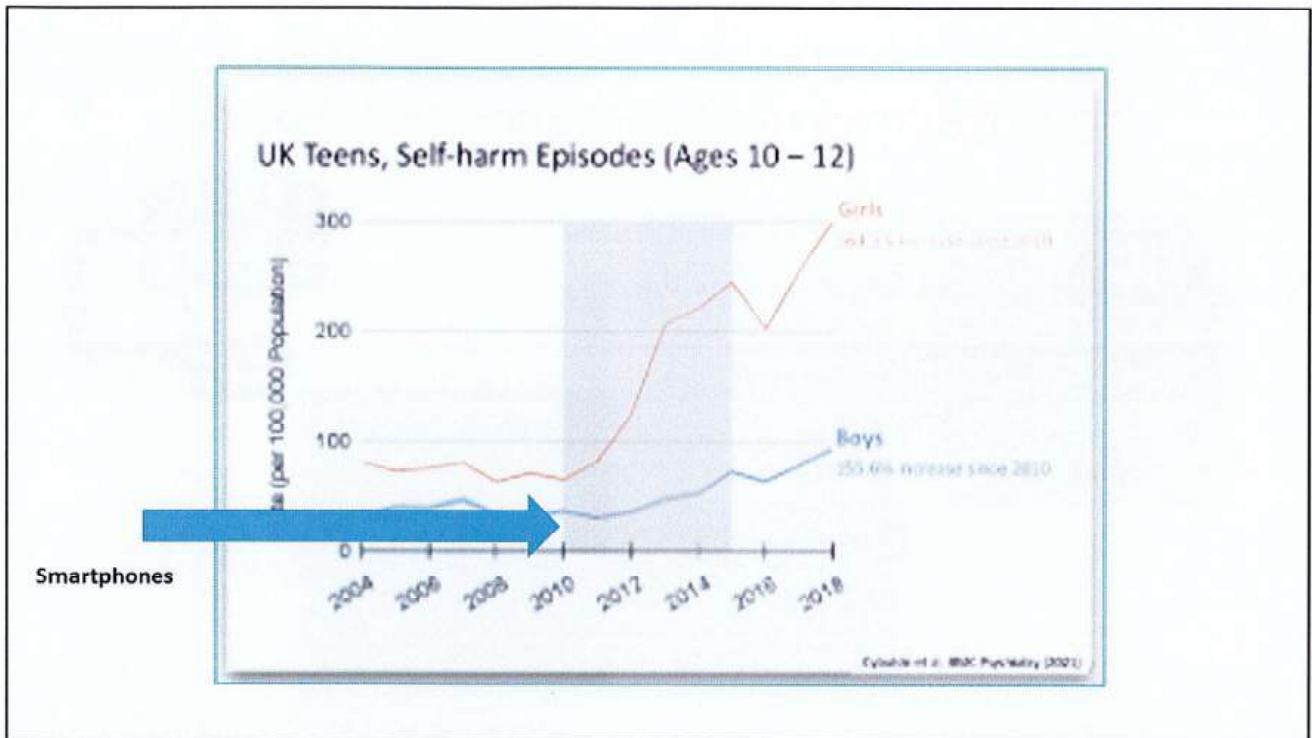
Sapiens Lab, 2023

HH: Mental Health:

Are our children happy? The news and media regularly share the issues we have with mental health. Teenagers are experiencing far more instances of debilitating anxiety and depression.

Research shows that the earlier a child has a smartphone, and the more time they spend on it, the worse the outcomes:

- Children with problematic use are 2x more likely to have anxiety and 3x more likely to have depression
- Five or more hours a day brings a 40% chance of clinical depression



Since 2010, when children first started getting smartphones- the graph clearly shows impact on rates of self harm.

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

Smartphones have reshaped childhood!

46%

Of teens report that they are online 'almost constantly', via their phones

Pew Research Centre, 2024

1 in 4

Children have smartphone addiction, using it to the detriment of other activities

Kings College London, 2024



HH Addiction

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

One Harvard study found that social media platforms made nearly \$11 billion in advertising revenue off kids and teens in 2022.

- The more time we spend on their apps, the more data they can harvest about us, the more targeted the adverts they can sell and the more money they make.
- Think of things like infinite scroll, Snapstreaks, likes and comments- they all trigger our brain's dopamine circuits in a similar way to that of slot machine gambling.

Children's brains, which are not yet fully developed, are particularly vulnerable to this – it's no wonder that Ofcom reports (2024) that many children are routinely spending eight hours a day on social media.

Smartphones have reshaped childhood!

