

# Smartphone Free beyond Primary v0.4

## Useful Resources

*This is a live document and will be edited and updated.*

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### Introduction

*We hope to inform and equip parents to make decisions around smartphone ownership and use to help protect their child(ren).*

*We have researched widely and explored thoroughly this topic over the last few years. We have summarised the emerging evidence and provided a concise overview of key points alongside some resources to help you navigate the choice of smartphone ownership and online safety with your child / adolescent. Select [\[Click here\]](#) within any section if you want to read in more detail.*

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## **1 : Reasons for Smartphone Free beyond Primary**

There are many reasons to consider delaying smartphone ownership as long as possible. These are our top 7!

### **I - Smartphones are highly addictive**

Tech companies spend billions on making apps and devices intentionally addictive as this is how they make their money. Smartphones are like slot machines in your children's pocket constantly drawing them back to crave more.

- i) One study found one-in-five teens looked at YouTube “almost constantly”. [\[Click here\]](#)
- ii) A former Google product manager shares how Silicon Valley is engineering your phone, apps and social media to get you hooked [\[Click here\]](#)
- iii) A study by researchers at King’s College London has estimated that 25% of children and young people use their smartphones in a way that is consistent with a behavioural addiction [\[Click here\]](#)
- iv) Tech company CEOs and owners and those in the business tend to not purchase smartphones for their children & worry about the impacts on developing brains:  
Steve Jobs was low-tech parent [\[Click here\]](#); ‘Parent like a Tech Exec’ [\[Click here\]](#)

### **II - Negative effect on mental health**

There has been a sharp rise in childhood anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide since smartphone became mainstream in 2012 [\[Click here\]](#) The iPhone was only invented in 2008! A young person’s brain is considered not fully developed until age 25.

- i. Children are not emotionally equipped to navigate the highly comparative nature and portrayal of perfectionism on social media. This results in negative feelings of not being good enough compared to the online version of their peers and feelings of missing out. This leads to low self-esteem and potentially low mood.

- ii. When children overuse technology, the constant stimulation of the brain causes the hormone cortisol to rise. Too much cortisol can inhibit a child from feeling calm. The loss of tranquillity can lead to sustained stress and anxiety disorders. Study in the UK shows social media use in teens correlates directly to rates of anxiety and depression. [\[Click here\]](#)
- iii. Social media use in young people is linked to deliberate self-harm (DSH) and suicide. Adolescents with a history of DSH are more active on social media than those with no history of DSH. There is growing evidence that use of social media could be considered a risk factor for suicide. [\[Click here\]](#)
- iv. A study in Canada showed daily social media use >2 hours is independently associated with poor self-rating of mental health and experiences of high levels of psychological distress and suicidal ideation. [\[Click here\]](#)
- v. Apps like TikTok provoke dopamine release and are instantly gratifying. This can lead to an inability to enjoy other activities or hobbies in the same way. It may also adversely affect skills such as perseverance and dedication - the ability to engage in a task in a sustained way requiring effort which results in a delayed reward. [\[Click here\]](#)

### **III - Availability of pornography**

Smartphones have enabled children to view pornography anywhere at any time. Pornography marketers intentionally target youth online to lure them to more explicit images and videos.

- a. The adult content which parents may have accessed in their youth could be considered 'quaint' in comparison to today's world of online pornography. Depictions of degradation, sexual coercion, aggression and exploitation are commonplace, and disproportionately targeted against teenage girls.
- b. The UK Children's Commissioner is deeply concerned about the normalisation of sexual violence in online pornography, and the role that this plays in shaping children's understanding of sex and relationships. [\[Click here\]](#)

c. In the UK by age 11 - 25 % of children have viewed pornography. This rises to 50% by age 13. The age a child first encounters it generally correlates with the age they first receive a smartphone.

## **IV - Diminished childhood experience**

Even harmless content isn't harmless. Time spent on a device is time not spent with other children; playing, exploring, interacting and developing vital social skills. Children develop problem solving skills and build resilience through play.

