# Clare Morell urges parents to lead the tech exit for children’s wellbeing



Clare Morell, a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, has recently released a thought-provoking book titled *The Tech Exit: A Practical Guide to Freeing Kids and Teens from Smartphones*. Launched on June 3rd, the book responds to a pressing societal concern: safeguarding children in an increasingly digital world. During a discussion with cultural commentator Emily Jashinsky, Morell expressed that traditional policy proposals addressing screen time have fallen short. Parents have increasingly approached her seeking specific, actionable steps to protect their children from the pervasive influence of technology. Acknowledging the work of Jonathan Haidt in *The Anxious Generation*, she believes that while his insights are vital, there remains a necessity for practical advice aimed directly at parents.

Morell's central thesis challenges the prevalent moderation approach to children's screen time, positing instead that digital screens are akin to “digital fentanyl.” She categorises screens as “inherently harmful,” suggesting that moderation is misdirected. According to her, what is needed is not simply a strategy for managing screen time, but a comprehensive plan for what she terms a “tech exit.” This calls on parents to take concrete steps to remove devices from their children's lives rather than merely controlling their usage.

A significant part of Morell's discourse focuses on how social media platforms, particularly Snapchat, are designed to be “maximally addicting.” This design feeds into a larger narrative where Big Tech companies claim to prioritise children's mental health while knowingly contributing to detrimental outcomes. She highlights that these companies receive thousands of complaints related to sextortion, a grim reality that disproportionately affects younger users. By acknowledging the intentional nature of these platforms' addictive designs, she advocates for a more proactive approach by parents.

Morell emphasises the importance of outdoor activities as a remedy. “It’s possible to reset a child’s brain,” she asserts, recommending that parents take away phones for a period of thirty days and engage their children in outdoor play. This shift, she believes, can foster natural creativity and joy, echoing Haidt's findings that outdoor activities can play a crucial role in rebuilding children’s mental well-being. As a broader context, Haidt's work has played a pivotal role in raising awareness about the negative impact of technology on youth mental health, creating a bipartisan awareness of these issues. Public sentiment is shifting, with more schools implementing phone-free policies and various state governments beginning to address the challenges posed by digital technology.

Ultimately, while policy could provide a structure for navigating these issues, Morell’s book enriches the conversation by providing parents with concrete tools to mitigate the risks associated with screen overexposure. The culmination of these discussions highlights a growing recognition of the adverse effects of technology on children, particularly as mental health concerns become increasingly prevalent across demographic lines. Morell’s advocacy for a tech-free childhood appears to resonate with a mounting urgency among parents and educators alike, marking a significant step in addressing the digital landscape confronting today’s youth.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://mindmatters.ai/2025/06/clare-morell-advocates-for-a-phone-free-childhood/), [[2]](https://www.amazon.com/Tech-Exit-Practical-Freeing-Smartphones/dp/0593655036)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://mindmatters.ai/2025/06/clare-morell-advocates-for-a-phone-free-childhood/), [[3]](https://www.amazon.com/Anxious-Generation-Rewiring-Childhood-Epidemic/dp/0593655036), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/b401b828-80a2-4a93-a0a5-8943aba5f2c5)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://mindmatters.ai/2025/06/clare-morell-advocates-for-a-phone-free-childhood/), [[5]](https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2025/04/adolescence-jonathan-haidt-phones/682459/?utm_source=apple_news), [[6]](https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-what%27s-next-0daa32f6-e904-4ae8-b0cf-626c33336a91)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://mindmatters.ai/2025/06/clare-morell-advocates-for-a-phone-free-childhood/), [[7]](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/729231/the-anxious-generation-by-jonathan-haidt/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.amazon.com/Tech-Exit-Practical-Freeing-Smartphones/dp/0593655036), [[5]](https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2025/04/adolescence-jonathan-haidt-phones/682459/?utm_source=apple_news)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://mindmatters.ai/2025/06/clare-morell-advocates-for-a-phone-free-childhood/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.amazon.com/Tech-Exit-Practical-Freeing-Smartphones/dp/0593655036> - Clare Morell's book, 'The Tech Exit: A Practical Guide to Freeing Kids and Teens from Smartphones', offers parents actionable steps to protect their children from the adverse effects of excessive screen time. Morell critiques current moderation strategies, advocating instead for a comprehensive 'tech exit' to help children disengage from digital devices. She highlights the addictive nature of social media platforms like Snapchat and emphasizes the importance of outdoor play in resetting children's brains and fostering natural creativity. The book aims to empower parents with concrete measures to safeguard their children's mental health in the digital age.
3. <https://www.amazon.com/Anxious-Generation-Rewiring-Childhood-Epidemic/dp/0593655036> - Jonathan Haidt's 'The Anxious Generation' examines the impact of smartphones and social media on adolescents, linking the rise of mental health issues to the pervasive use of digital technology. Haidt argues that the shift from play-based to phone-based childhoods has led to increased anxiety, depression, and self-harm among teens. He advocates for delaying smartphone access until high school and restricting social media use until age 16, proposing that such measures could mitigate the negative effects of digital immersion on youth mental health.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/b401b828-80a2-4a93-a0a5-8943aba5f2c5> - In 'The Anxious Generation', Jonathan Haidt explores the negative impact of smartphones and social media on the post-2009 adolescent generation, arguing that it has rewired the experience of childhood for the worse. Haidt presents data showing increased rates of anxiety, depression, and self-harm among teenagers, particularly young adolescent girls. He attributes these mental health issues to the addictive and comparative nature of social media, criticizes tech companies for their role, and suggests practical measures such as imposing age restrictions on smartphone use and promoting more free play.
5. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2025/04/adolescence-jonathan-haidt-phones/682459/?utm_source=apple_news> - The article discusses Jonathan Haidt's reflections on the Netflix miniseries 'Adolescence', which explores the dark influence of social media and smartphone use on teenagers. Haidt, author of 'The Anxious Generation', has long advocated for delaying smartphone access until high school and social media use until age 16. He emphasizes that unrestricted access to smartphones and screen-based communication can exacerbate mental health issues, bullying, and harmful behavior, particularly among boys and girls in different ways. Haidt argues for phone-free schools, increased parental oversight, and a clear distinction between internet benefits and the manipulative nature of social media algorithms.
6. <https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-what%27s-next-0daa32f6-e904-4ae8-b0cf-626c33336a91> - In his new book, 'The Anxious Generation', NYU social psychologist Jonathan Haidt argues that children should not have smartphones before high school or access to social media before age 16. He claims that the transition from play-based to phone-based childhoods is detrimental to children's mental health, contributing to an epidemic of mental illness since around 2012. Haidt suggests banning phones in schools to improve youth mental health, though some critics question his conclusions. Additionally, the newsletter covers Reddit's successful IPO debut, raising $748 million with shares opening at $47 each.
7. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/729231/the-anxious-generation-by-jonathan-haidt/> - Jonathan Haidt's 'The Anxious Generation' investigates the collapse of youth mental health in the era of smartphones, social media, and big tech. The book examines the rise in depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide among adolescents since the early 2010s, attributing these trends to the pervasive use of digital technology. Haidt proposes a plan for a healthier, freer childhood, advocating for delaying children's access to smartphones until high school and social media platforms until age 16, and promoting more independent play and responsibility in the real world.