2X

Children using smartphones at bedtime have over double the risk of a disrupted night's sleep

Kings College London, 2016

237

The average teen gets 237 smartphone notifications a day

Common Sense Media, 2023

1-2 grades

Children at smartphone-free schools get GCSE results 1-2 grades higher

Policy Exchange, 2024



HH Attention:

Are our children being successful? Are they learning to be their best? Are they alert and ready for the day?

- Excessive screen time and short-form video apps reduce attention span, concentration, and sleep quality, reducing focus and impacting learning.
- Pre-teens lose the equivalent of a night's sleep per week to social media use-this impacts mental health, wellbeing and learning. (De Montfort University 2022)
- High screen use contributes to poor posture, disrupted sleep- 60% of teenagers report sleep difficulties. SHDH 2023
- Road safety- mobile phone distraction is a major cause of road accidents involving children. (LookUp)
- A large controlled study of 17,000 students in secondary school found that banning smartphones in class led to higher grades – with the biggest gains for lower-achieving pupils.

Smartphones have reshaped childhood!

33%

Of parents of kids with smartphones have cried over their child's phone obsession

HMD global survey of 10,000 parents, 2024

51%

Of parents of kids with smartphones regret giving them one

HMD global survey of 10,000 parents, 2024

73%

Of parents say excessive smartphone-use is a source of family conflict

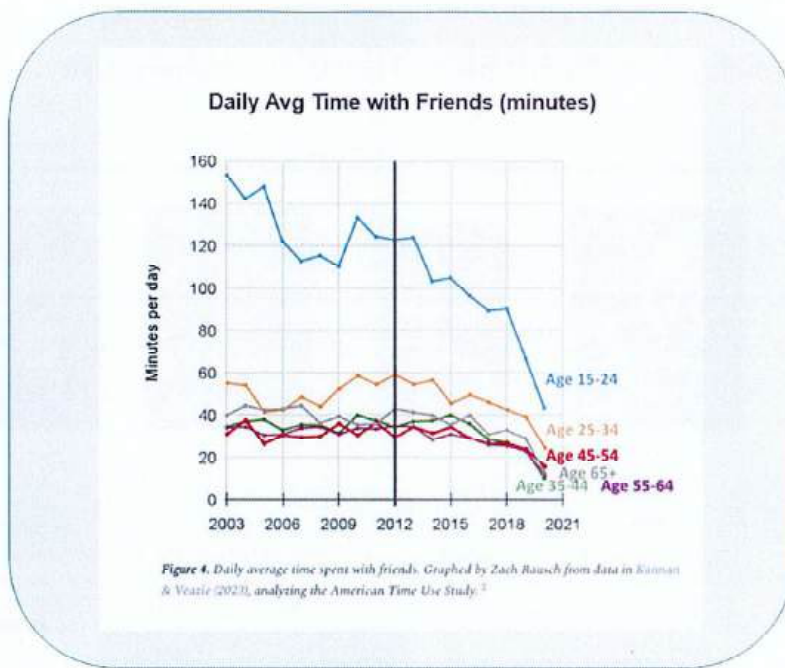
Vivo Switch Off study, 2024



HH: Family Life:

Children spend twice as long looking at screens as playing outside. [Oxford Home Tutoring, 2022](#)

There has been a 50% reduction in the time children play outside in 1 generation. [Raising the Nation Play Commission, 2025](#)



Impact on being with friends has dropped significantly since the introduction of the smartphone



IN TWO DECADES, EVERYTHING'S CHANGED

2004



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

HR- How technology has developed.

In just 20 years, look how the technology has developed. In just 20 years since the first iPhone, smartphones have gone from novelty to necessity!

- It is important to know that smartphones were not designed for children.



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

HR – Parents and smartphones

We have already recognised that many of us feel trapped.... the choice to buy a smart phone doesn't feel like a choice as either way it feels like a lose-lose!

We hear in school: "A smartphone is essential for safety, contact or peace of mind." "We need to prepare the children for the digital world they are a part of." "I don't want my child to be the only one without one. I don't want them to miss out."

Many parents prefer to delay giving their child a phone, but almost all parents to give in earlier than they'd like. AND if it is not the smartphone it will be a console, ipad, parent phone.



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

HR If we all know that smartphones aren't necessarily a good thing for kids, why does almost every child have a smartphone by aged 11?

Because everyone else has a phone- this seems to be the key pressure.

