# Digital natives call for stricter limits on children’s smartphone use amid mental health concerns



As digital natives enter adulthood, many are reassessing the impact of smartphones and social media on their formative years. A generation that was once an enthusiastic advocate for technology now expresses profound concerns about its effects, particularly regarding children's access to devices. Sophie, now an 18-year-old student at the University of Edinburgh, reflects on her own experiences with smartphones as a child. She recalls receiving shocking videos from classmates, including explicit and violent content, which left lasting impressions. “My parents’ generation simply didn’t have a clue,” she observes, highlighting a generational gap in understanding the potential dangers of unfettered online access.

This shift in perspective among young adults has been corroborated by recent surveys revealing that nearly half of young people would prefer a world without the internet. Additionally, a considerable portion supports the idea of a digital curfew for children. More than three-quarters feel that their self-esteem has suffered as a result of social media interactions. The critical sentiment is echoed by others, like Izzy Bouric, a 24-year-old artist living in Paris. Bouric states that the blurring of boundaries between childhood and adult online spaces on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok poses significant risks. Past online environments, like Club Penguin, had rigid rules to safeguard young users from adult content; a stark contrast to the current landscape where young children encounter harmful material and violent rhetoric.

Moreover, the Netflix documentary series *Adolescence* has catalysed conversations about the myriad ways social media can be detrimental to young minds. Bouric herself experienced what she describes as an oppressive environment dominated by corporate advertising and pervasive misinformation, leading her to abandon her smartphone in favour of a flip phone that allows her to reclaim precious time and mental space. Similarly, 20-year-old Tobias from Austria notes how smartphones have changed social dynamics among his peers. He observed a decline in genuine interactions, replaced instead by invisible threads of communication that tether individuals to their devices. Furthermore, he has recognized the alarming content that algorithms served him based on his interests, which has led him to advocate for delayed access to smartphones for children and teenagers.

Leah, also at the tender age of 20, expresses a similar reluctance to introduce smartphones to younger family members, suggesting that access should wait until the age of 16, with close monitoring of media interactions. She recounts how her friends faced bullying in schools, observed diminished attention spans, and became preoccupied with social media, often to the detriment of their creativity and interpersonal skills. The concern extends beyond personal anecdotes; research presented by social psychologists like Jonathan Haidt indicates a troubling rise in rates of anxiety and depression among adolescents coinciding with increased smartphone use—an issue that underscores the need for structured guidelines and perhaps legislation around technology use.

The complexities surrounding children’s smartphone use have prompted advocacy efforts, including movements like MAMA (Mothers Against Media Addiction), which aims to educate parents on the effects of social media and promote safer environments for children. Legislative initiatives, such as the Kids Online Safety Act in the U.S., seek to address these issues by enhancing parental controls and minimising exposure to harmful content, garnering bipartisan support amidst a national conversation about children’s safety online.

In France, a government-appointed committee has issued strong recommendations to mitigate screen exposure among young people. They advocate for no screen use before age three, significant restrictions until age six, and careful consideration of mobile and internet access thereafter. Such initiatives emphasize the need for more robust societal interventions and industry regulations to protect future generations.

As more young adults voice their apprehensions regarding the digital landscape they grew up in, there is a palpable shift towards advocating for healthier limits on children’s access to technology. This emerging consensus suggests that prior generations might need to reconsider their approach to digital engagement in light of the profound implications for mental health and overall well-being.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/25/my-parents-didnt-have-a-clue-why-many-digital-natives-would-not-give-their-kids-smartphones), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/25/my-parents-didnt-have-a-clue-why-many-digital-natives-would-not-give-their-kids-smartphones)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/25/my-parents-didnt-have-a-clue-why-many-digital-natives-would-not-give-their-kids-smartphones), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/c122775a-f664-4c06-90c2-eba077367757)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://time.com/7288539/kids-online-safety-act-status-what-to-know/), [[7]](https://apnews.com/article/f66bcbe64b1be143f3e93b93a4e83e94)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/25/my-parents-didnt-have-a-clue-why-many-digital-natives-would-not-give-their-kids-smartphones), [[5]](https://time.com/6968942/jonathan-haidt-2/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2024/05/02/kids-and-screentime-what-the-committee-appointed-by-macron-recommends_6670225_7.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://time.com/7288539/kids-online-safety-act-status-what-to-know/), [[7]](https://apnews.com/article/f66bcbe64b1be143f3e93b93a4e83e94)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/25/my-parents-didnt-have-a-clue-why-many-digital-natives-would-not-give-their-kids-smartphones> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/25/my-parents-didnt-have-a-clue-why-many-digital-natives-would-not-give-their-kids-smartphones> - An article from The Guardian discusses how many young adults, referred to as 'digital natives,' are now skeptical about giving smartphones to their children. The piece highlights personal experiences of individuals who faced online bullying, exposure to inappropriate content, and the negative impact of social media on mental health during their adolescence. These experiences have led them to reconsider the role of smartphones in their children's lives, advocating for delayed access until adulthood to protect them from potential online harms.
3. <https://time.com/7288539/kids-online-safety-act-status-what-to-know/> - Time magazine provides an overview of the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA), a legislative proposal aimed at addressing children's privacy and mental health concerns related to social media and internet use. The article details the bill's provisions, including requiring tech companies to minimize harmful content exposure and enhance parental controls. It also discusses the bipartisan support and criticisms the bill has received, highlighting the ongoing debate over balancing online safety with free speech.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/c122775a-f664-4c06-90c2-eba077367757> - The Financial Times features an interview with social psychologist Sonia Livingstone, who advocates for a balanced approach to children's smartphone use. Livingstone emphasizes the importance of the quality of screen time over its quantity and suggests that tech companies should take more responsibility in mitigating online harms. She proposes empowering parents and children through guidance and flexible rules, rather than imposing strict bans, to address the complex impact of smartphones on mental health.
5. <https://time.com/6968942/jonathan-haidt-2/> - Time magazine profiles social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, who has shifted his research focus to the effects of social media on teenagers. Haidt discusses alarming trends, including a significant increase in depression and anxiety rates among U.S. adolescents from 2010 to 2019. He attributes these issues to overprotecting children in real scenarios and under-protecting them online, advocating for solutions such as increased free play, banning phones in schools, and delaying smartphone usage until high school.
6. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2024/05/02/kids-and-screentime-what-the-committee-appointed-by-macron-recommends_6670225_7.html> - Le Monde reports on a French committee's examination of screen exposure's impact on young people, revealing significant concerns about its effects on children's health and development. The committee recommends avoiding screen use before age three, restricting it until age six, and limiting mobile and internet access to later ages. They also suggest prohibiting computers and televisions in early education settings and emphasize the need for collective societal intervention, including stricter industry regulations.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/f66bcbe64b1be143f3e93b93a4e83e94> - The Associated Press discusses the formation of MAMA (Mothers Against Media Addiction), a group founded by Julie Scelfo to combat the negative effects of social media on children. The article highlights MAMA's efforts to educate parents, advocate for smartphone-free schools, and push for legislative action to regulate technology safely. It also covers Australia's new law banning social media for children under 16 and Scelfo's support for similar policies in the U.S.