# Campaign calls for parents to delay giving children smartphones until 14



An online initiative, aiming to encourage parents to delay giving their children smartphones until at least the age of 14, has gained substantial traction, amassing over 100,000 signatures since its inception in September. The campaign, known as Smartphone Free Childhood, includes a “parent pact” in which signatories commit to withholding smartphones from their children until they complete year 9 and to keeping them off social media until they reach 16 years of age.

Daisy Greenwell, a co-founder of Smartphone Free Childhood, stated, “Families have been put in an impossible position by the lack of regulation around Big Tech, forced to choose between either getting their kids a smartphone which they know to be harmful, or leaving them isolated the only one without.” She further emphasised that the significant number of families signing the pact indicates widespread concern regarding children's interaction with technology and its potential effects.

The most notable regional support for the pact has been recorded in Surrey, with approximately 6,370 signatories. Following this, Hertfordshire, particularly the city of St Albans, aims to become Britain’s first smartphone-free zone for all individuals under the age of 14. In addition to general public support, more than 11,500 schools across the UK have backed the campaign, representing over a third of the nation's total of 32,000 schools. Notable celebrity endorsements include singer Paloma Faith, actor Benedict Cumberbatch, and broadcaster Emma Barnett.

Statistics provided by media regulator Ofcom reveal that an alarming 89% of 12-year-olds possess smartphones, while 25% of three- and four-year-olds are also reported to own such devices. Furthermore, approximately half of children under the age of 13 are engaged with social media platforms.

Proponents of the campaign argue that the effects of smartphones are detrimental, distracting children from their academic responsibilities, exposing them to harmful online content, and promoting addictive behaviours. These concerns have prompted legislative discussion surrounding the digital age of consent. Recently, Labour MP Josh MacAlister amended a private member's bill that originally sought to increase the age of digital consent from 13 to 16, which would have required social media companies to obtain parental permission for data processing. The revised version now focuses on conducting further research into the implications of digital childhood rather than implementing immediate regulations.

While there is a strong push for change, some experts express concerns regarding the feasibility of a complete ban on smartphones. Sonia Livingstone, a professor of social psychology at the London School of Economics, described a blanket ban as “too simplistic,” suggesting that it may detract from the necessary pressure on social media companies to reform their practices. Livingstone highlighted the importance of providing alternative opportunities for children to engage with their peers, noting the practical advantages of smartphones, such as navigation, homework assistance, and communication with parents.

Paloma Faith personally supports the movement, sharing her experience with her eight-year-old child, who eventually ceased requesting a smartphone after a landline was installed for making calls. Reflecting on the changes she observed when limiting smartphone access, she remarked, “They slept better, they were more focussed, more imaginative and much better company.” Other celebrities like Joe Wicks and Jamie Redknapp have also thrown their support behind the initiative.

The government's response to these concerns has been to commission the University of Cambridge for a feasibility study exploring the impacts of smartphones and social media usage among children. This action comes amidst criticism from Conservative MP Kit Malthouse, who accused the government of “dithering and capitulating” in addressing the concerns around smartphone prevalence among the youth.

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

## References

* <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/they-ve-got-to-step-in-this-is-harming-children-parents-314967/> - This article supports the claim that the Smartphone Free Childhood campaign is gaining traction and highlights concerns about the impact of smartphones on children's mental health and well-being.
* <https://smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/about> - This webpage provides information about the Smartphone Free Childhood movement, including its mission and the number of parents involved, corroborating the claim about the campaign's scope and influence.
* <https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/how-my-familys-mobile-obsessions-converted-me-to-the-smartphone-free-childhood-mission-4818988> - This article discusses the growing support for the Smartphone Free Childhood campaign across the UK, including in Scotland, and highlights concerns about smartphone addiction and its effects on children.
* <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/childrens-media-literacy/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report> - This report from Ofcom provides statistics on children's media use, including smartphone ownership and social media engagement, supporting the claim about the prevalence of smartphones among children.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-65633351> - This news article discusses legislative efforts related to digital age of consent and smartphone use among children, aligning with the mention of Labour MP Josh MacAlister's bill.
* <https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/children-and-the-digital-world> - This webpage from the London School of Economics highlights research on children's digital experiences, including the perspectives of experts like Sonia Livingstone, who caution against simplistic solutions to smartphone use.