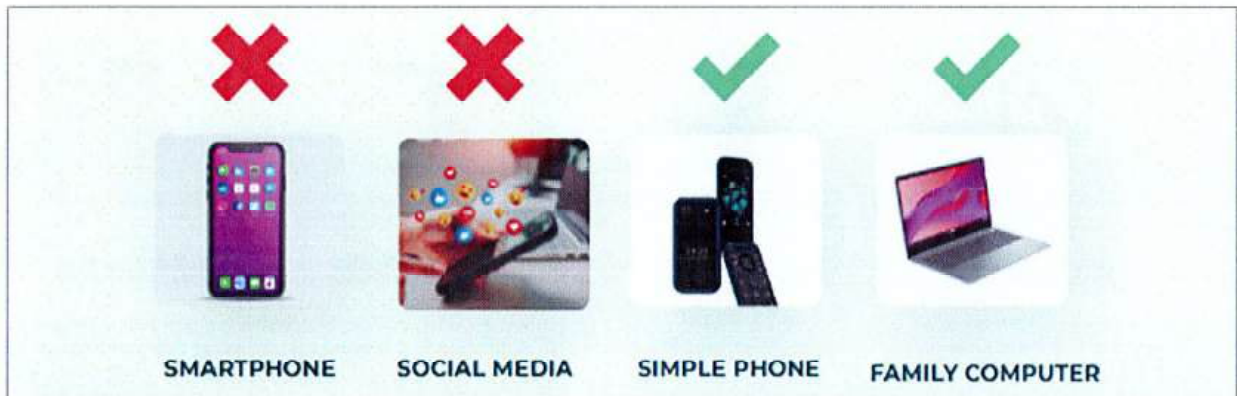
The powerful network effect of these devices means that many parents and young people feel like they have absolutely no choice in the matter.

Remember: **You are the ones in control of this.** Your voice makes a huge impact on the rest of the parents.



HR: Advice:

1. No phone 0-11
2. First phone- a simple phone instead of smartphone until end of year 9. That means you can keep in touch when they're out and about using calls and texts, without any of the harms associated with smartphones and social media.
3. Follow on phone-When they want to use the internet, with parental controls with boundaries around the digital world.
4. Smartphone at 18- once acquainted with the digital world and stay connected to their friends without the temptation of having it in their pocket 24/7.



HR: In the family home:

- Simple phone until at least the end of Year 9
- Delay social media until 17yrs /18 yrs old (when an adult)
- Internet and WhatsApp access via a **shared** family computer

WhatsApp- pitfalls.

- end to end encryption means WhatsApp nor police can monitor
- disappearing messages- optional setting that can make evidence of sextortion and bullying vanish
- multiple groups- can be connected inadvertently allowing online predators
- real-time location- live location allows children to share real-time location with others in the group



12 mins video regarding smartphones.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Zhfd0jW7iY>
Please do take time to watch.

“Smartphones are the gateway to social media and the Wild West of the Internet.”

Smartphone Free Childhood

Break into groups-

Years R & 1- in hall with Mrs Robbins

Years 2, 3 & 4 in 4C on upper corridor- Mrs Morganti

Years 5 & 6 in 4A on upper corridor – Mr Coyle and Miss Hughes



**WE HAVE OVERPROTECTED
OUR CHILDREN IN THE REAL
WORLD WHILE
UNDERPROTECTING THEM
ONLINE**

Jonathan Haidt



What access do you want the internet to have to **your child**?

What age do you think (play based) **childhood** should end?

What are you most worried about in **managing** the transition to a smartphone/ social media?

What habits do you want **your child** to have with them for life?

What are **your** smartphone/screen time/ social media habits?

How might we work **together** to help each other for the children?

Discussion time in rooms- choosing one or more questions to reflect on.

What are some of the common reasons parents have for giving a child a smartphone/device?

“Everyone else in my child’s class has a phone.”

“We are living apart and my child needs a smartphone to communicate with me.”

“Can’t we just use a stripped back iPhone with parental controls?”

“My child needs a smartphone for walking home. They need it for their safety and so I can track them.”

These are some of the common reasons- they are really hard.

1. This is one of the hardest to overcome.
 - We have to work together to agree to delay
 - This helps to reduce the pushback
 - We can all feel that we are in charge of what our children access, do and why.
2. They can use an ipad with facetime, parent phone, brick phone
3. No parental control is foolproof. The children will find a way through them
 - A 2024 Parentkind poll found that 58% of children never had any parental controls on their phone, and of those that did, 47% had bypassed them.
 - Even the best intentioned parent struggles to stay on top of the settings required across multiple apps and devices, often across multiple children. Whether it’s on YouTube, on Whatsapp, from AI chatbots or just shared in the playground, children have endless advice made available to them on how to find their way around any parental controls. And even when they work, parental controls can’t stop the peer pressure, addictive design, or inappropriate content children are sent by others.
4. Brick phones allow calls and text.
 - Do we really need to track our children? Call on leaving and arriving at home.
 - If you are worried, is it the right time for them to walk home? What is the reason for the choice?

Delay, delay, delay.....

