# Baroness Cass warns digital risks could trigger mental health crisis and economic fallout for young people



Baroness Hilary Cass, a prominent pediatrician and independent crossbencher in the House of Lords, has expressed urgent concerns regarding the mental health of young people in the context of rapidly evolving digital technology. During a debate on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, she warned that without appropriate safeguards, a generation may face significant challenges to their mental wellbeing.

In her address, Baroness Cass emphasised the profound effects that smart devices can have on children, highlighting issues such as disrupted sleep, decreased attention spans, and negative impacts on educational outcomes. She characterises these issues as more than moral dilemmas, labelling them as an “economic timebomb” that could have far-reaching consequences for the workforce of the future.

Drawing from her experience, including a landmark review she led on gender services for young people, Baroness Cass called for comprehensive strategies to mitigate these digital risks. She asserted that the legislation aimed at safeguarding children must adequately consider how digital technology influences their lives. “Any legislation addressing the subject of safeguarding children, and opportunity, and safety in schools, cannot possibly ignore the impact of digital technology on the lives of children and young people,” she stated.

Baroness Cass pointed out that the dangers extend beyond overt threats such as cyberbullying and emotional abuse; they also include subtler risks associated with learning and overall mental health. She remarked, “That’s just the tip of the iceberg,” stressing that addictive applications pose a particularly significant risk, especially for boys. According to her, the issue reaches beyond merely restricting smartphone use in educational settings and calls for a multifaceted approach.

In her view, there should be enhanced training for teachers on managing the interaction between children and digital technology. Despite the compulsory nature of relationships and sex education (RSE) in schools, she noted a glaring absence of instruction on how to handle digital technology, which consumes a considerable portion of children’s daily lives. She urged for the development of educational resources and support mechanisms for parents as well, advocating for strategies to help them guide their children’s technology use in a manner conducive to learning and development.

Additionally, she highlighted the repercussions of losing safe recreational spaces for children, which could provide alternatives to screen time. “There’s insufficient consideration of the impact of loss of safe space,” she remarked, calling for renewed focus on creating environments that promote health and wellbeing.

Baroness Cass concluded her remarks by reiterating the urgency of addressing these issues within the framework of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. She implored the Government to consider a variety of amendments aimed at these educational deficits to enhance the future prospects of children. “Without such measures we are looking at losing a generation to poor mental health and to even more young adults being unable to contribute to the workforce,” she warned.

As the debate continues, it remains to be seen how lawmakers will address these pressing concerns regarding the intersection of digital technology and children's wellbeing. The implications of inaction could not only affect individual lives but potentially burden society with broader economic challenges.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/house-of-lords-school-westminster-labour-weymouth-b1197022.html> - This article reports on Baroness Cass's maiden speech in the House of Lords, where she cautioned that imposing smartphone restrictions in schools without involving young people could lead to behaviors akin to 'smoking behind the bike shed'.
2. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/house-of-lords-school-westminster-labour-weymouth-b2655613.html> - This piece highlights Baroness Cass's warning that without engaging young people in discussions about smartphone use in schools, restrictions might lead to secretive behaviors similar to 'smoking behind the bike shed'.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/nov/05/children-cyberbullying-self-harm-gaming-mps-concern> - This article discusses concerns raised by Hilary Cass, then president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, about the mental health risks posed to children by digital technology, including cyberbullying and self-harm.
4. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-03-17/debates/E5BB116A-6FBA-4758-9E0D-276C81369B21/details> - This Hansard record details a debate on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, where the impact of smartphones and social media on children's mental health was discussed, including issues like disrupted sleep and decreased attention spans.
5. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-11-28/debates/6f9a32ac-72f7-4c63-b4e2-a63c291a51b0/LordsChamber> - This Hansard record captures a debate in the House of Lords where the negative effects of smartphones on children's education and mental health were highlighted, including impaired concentration and increased anxiety.
6. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/18944/html/> - This document presents written evidence to a parliamentary committee, addressing concerns about the impact of digital technology on mental health, particularly among children and young people.
7. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/generation-will-be-lost-to-poor-mental-health-without-safeguards-on-tech-cass-UHAEE3J7VBNY7L52QDXBM3PCKM/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data