# Jack Thorne urges UK government to restrict smartphone access for under-14s amid growing safety concerns



The creator of the Netflix drama Adolescence, Jack Thorne, has called for urgent government action to limit children's unrestricted access to smartphones and social media, stressing the importance of intervening before children reach the age of 11—the typical age when many are given their first devices. The series, which dramatizes the consequences of early exposure to explicit, harmful, and misogynistic online content, opened a wider public conversation on what primary school-aged children and young teens are encountering online, often without their parents being fully aware.

Speaking during an online safety meeting at Gospel Oak primary school, Thorne highlighted the need for the UK government to do more on this front, pointing to other countries like Australia which are already implementing stricter social media restrictions for under-16s. "If we don’t solve this problem then kids will end up in deeper trouble and then what kind of generation will be coming out to be employed?" he remarked, underscoring the wider societal implications of early smartphone use.

Supporting this view, Nova Eden, a children's mental health expert and campaigner for phone-free childhoods, revealed alarming statistics about children's digital exposure. According to Eden, the average teenager spends nearly eight hours a day on their smartphone—comparable to a part-time job—and by age 14, more than 90 per cent have been exposed to pornography. She emphasised the challenges parents face in controlling the content their children receive, especially given the increasing graphic and addictive nature of online material, which can distort young boys’ perceptions of loving relationships. Eden lamented the government’s slow response to protect children from these harms and advocated for a collective effort toward meaningful change.

One practical initiative Eden is advancing involves the "Parent Pact," a voluntary agreement among parents not to provide smartphones to children before age 14 and to restrict social media access until 16. This approach aims to alleviate peer pressure that often compels parents to acquiesce to early phone ownership. Additionally, a consortium letter is being prepared to encourage Camden secondary schools to implement smartphone-free policies, starting with incoming Year 7 students in 2025. This would make Camden the fourth north London borough to adopt such measures to curb smartphone use among schoolchildren.

Hampstead and Highgate MP Tulip Siddiq, who attended the meeting, echoed the call for stronger protections, stressing the crucial role of government in supporting parents and educators. She highlighted the dual nature of technology, which can offer benefits but also cause serious harm if misused. Siddiq also shared a personal experience as a recent victim of an AI deep fake, reinforcing her belief that laws must keep pace with technological innovation. She expressed her commitment to working with local families and schools to advocate for tighter online safety regulations.

The campaign to delay children's access to smartphones has gained significant momentum, garnering over 100,000 signatures and celebrity endorsements from figures such as Paloma Faith and Benedict Cumberbatch. Research by Ofcom shows that 89 per cent of 12-year-olds in the UK already own a smartphone, underscoring the scale of the challenge these advocates seek to address. Jack Thorne has even suggested treating smartphone use akin to smoking, proposing legislative bans on under-16s akin to existing tobacco laws.

As debates continue, the tension remains between managing technological engagement and protecting children's mental health and development. The emerging consensus among experts and campaigners suggests that earlier and more decisive intervention is critical if future generations are to avoid the pitfalls that unchecked early smartphone use can bring.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/parents-are-urged-not-to-give-their-kids-a-smartphone-until-they-are-14), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2025/mar/23/adolescence-writer-jack-thorne-backs-smartphone-free-childhood-group)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/parents-are-urged-not-to-give-their-kids-a-smartphone-until-they-are-14), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/18/ban-smartphones-for-uk-under-16s-urges-adolescence-writer-jack-thorne)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/parents-are-urged-not-to-give-their-kids-a-smartphone-until-they-are-14)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/parents-are-urged-not-to-give-their-kids-a-smartphone-until-they-are-14)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/parents-are-urged-not-to-give-their-kids-a-smartphone-until-they-are-14)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/parents-are-urged-not-to-give-their-kids-a-smartphone-until-they-are-14)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2025/mar/23/adolescence-writer-jack-thorne-backs-smartphone-free-childhood-group), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/18/ban-smartphones-for-uk-under-16s-urges-adolescence-writer-jack-thorne)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/parents-are-urged-not-to-give-their-kids-a-smartphone-until-they-are-14> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2025/mar/23/adolescence-writer-jack-thorne-backs-smartphone-free-childhood-group> - Jack Thorne, co-writer of the Netflix series 'Adolescence', supports the Smartphone Free Childhood movement, which advocates delaying children's access to smartphones until at least 14. The initiative has gained significant traction, with over 100,000 signatures and backing from celebrities like Paloma Faith and Benedict Cumberbatch. Research by Ofcom indicates that 89% of 12-year-olds in the UK own a smartphone, highlighting the need for such campaigns to address the impact of early smartphone use on children's development.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/18/ban-smartphones-for-uk-under-16s-urges-adolescence-writer-jack-thorne> - Jack Thorne, co-writer of the Netflix series 'Adolescence', advocates for treating smartphones like cigarettes and banning their use for under-16s in the UK. He calls for government intervention to restrict teenagers' access to social media, citing concerns over the influence of online spaces on teenagers. Thorne suggests that the UK should follow countries like Australia in implementing such measures to protect young people from harmful online content.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/18/ban-smartphones-for-uk-under-16s-urges-adolescence-writer-jack-thorne> - Jack Thorne, co-writer of the Netflix series 'Adolescence', advocates for treating smartphones like cigarettes and banning their use for under-16s in the UK. He calls for government intervention to restrict teenagers' access to social media, citing concerns over the influence of online spaces on teenagers. Thorne suggests that the UK should follow countries like Australia in implementing such measures to protect young people from harmful online content.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/18/ban-smartphones-for-uk-under-16s-urges-adolescence-writer-jack-thorne> - Jack Thorne, co-writer of the Netflix series 'Adolescence', advocates for treating smartphones like cigarettes and banning their use for under-16s in the UK. He calls for government intervention to restrict teenagers' access to social media, citing concerns over the influence of online spaces on teenagers. Thorne suggests that the UK should follow countries like Australia in implementing such measures to protect young people from harmful online content.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/18/ban-smartphones-for-uk-under-16s-urges-adolescence-writer-jack-thorne> - Jack Thorne, co-writer of the Netflix series 'Adolescence', advocates for treating smartphones like cigarettes and banning their use for under-16s in the UK. He calls for government intervention to restrict teenagers' access to social media, citing concerns over the influence of online spaces on teenagers. Thorne suggests that the UK should follow countries like Australia in implementing such measures to protect young people from harmful online content.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/mar/18/ban-smartphones-for-uk-under-16s-urges-adolescence-writer-jack-thorne> - Jack Thorne, co-writer of the Netflix series 'Adolescence', advocates for treating smartphones like cigarettes and banning their use for under-16s in the UK. He calls for government intervention to restrict teenagers' access to social media, citing concerns over the influence of online spaces on teenagers. Thorne suggests that the UK should follow countries like Australia in implementing such measures to protect young people from harmful online content.