The more of you, the parent body, decide upon delaying giving children a smartphone, or access to certain apps and games, the easier it becomes for ALL parents.

PARENT POWER

- Smartphone free childhood and other websites - many resources for parents
- Speak with your friends and find out who is making what decision so you have the facts and these do not come from your child.
- Agree what you are doing as a friendship group/ class group.

(It is ok to have different thoughts and make different decisions. Remember: if you decide to give your child access to a smartphone and apps like snapchat and WhatsApp, what your child sees, says, has access to, will come into the classroom and playground and will not just have an effect on your child, but those of other children.)

What do you say to your child?

1. Listen to your child and all of their reasons, feelings and thoughts. Make sure they feel heard and that their views are important.
2. Explain, just because everyone else has something, it doesn't mean it is the best thing for **you**.
3. Explain the reasons for the decision and raise awareness of the concerns over the use of a smartphone.
4. Explain that "It is not never, it is just not yet."

What is important:

- talking to your children openly as a family.
- being good role models to your child.
- making a concerted effort to show healthy use of smart tech i.e. screen free times.
- Creating a plan/ contract with your child of when they will have a phone and how access to internet/ apps etc will progress

What if my child has a smartphone already?

- ✓ Have the difficult and awkward conversations about what they may face on a smartphone e.g. pornography, suicide, toxic masculinity, radical views, bullying, meeting people who may not be who they say they are
- ✓ Make sure you have strong family parent controls and the child knows why they are in place
- ✓ Limit screen time, apps and ensure they do not have access to social media

Advice from Smartphone free childhood: focus on

- 1) Being a positive, digital role model
- 2) Educating yourself to the risks
- 3) Raising awareness and teaching your child about online safety
- 4) Teaching your child and putting in boundaries to ensure there is a healthy balance of hobbies, downtime, online/screentime

Education:

- 1) Open conversations- so children know they can come to you- it is not taboo.
 - Teach them about the risks and the ways to protect themselves and that they can always talk to a trusted adult- not a friend- about internet worries
- 2) Make sure you educate yourself about parent controls and the risks with all apps and smart tech. See the websites at the end.

Make sure all parental controls are set up and switched on until they are an adult themselves!

- You can control the device on the phone and limit functionality in an age appropriate way.
- Have an agreement over the apps they will have access to- thinking of the age limits. Will they have access to the internet? What games will they be able to play? It is always easier to work forwards it is so very hard to go backwards!

**It is much harder to
go back once they
have started using a
smartphone/App!**

What if my child has a smartphone already?

- ✓ If they have Instagram – make sure they have a positive set of people to follow who can get the algorithm going.
- ✓ If snapchat or tiktok- this is much harder to do (please don't give them access)
- ✓ No WhatsApp groups of larger than 10 people that they know personally. Look at the settings and explain the concerns over disappearing messages, other people accessing groups they do not know, sharing of images
- ✓ Phone downtime- 7pm to 9am

Digital role models:

3) Remember children are looking at you to learn behaviours. Lead the way by limiting your own screen time and demonstrate positive digital habits.- phone away at night, not at the dinner table.

What are you viewing? Are the children aware of the draws and excitement and fun of apps like tiktok, snapchat?

Are you multi screen tasking- phone, tv, computer? What are we teaching our children about- reading, talking, writing, hobbies.

4) Help them to have a healthy childhood- provide balance and time for reading, hobbies, creativity, being outside and active.

No internet in the bedroom- at night, unsupervised/ unmonitored.

**Remember the internet should not
be in your child's bedroom!**

Who gains from children's use of smart phones and apps?

The biggest 5 Social Media platforms made \$68 billion in 2023

Meta's profit in 2023 was \$134.9 Billion

Bill and Melinda Gates waited until their children were 14 years old before giving them a smartphone. Melinda acknowledged in hindsight that even this was too young.

In pursuit of profit, internet platforms are amassing huge amounts of profit without a thought or care for **the minds of children**.

“Smartphones can offer independence, connection, and reassurance. But there are safer ways to give kids those things – especially in the early years of adolescence.”

**The question is: are the risks
worth the reward?**

Smartphones

Choose the emoji that matches how you feel about smartphones in the lives of primary aged children.



Relaxed/
confident



Curious



Worried



Overwhelmed



I invite you to raise your hand to show where are you in your feelings towards smartphones are now.



Remember you are the
primary educator of your
child. Educate yourself and
take control!

Thank you for taking the time to look through the slides. There is a lot to take on and there might be a range of emotions that you are feeling about your child's childhood, worries about the decisions that you now want to make.