[A 2023 survey](#) of over 1,500 teens found over half (51%) of U.S. teens spend a minimum of four hours on social media every day. That is nearly *30 hours* a week. The opportunity cost of this needs serious consideration.

[\[Worth a watch: Jonathan Haidt presentation at Education Event\]](#)

## **V - Effect on attention span**

Excessive screen use alters the developing brain and reduces attention span

Initial results from a groundbreaking study by the National Institute of Health reveal that MRI's found significant differences in the brains of children who use smartphones, tablets, and video games >7 hours a day. [\[Click here\]](#)  
How smartphones weaken attention spans in children and adults [\[Click here\]](#)  
'Stolen Focus' by Johann Hari is a book (available as audio book) addressing this issue

## **VI - Impact on sleep [\[Click here\]](#)**

Sleep disturbance in childhood is known to have adverse effects on health, including poor diet, obesity, weakened immune system, stunted growth, and mental health issues. It also impacts attendance and performance in school.

## **VII - Effect on academic performance**

- a. Pupils with strict device bans are more likely to get top grades than those who scroll, study finds" [\[Click here\]](#)
- b. A Norwegian study shows how banning smartphones in schools positively impacts students' mental health, incidents of bullying, and several measures of educational performance. [\[Click here\]](#)

- c. Research from the University of Texas suggests the mere presence of your smartphone in the same space reduces cognitive capacity and test-taking brainpower. [\[Click here\]](#)
- d. A study by the National Institute of Health show that children who spend more than two hours a day looking at a screen got lower scores on thinking and language tests [\[click here\]](#)

[Note: some of the studies above are taken from <https://www.waituntil8th.org/why-wait> and <https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/the-problem> ]

## 2: Global initiatives for Smartphone Free Childhood

- [The Anxious Generation - International movement](#)
- [Smartphone Free Childhood - UK movement](#)
- [Delay Smartphones - Scottish movement](#)
- [Wait until 8th - American movement](#)
- [The Heads Up Alliance - Australian movement](#)
- [Adolescence Free of Mobile Phones - Spanish movement](#)
- [Look up - French movement](#)
- [Smarter Start at 14 - German movement](#)
- Explore over 40 international movements [\[Click here\]](#)

## 3: Smartphone alternatives

Wrist watches with call/text function.

A couple of examples:

- [Xplora](#)
- [Cheaper options on amazon](#)

Nokia phone examples:

- Nokia 3310

- Nokia 2260
- Nokia 5310
- Nokia 105
- Nokia II0
- Nokia 8210

Note: Some Nokia feature phones have simplified versions of popular social media apps. A system called KaiOS is used which allows for a number of apps including Google Maps, Facebook, WhatsApp etc. If you are trying to avoid these you can check that they are not enabled. You can see the apps available on these phones here:


<https://www.kaiostech.com/store/>

This is an American article and has some good information [The Best Dumb Phones](#)

## 4: Explore further

### Documentaries/videos

1. The Social Dilemma (on Netflix) - A documentary that looks at what the consequences are of our growing dependence on social media. As digital platforms increasingly become a lifeline to stay connected, Silicon Valley insiders reveal how social media is reprogramming civilization by exposing what's hiding on the other side of your screen.

2.  Social Media Dangers Documentary — Childhood 2.0

3. How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness.

Bestselling author and social psychologist Jonathan Haidt shares research findings from his book, *The Anxious Generation* at National Education Summit 2023 in the USA: 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. [\[Smartphones vs Smart Kids -click here\]](#)

4. "Who is Controlling Your Children? The Hidden Influence of Generative AI Learning" Presentation by Power of Zero [\[click here\]](#)

### Podcasts/radio interviews

1. BBC World report on Greystones Smartphone Voluntary code at primary level, the voice of Greystones teens sharing their online experiences as well as their assistant principal, Eoghan Clearly sharing his insights based on all his involvement in helping

support his students. It finishes with an interview with our health minister, Stephen Donnelly who says it is irrefutable at this point that there is a direct causal link between the horrific content children are being exposed to on social media and the very significant widespread damage to children. [\[click here\]](#)

