# Sophie Winkleman warns screen culture risks ‘digital destruction of childhood’ in schools



Sophie Winkleman, while predominantly known for her roles in television and film, has emerged as a vocal advocate against the pervasive use of technology in education and its implications for children's well-being. Married to Lord Frederick Windsor, she has spoken extensively about the detrimental effects of screens on young minds, echoing concerns raised by experts about the current digital landscape.

In recent discussions, particularly in an interview with The Telegraph, Winkleman expressed deep apprehension over the prevalent screen culture, asserting that the nation appears indifferent to the risks faced by children today. “I’m beginning to worry that this country just doesn’t care about children," she remarked. Her concerns stem from experiences during the pandemic when she felt compelled to take her children out of school due to the introduction of iPads as learning tools. The use of such devices, she argues, encourages a detachment from active learning, making it easy for children to become passive recipients of information rather than engaged learners.

Her advocacy has led to collaborations with notable figures such as actor Hugh Grant and social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, who recently highlighted the urgent need to reassess children's relationship with technology. Haidt's argument for banning smartphones for children under 14 echoes Winkleman's sentiments, as both see a direct correlation between technology use and a troubling rise in mental health issues, including anxiety and depression among youth.

Winkleman's views extend to a broader critique of educational methodologies that increasingly integrate technology without substantial evidence of its benefits. At the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) conference, she labelled many schools' embrace of digital tools as “going crazy,” asserting that education has shifted towards an over-reliance on screens. She champions a return to traditional forms of learning—books and handwriting—believing that they nurture crucial skills such as imagination and critical thought, which are vital for holistic development.

Moreover, Winkleman has voiced concerns over the encroachment of artificial intelligence in educational settings, arguing that it stifles creativity and reinforces a passive learning model. Her vision is one of an educational landscape that prioritises human interaction, empathy, and creative expression, skills she posits are essential for active citizenship and cannot be effectively imparted by machines.

In her public engagements, she has painted a stark picture, labelling the current educational approach as a potential “digital destruction of childhood.” This term encapsulates her worries about rising rates of self-harm, anxiety, and other mental health challenges among adolescents, which she attributes significantly to technology-infused environments in schools.

Sophie Winkleman’s ongoing campaign highlights urgent issues and invites parents, educators, and policymakers to reconsider the trajectory of contemporary learning. By advocating for a return to unmediated, engaging methods of education and the reconsideration of children's exposure to technology, Winkleman is striving to not only raise awareness but also to galvanise action towards safeguarding the mental and emotional well-being of future generations.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/2061049/royal-emotional-statement-sophie-winkleman), [[4]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sophie-winkleman-excel-centre-giza-cairo-david-lynch-b2699726.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/19/endless-tech-at-schools-a-failure-says-sophie-winkleman/), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/15/sophie-winkleman-smartphones-social-media-planet-normal/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://heritageschool.org.uk/actress-sophie-winkleman-celebrates-heritage-as-an-oasis-of-screen-free-education/), [[6]](https://intellectualtakeout.org/2025/02/be-a-good-parent-and-take-away-your-childs-smartphone/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.sandpointwaldorf.org/sws-blog/2025/3/26/watch-the-most-compelling-argument-against-tech-in-schools-sophie-winkleman)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/royal/2061049/royal-emotional-statement-sophie-winkleman> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/19/endless-tech-at-schools-a-failure-says-sophie-winkleman/> - In April 2024, Sophie Winkleman criticised the excessive use of technology in classrooms, stating that schools have 'gone crazy' with screens, which she believes negatively impacts educational outcomes. She advocates for a return to traditional teaching methods, emphasising the importance of books and handwriting over digital tools. Winkleman also highlighted the lack of robust evidence supporting the effectiveness of educational technology, citing a UNESCO report that found little added value from digital tools in education. She expressed concern over the rapid adoption of technology in schools without sufficient evidence of its benefits.
3. <https://heritageschool.org.uk/actress-sophie-winkleman-celebrates-heritage-as-an-oasis-of-screen-free-education/> - At the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) conference, Sophie Winkleman praised Heritage School as an 'oasis of screen-free education,' highlighting its focus on classical intellect, Christian heritage, nature, art, and beauty. She questioned the effectiveness of digital tools in education, arguing that they render students passive learners and negate the need for imagination. Winkleman emphasised the importance of nurturing human skills such as empathy, concentration, and creative expression, which she believes are essential for responsible citizenship and cannot be taught by artificial intelligence.
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sophie-winkleman-excel-centre-giza-cairo-david-lynch-b2699726.html> - In February 2024, Sophie Winkleman spoke at the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) conference, advocating for the exclusion of artificial intelligence from classrooms. She expressed concerns about AI's role in education, suggesting that it could lead to passive learning and diminish the development of critical human skills. Winkleman questioned the effectiveness of digital immersion tools, arguing that they negate the need for imagination and render students passive learners. She called for a return to traditional teaching methods that foster active engagement and critical thinking.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/15/sophie-winkleman-smartphones-social-media-planet-normal/> - In February 2024, Sophie Winkleman advocated for banning smartphones for under-16s, expressing concerns over the negative impact of social media on children's mental health. She highlighted the rise in anxiety, depression, self-harm, and anorexia among teenagers, attributing these issues to smartphone and social media use. Winkleman suggested that children should be given basic 'brick' phones instead, allowing only calls and texts, to protect them from the harmful effects of social media. She called for government support in implementing such measures to safeguard children's well-being.
6. <https://intellectualtakeout.org/2025/02/be-a-good-parent-and-take-away-your-childs-smartphone/> - In February 2025, Sophie Winkleman delivered a compelling address at the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) conference, discussing the detrimental effects of smartphones and classroom technology on adolescents. She referred to this phenomenon as 'the digital destruction of childhood,' highlighting the rise in teen suicides, self-harm incidents, and increased anxiety and depression among the young. Winkleman questioned the effectiveness of digital tools in education, arguing that they render students passive learners and negate the need for imagination. She called for a return to traditional teaching methods that foster active engagement and critical thinking.
7. <https://www.sandpointwaldorf.org/sws-blog/2025/3/26/watch-the-most-compelling-argument-against-tech-in-schools-sophie-winkleman> - In March 2025, Sophie Winkleman delivered a compelling argument against the use of technology in schools at the ARC 2025 conference. She questioned how children, constantly stimulated by artificial means, can learn to think, imagine, create, or simply be still. Winkleman advocated for a return to an 'analog' upbringing, warning of the adverse effects of excessive technology use, particularly in education systems. She emphasised the importance of nurturing human skills such as empathy, concentration, and creative expression, which she believes are essential for responsible citizenship and cannot be taught by artificial intelligence.