Remember the most important thing is your **collective parent power**

If you are interested in working together more formally, there is the Smartphone Free Childhood movement. If you would like to sign up to this, please see the information shared in the school comms or view the **Smartphone Free Childhood website**.

There is also the book- **The Anxious Generation** that you may want to look at and buy yourself.

Resources

- Pdf of some good websites and videos
- There will be future talks based on the ideas that you have share with us
- Ai -very brief information on at the back of this powerpoint.
- Hannah Fry documentary BBC

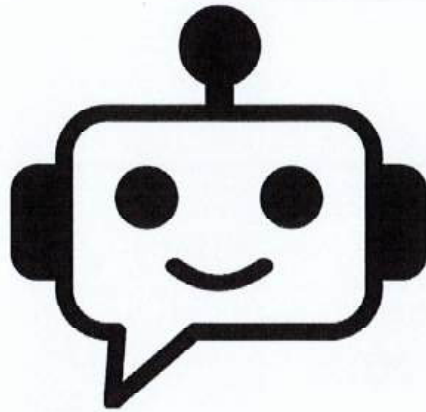
The message we want you to leave with is that you are not alone!

- Connect with each other
- Know that you can have those conversations around these issues with your peers
- Find the power and strength in each other so you can support your children to have the childhood you want them to have.
- Speak with us!

Parent resources

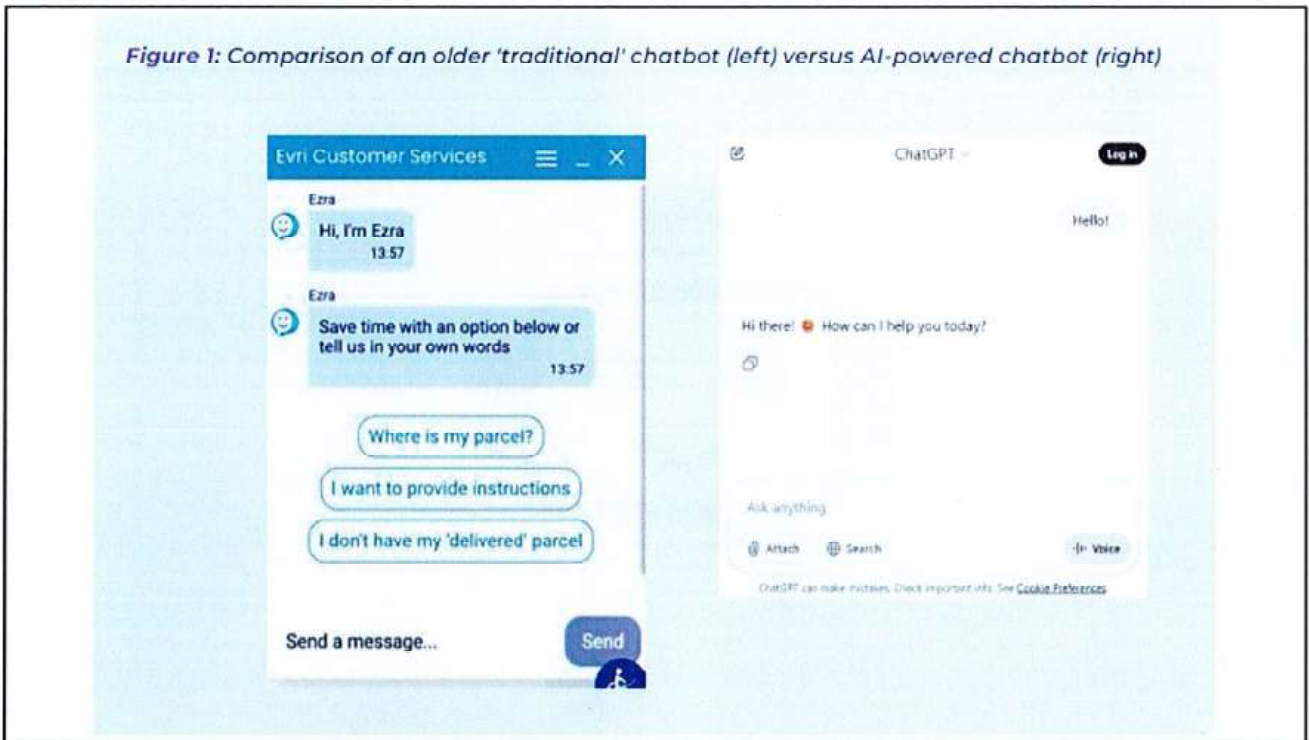
- An [excellent 12 minute video](#) from Papaya Parenting
- [A half hour summary](#) of the leading book on the subject, "The Anxious Generation" by Jonathan Haidt
- An [excellent and entertaining documentary](#) called "Swiped" on Channel4
- [Smartphonefree Childhood](#) website
- [Papaya](#) website
- [NSPCC](#) website
- [Internet matters](#) website
- [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) website
- [Childnet](#) website
- [Lego education](#) website

Resources that might be useful for you to use will be shared via pdf.