2. How Smartphones Are Rewiring Our Brains, Why Social Media is Eradicating Childhood & The Truth About The Mental Health Epidemic with Dr Jonathan Haidt and Dr. Rangan Chatterjee [\[Click here\]](#)
3. The Anxious Generation - Social psychologist, Dr Jonathan Haidt, joins Dr. Becky to give parents hope that we can end phone-based childhood and restore a more humane one. [\[Click here\]](#)
4. Cyber safety for young people, East Coast radio interview with Alex Cooney from CyberSafe Kids, Eoghan Cleary (teacher) from Temple Carrig School in Greystones and student James Fennoll. [\[Click here\]](#)
5. Secondary school teacher/author, Eoghan Cleary's interview with Ryan Tubridy on porn literacy in the classroom [\[Click here\]](#)
6. Podcast with secondary school teacher/author, Eoghan Cleary, on how to talk about sex, consent and porn literacy with your kids (Mum's Mind Podcast). [\[Click here\]](#)
7. Podcast on "how have the lives of 13-year-olds changed so dramatically in a decade?" (ESRI study) [\[Click here\]](#)

## 5 : Parents leading by example

There are some great tips in this article on how to improve on phone overuse

"Stop Scrolling - Start Living!"

<https://lifeapprentice.substack.com/p/11-tips-to-fight-social-media-addiction#%C2%A7use-third-party-apps>

Child's voice on parental phone overuse

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?mibextid=WC7FNe&v=1084142422656821&rdid=6bOG1xJ8DBEsbv7l>

Short video illustrating the effects parental phone overuse can have on kids

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/C5ObXT8p1RC/?igsh=N2U3eW9kdjgXNnZ2>

## 6 : Government Publications, research papers & articles

[Beheadings, porn, abuse and anxiety. A teacher talks to his students about their smartphone use](#)

[Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#)

[Technology Addiction Statistics](#)

[Sleepyteens: Social media use in adolescence is associated with poor sleep quality, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem](#)

[The influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents](#)

## 7 : Tips for talking to your child when they want a phone

### Advice from a mother

(Shared on the UK WhatsApp group "Parents United for a Smartphone Free Childhood")

**Step 1.** Empathise and get curious.

"I know you're feeling upset with us that we won't get you a phone. Why do you think it would be cool to have a smartphone?" Then listen carefully and mirror back what she says. "Oh, you feel like your friends are making plans in group chats without you." "Other kids have teased you about not having a phone." "You feel out of the loop about the latest TikTok trends." This step should help your daughter feel really heard and will give you so much intel on what is important to her.

**Step 2.** Share plainly and openly what your concerns are for her safety and development. Try not to lecture or sound like you're moralising. Emphasise how much you WANT her to have connections with her peers and for her to feel like she belongs. Maybe leverage a 3rd party resource like "Childhood 2.0", "Social Dilemma," or a recent Jonathan Haidt interview so that she hears it from elsewhere.

**Step 3.** Invite her to come up with a solution that addresses BOTH your concerns. If she doesn't have ideas, have your own ready.

Maybe YOU open a TikTok account and she can use it for 15 minutes a day, in the living room, on the family laptop, so she knows what's trending.

Maybe she has an iCloud account that she can text from on a computer (again, in a public, shared place) for a limited amount of time daily.

Maybe you guide her to be a peer leader who organises the most fun (phone-free) activities for friends.



(A half-step after step 1 or 2 would be to invite her to reflect on any negatives SHE has noticed about her friends' tech use. Chances are she will have observations of her own).

And finally, emphasise that sometimes our culture normalises things that are harmful (slavery and segregation in the US, smoking everywhere until this century, dangerous TikTok trends...), and it takes courageous people to think for themselves and make a different choice, even if it's hard.

