

Navigating Technology: Smartphone Free Childhood [B1]

Nato come un gruppo di WhatsApp tra genitori, oggi è un movimento internazionale che spinge a riflettere sulle conseguenze degli smartphone e delle reti sociali sulla salute mentale dei più giovani.

When children first started getting smartphones a decade ago, there was no research about what effect this would have on their mental health. Now it is understood that smartphones expose children to things their brains aren't developed enough to deal with, causing serious problems, from triggering anxiety and eating disorders, to opening the door to addictive algorithms, cyberbullying or sexual predators.

CONCERN FOR SAFETY

Smartphone Free Childhood is a rapidly-growing grassroots movement that launched in the UK in early 2024. It reflects a growing concern among parents about online safety and the now-normal practice of giving children smart devices when they go to secondary school. The movement began as a WhatsApp group set up by two young mothers, Clare Fernyhough and Daisy Greenwell. Within weeks it had attracted over four thousand members.

YOUNGER USE

Research has found that 91 per cent of children in the UK own a smartphone by the time they are eleven, and 44 per cent by the time they are nine. Most people believe that childhood should be focused on play, learning and real-life social interaction. However, smartphones are now a fact of life. Experts say that school children cannot be protected from smartphone use altogether, and should instead be taught critical thinking skills to learn the risks and opportunities that come with technology.

TECH AND EDUCATION

According to the UN, only technology that supports learning should be allowed in schools. To date, some 40 per cent of global education systems have **banned** smartphone use. However, banning is not as **straightforward** as it seems and different schools, cities or countries have adopted different approaches. In the UK, schools and sometimes **boroughs**, such as Barnet in London, have implemented bans during the school day.

INTERNATIONAL BANS

The differing response is also seen internationally. Some cities, like Zhengzhou in China, ask parents of children in primary and secondary schools to provide written consent for phones to be used for educational reasons. France has suggested a 'digital break' in **lower secondary schools**, in addition to an existing phone ban at other education levels. Saudi Arabia, however, has reversed its ban after **disability** groups claimed that smartphones were essential for medical purposes.

PARENT PACT

A year after the Smartphone Free Childhood campaign was started, around twenty similar movements have been set up in other countries, including the US, Argentina, Belgium, Italy, Finland, Kenya and Uzbekistan. Today the initiative has over 200,000 supporters worldwide and provides resources, community support and **advocacy** to help families and schools resist the pressure to give children smartphones too early. Parents are encouraged to sign a 'Parent Pact', a collective agreement to **delay** giving their children smartphones, typically until at least the age of fifteen.

ADOLESCENCE

The acclaimed Netflix series Adolescence brought the **topic** of smartphone use in childhood back into the limelight. The British production is about a fourteen-year-old boy accused of **stabbing** a female classmate to death after

becoming ‘radicalised’ by manosphere-related ([i.e.](#), websites, blogs and online forums promoting masculinity and misogyny) content online. Series co-creator Jack Thorne backs the Smartphone Free Childhood group and says that he would not give his kids a phone until they were sixteen.

Glossary

- **triggering** = scatenare, innescare
- **i.e.** = cioè (id est)
- **devices** = dispositivi
- **lower secondary schools** = scuole medie
- **topic** = tema
- **stabbing** = accoltellamento
- **grassroots movement** = movimento popolare
- **boroughs** = distretti, quartieri
- **delay** = ritardare
- **straightforward** = semplice, diretto
- **disability** = disabilità
- **advocacy** = difesa
- **growing concern** = crescente preoccupazione
- **altogether** = del tutto
- **banned** = vietare