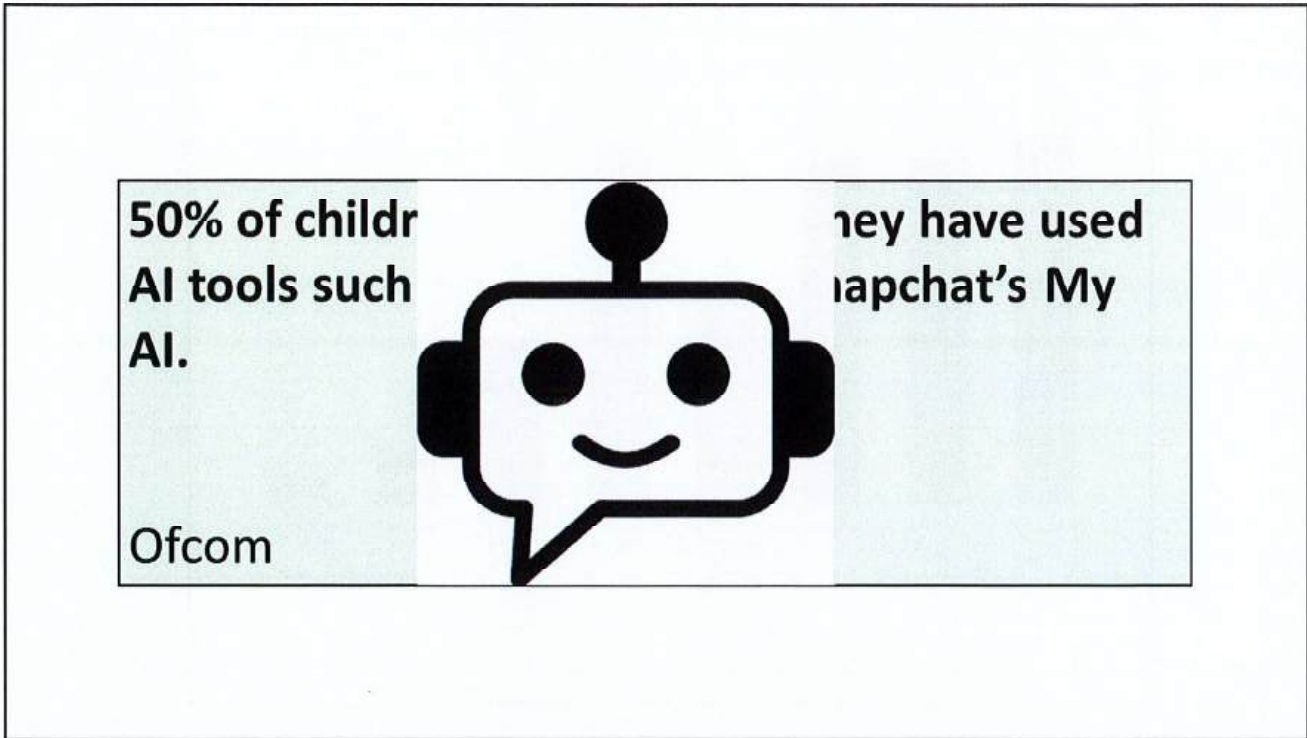
The following slides are a snapshot of some Ai facts for your information

Figure 1: Comparison of an older 'traditional' chatbot (left) versus AI-powered chatbot (right)



Older chatbots that we might have seen for consumer support/ customer service.

The new Ai powered chatbot is now prompting interaction.