## 8 : Helping your kids understand some of the issues with smartphone

### Mum, Dad, Why do you have rules about smartphones

You could print out the poster below and use it as a conversation starter with your kids:

**MUM, DAD, WHY DO YOU HAVE RULES ABOUT SMARTPHONES?**

- The more you use it, the less you sleep, everybody likes sleep 😊
- The more you use unsocial media, the worse you feel about yourself as a person
- 30% of children teenagers on whatsapp report feeling they've been cyber-bullied
- Unsocial media apps hijack the brain by using the same brain pathways seen in drug addiction
- 2/3rds of teenagers have been catfished - threatened or blackmailed online
- The people who make the apps you use don't actually let their own children use them, funny that isn't it?

One day maybe you'll thank us for it 😊

**COOL Challenge** Find 5 scientific studies that say that overusing smartphones is GOOD for children. **Bet you can't!!**

**COOL Challenge** Try going 7 days with ZERO social media or tech use. 95% of kids could never hack it. **What about you?**

Inspired by **SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD** [smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk](http://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk)

Produced by Patrick Ney from All About Parenting. Specifically designed to be printed and put up at home. Please use and share as widely as you like.

## A Short story to read with your child (shared on Parents United for Smartphone free childhood UK WhatsApp group)

Once upon a time, in a kitchen so bright,  
Little Chase sat, drawing maps day and night.  
With paper and crayons, he'd travel the world,  
Listing countries and capitals, his mind all unfurled.

He'd write funny songs and poems with glee,  
Leaving notes all around for his family to see.  
The house was a canvas for his creative flow,  
But then something happened, that you should know.

When Chase turned thirteen, he got his first phone,  
A gadget so shiny, it was all his own.  
At first, it seemed like a wonderful treat,  
But soon, it changed him, from head to his feet.

He stopped drawing maps and writing his rhymes,  
No more poems or songs, no more fun times.  
His eyes, once so bright, turned dull and heavy,  
He was there but not there, like a ghostly levy.

You see, inside his phone, Chase found a new place,  
Easier than boredom, a digital space.  
But being bored helps us find who we are,  
It's like searching for treasures, both near and far.

When we're bored, we think, "What should I do?"  
And that's when the magic starts coming through.  
We pick up a pen, a ball, or a book,  
Or explore the backyard, take a closer look.

Right after boredom, there's discovery to find,  
New ideas and talents, that expand our mind.  
But if we're always on screens, we miss out on the fun,  
On creating and dreaming, on a life that's well-spun.

Some grown-ups who made these phones and their kin,  
Keep them away from their own children's skin.  
They know screens can be fun, but they don't want to steal,  
The boredom that leads to a life that's so real.

So, my young friend, put down that phone,  
Pick up a crayon, let your imagination roam.  
Draw, write, play, and explore every day,  
You'll find yourself in the most wonderful way.

Just like Chase before phones, with a map and a rhyme,  
Discovering the world, one fun moment at a time.  
So go on adventures, both inside and out,  
For that's what being a kid is really about!

## A short film to share with kids illustrating the addictive lure of devices

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioaY1z2trx4>

## A nice story to share with younger kids

"Look Up" by Nathan Bryon. It is bursting with energy and passion about science and space, this heart-warming, inspirational picture book will have readers turning off their screens and switching on to the outside world. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZrr-KTpoCU>

## 8 : Examples of how kids get around parental controls

A quick search on YouTube on Reddit shows several workarounds. One of the most common is just changing the time zone to get around time restrictions.