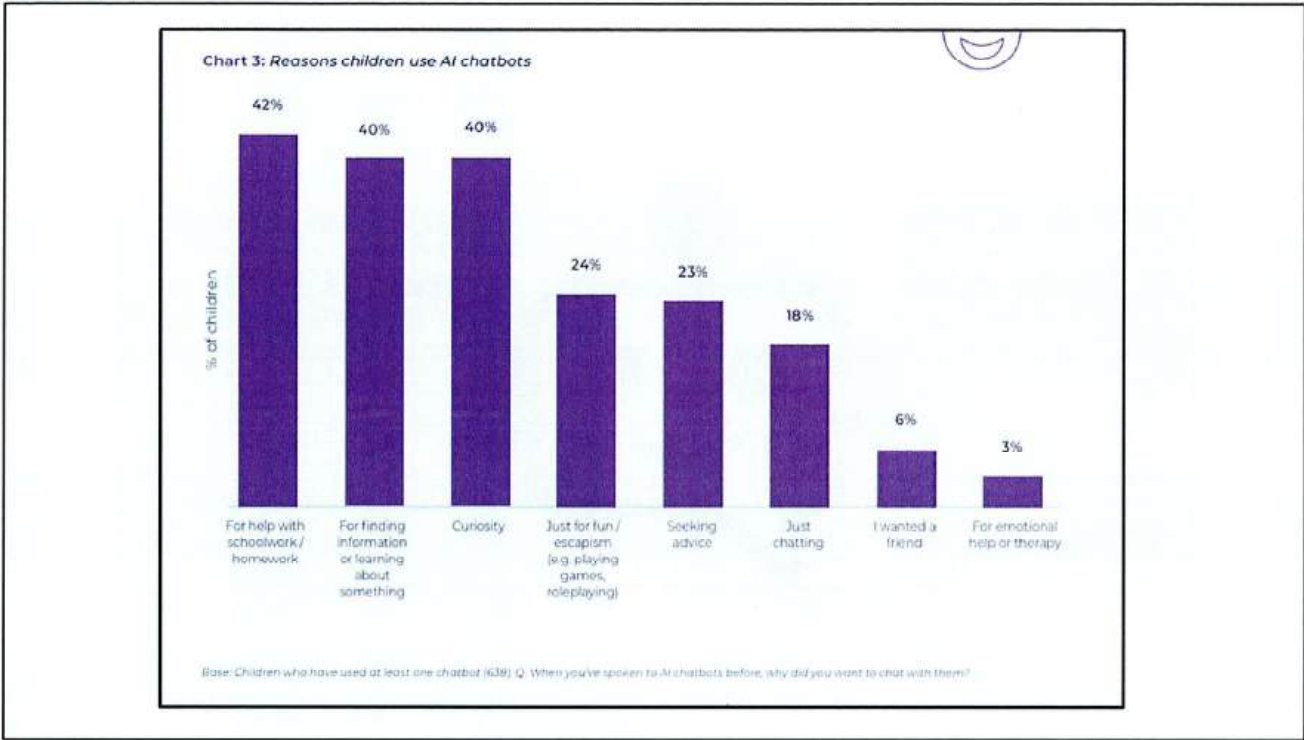
Some AI chatbots are designed to be helpful and friendly, but this can sometimes lead them to agree with everything a child says, even if it is not true or safe. This can reinforce harmful thoughts or behaviour, especially if a child is looking for reassurance or validation.

One explanation for this is a behaviour called sycophancy, which refers to when an AI chatbot gives overly agreeable responses that closely mirror the user's views. The friendly, non-judgemental tone of AI chatbots may also encourage users to confide in them and reveal sensitive information or seek emotional support, even when the AI chatbots are not trained to provide such support.

Some AI chatbots do not clearly signpost that they are AI-driven, which may pose further challenges for children who may not yet have the developmental skills to fully understand the nature of the interaction.

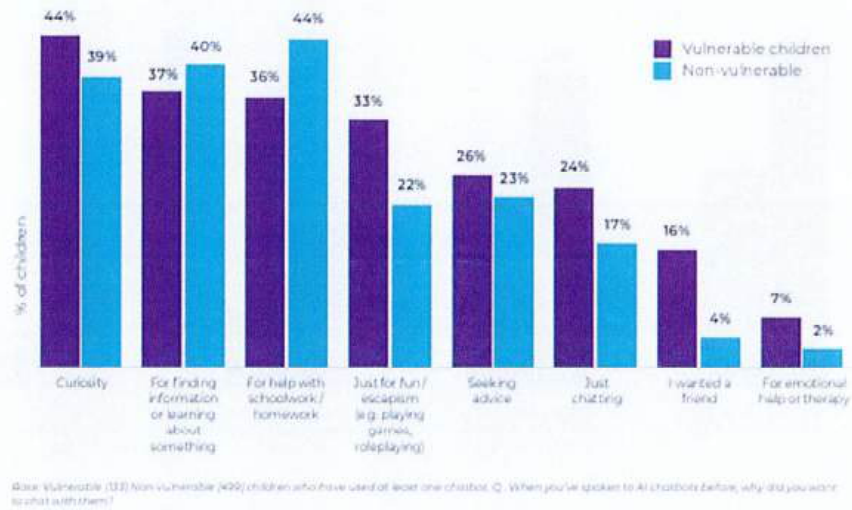
In 2024, a mother in Florida filed a lawsuit against character.ai, claiming an AI chatbot based on a character from Game of Thrones engaged in abusive and sexual interactions with her teenage son and encouraged him to take his own life.

In the UK, an MP recently told Parliament about "an extremely harrowing meeting" with a constituent whose 12-year-old son had allegedly been groomed by a chatbot on character. ai.



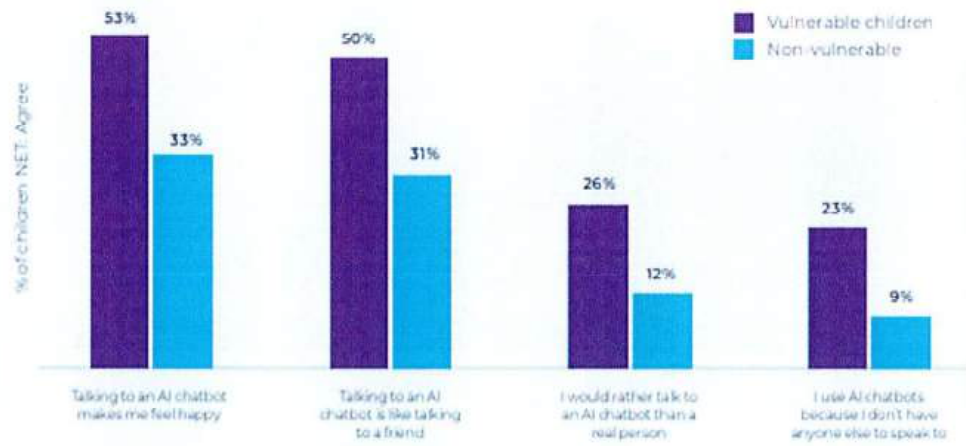
Children's use of Ai chatbots

Chart 4: Reasons children use AI chatbots - comparison between vulnerable and non-vulnerable



Vulnerable children use of ai chatbots is higher than non-vulnerable children and more for friendship, emotional help, fun.

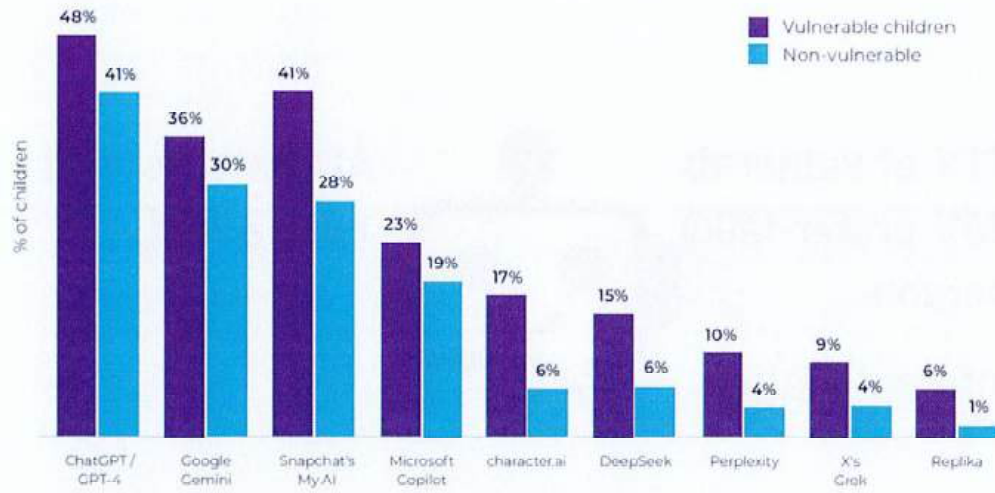
Chart 5: Children's views on AI chatbots as companions - comparison between vulnerable and non-vulnerable children



Base: Vulnerable (788) / non-vulnerable (832) children who have used at least one chatbot. Q: How far do you agree with these statements? (NET, Agree)

Vulnerable children are using ai chatbots as companions more than those non-vulnerable.

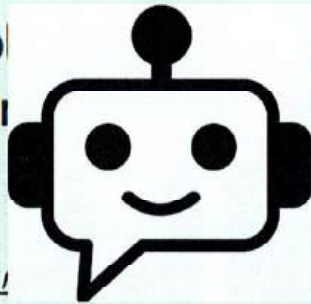
Chart 2: Vulnerable children's use of popular AI chatbots compared to non-vulnerable



Base: Vulnerable (188) Non-vulnerable (812) Q: How familiar are you with each of these AI chatbots? - I've used this before

Use of ai chatbots- - snapchat ai

- 71% of vulnerable
26% prefer talking
person.



AI chatbots, and
over a real

Internet Matters,

Figure 11: character.ai desktop 'For you' tab displaying misogynistic and explicit chatbot



On some AI chatbots, children can easily be exposed to inappropriate and explicit material.

One of the first AI chatbots shown to a 15-year-old girl's character.ai avatar during user testing- see above