Kids are also hiding apps from their parents. This video explains how to find hidden apps on your kids phone [\[Click here\]](#)

Some of the most commonly known workarounds that older children thought may potentially negate age-verification included:

- Using a VPN<sup>32</sup> to appear as if you are accessing adult content from elsewhere in the world
- Torrenting files<sup>33</sup> by downloading the data in chunks
- Using Tor (the 'onion' router)<sup>34</sup> to disguise the user's location
- By accessing the dark web<sup>35</sup>
- By using proxy websites<sup>36</sup>

[\[Click here for source pg 56\]](#)

## 9 : Parental Controls

Parent controls are recommended but it is important to recognise that children are very clued in on getting around parental controls so open dialogue and clear boundaries are key (for example : no devices in the bedroom)

47% of teens with parental controls in place say they have bypassed them  
(Parentkind poll, May 2024)

Washington Post: [Teens find circumventing Apple's parental controls is child's play](#)

### Parental Control apps

Android - Family link [click here](#)

Apple - Apple screen time [click here](#)

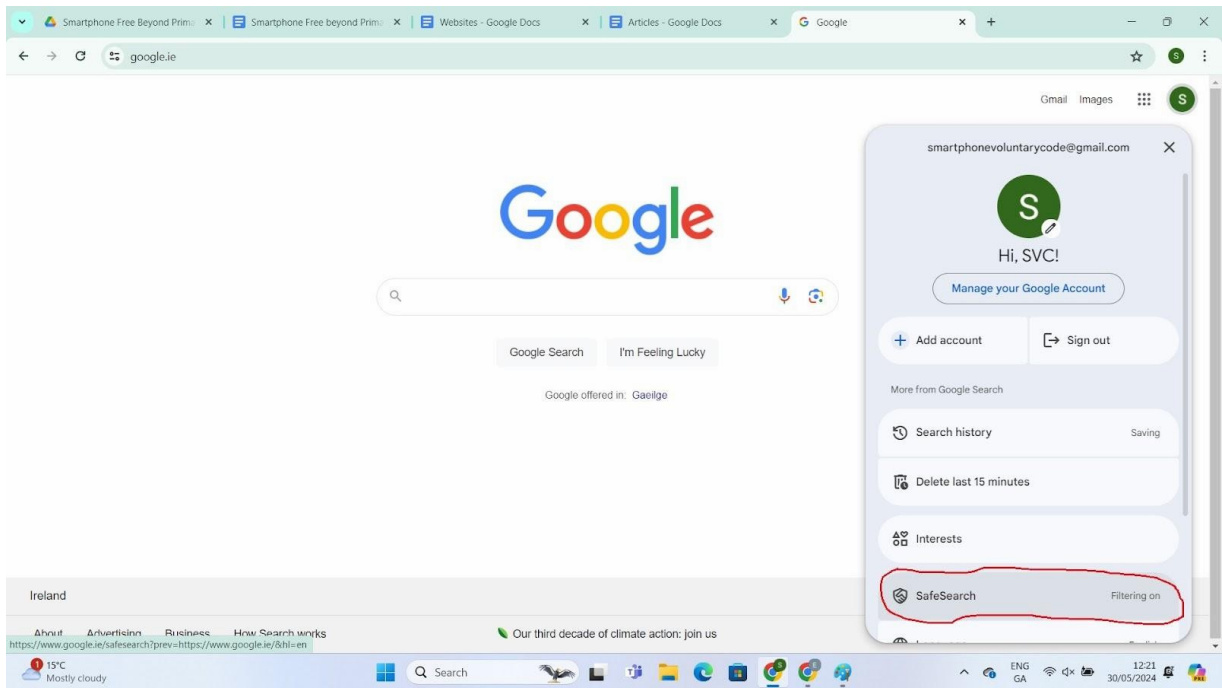
A list of screen time management apps can be found [here](#)

Parental consent for downloading new apps from App Store is essential.

### How to activate safe search on Google

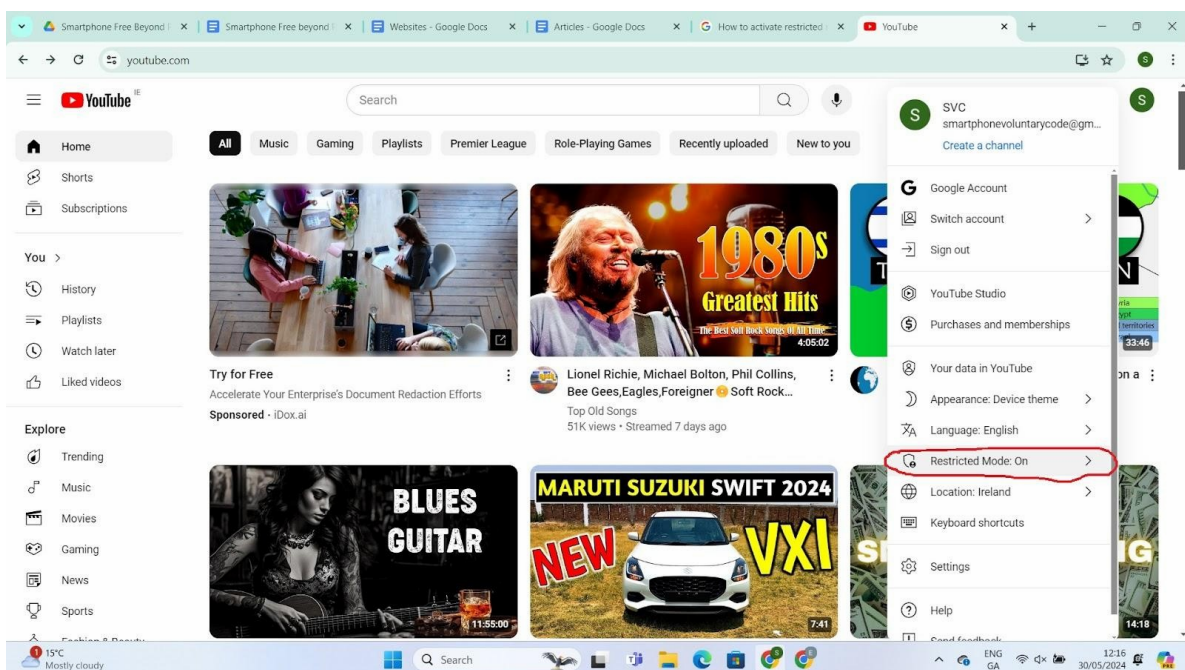
It is advised to turn on safe search in google to try and block explicit results

1. On your Android phone or tablet, open the Google app or google home page [www.google.ie](http://www.google.ie)
2. At the top right, tap/left mouse click your profile picture or initial settings.
3. Select SafeSearch.
4. Parents can lock SafeSearch to Filter for child their accounts using the Family link app



## How to activate restricted mode in YouTube to help screen out inappropriate content.

1. Sign in to your account.
2. At the top right, tap your profile photo .
3. Select restricted mode



## How to make YouTube safer

[“The Ultimate Guide to YouTube for Caregivers”](#). This is an excellent resource it includes the following sections:

- Is YouTube safe for kids?
- What is YouTube
- The different filters, features, and settings available
- How do YouTube’s Safety Settings work?
- What are the Main Sections of YouTube?
- What have I been Watching?
- What are YouTube Shorts?
- Can I Filter YouTube Shorts? Make them Cleaner?
- How do Subscriptions work on YouTube?
- Quick Note about Comments on Videos
- YouTube Library: This is where you Check and Watch History
- How to Make YouTube Safer for Specific Devices
- Should My Kid Have Their Own YouTube Channel?
- What about YouTube Kids?
- YouTube Controls Bottom Line:

## Links to websites with advice on parental controls

[Parents' Ultimate Guide to Parental Controls - Common Sense Media](#)

[Parenting Apps - Screenagers](#)

[Using parental controls](#)

[How to Set up Parental Controls on all Devices - Webwise](#)

[Parental controls guides - Internet Matters](#)

## Monitoring WhatsApp

<https://parentshield.co.uk/monitoring-whatsapp/>

## 10 : Social Media, Gaming apps explained

At the link below you will find over 110 apps sorted alphabetically with information that explains what the app is, what parents need to know, whether the app has parental controls and whether the app is considered safe for kids.

<https://protectyoungeyes.com/apps/>

