

# The Fight Against Social Media Addiction - Jonathan Haidt, Erica Komisar, and Rudyard Lynch

14 MIN · YOUTUBE · [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=INZ-SXPK0jM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INZ-SXPK0jM)

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## SUMMARY

*The discussion highlights the detrimental effects of smartphones and social media on mental health, particularly among children and adolescents. It emphasizes how the addictive nature of these technologies, combined with the constant need for social validation, has led to increased anxiety and depression, especially in Gen Z.*

- Facebook opened to the public in 2006, initially fostering a non-toxic social media environment.*
- The introduction of features like the "like" button and retweeting between 2009 and 2012 made social media more addictive and evaluative.*
- Gen Z has experienced a significant rise in depression and anxiety, correlating with the rise of social media.*
- Smartphones hinder children's ability to develop independence and cope with solitude, leading to a lack of necessary breaks from social interaction.*
- Early exposure to addictive stimuli, such as social media, can lead to long-term dependency issues.*
- The speaker advocates for delaying smartphone and social media access for children until at least age 16 to mitigate addiction risks.*
- There is a call for government regulation to protect children from harmful social media exposure, while also recognizing the need for community support and parental guidance.*
- Personal anecdotes illustrate the struggle of overcoming smartphone addiction and the importance of undistracted time for mental well-being.*

So, in 2006, Facebook opens up to the world. Anyone can have an account. You have to be 13, but you can lie at any age and get an account. In those early years, social media is not particularly toxic. It's just look at me, here are my friends, here are the bands that I like. Uh between 2009 and 2012, um that's when social media changes and becomes much more um addictive and much more evaluative. That is, you get the like button in 2009. Uh you get um uh you get retweeting, you get sharing, you it it becomes much more viral and much better at shaming people, much more much better at canceling people. So, Gen Z, they're just hitting their teen years as social media becomes much more toxic. So, all we know for sure is that Gen Z shows an enormous increase in depression and anxiety.

Jonathan Haidt is correct in saying that um social media is damaging to children. Um and the smartphone um is, you know, Jean Twenge was the one who came up with the idea of the smartphone being bad for children. It's really the smartphone that's bad for children. Um that was the beginning. So, even before social media, having to be constantly connected and to have no sense of independence or separation didn't allow you to develop a

sense of uh security being separate from contact with your parents or contact with everyone, right? It didn't allow for aloneness ever, right? Before the Before I mean, you remember what it was like before the smartphone. We We had a sense of being alone.

>> I can feel the change in myself. I can feel the like way that I am dependent on checking things and it's and and and struggle to maintain focus. >> media. That's your emails, that's your texts, that's your phone. Notifications. >> constant contact that doesn't allow the space that human beings need. They need space from social contact. Even babies, if you see the way that babies interact with adults, they connect and then when they're overwhelmed and they're done, they disconnect. They look away. They get overstimulated.

>> Yeah, they look away and then when they're ready to reconnect, they reconnect. But then they look away and they do their own thing again, right? We need that as human beings. We need breaks. We need social relational contact, but we need breaks. The smartphone took away the breaks. And that really was the beginning of the downfall. So, if you want to say technology in terms of the smartphone really was damaging to people's mental health. Now add social media, which provided mostly teenagers, but adults too, with a perfectionistic view of the world.

Um, a competitive perfectionistic view of the world. Constant stimulation, constant overwhelming stimulation that then triggered these dopamine reactions. So, what we know is that if you overload a child's dopamine receptors when they are under the age of 14, and I've heard statistics to say under the age of 16. I just think Jonathan was trying to mitigate it and make it easier for parents to swallow, but I think it's 16.

That sounds more right. >> Because under the age of 16, if you start to drink alcohol or smoke marijuana or do drugs or gamble or look at por- or get a smartphone, you are more likely to become addicted to it. That is what the research says. Whereas, if you wait till you get your adolescent past early adolescence into middle adolescence towards the end towards late adolescence, you are more likely to see social media as an adversity as something to be regulated but not something that you are obsessive over or addicted to. Because once you get the dopamine going at such an early age, the brain becomes used to it and used to being stimulated by it and then can't function without it. And it's very very difficult for a child who's been exposed to marijuana under the age of 16 to withdraw from marijuana. Very hard once they start drinking before 16. So, you know, I always encourage the kids that I treat, you know, you can >> What about Italy and Spain and France?

They're like drinking They're Is it Is this Is it a Is it a toxicity as a function of dose when it comes to the alcohol? There's There is a lot of controversy about that. Basically, they microdose their kids with wine. So, in other words, they'll allow their children If you go to Italy, they don't allow their children to drink a lot. They'll give their children this much wine with dinner. They have the lowest rates of alcoholism in Europe, too.

>> Yeah, they don't have a culture of excessive drinking. They use wine as a condiment to food. They don't really um they don't really have a culture of alcoholism. We have a culture of obsessiveness in our culture. So, you know, and if you expose children to excessive drinking, excessive marijuana smoking um then they're more likely to become addicted. So, social media is no different. So, if we can keep smartphones and social media out

of the hands of kids, give them a flip phone.

You know, I sat down with a at a conference with a Google executive who, you know, she was in charge of um making Google phone safe for for children. Creating Google phones. And I said, you know, you've got to do something. She said, we have. She said, we have a phone. We've had a phone for years. The grownups don't want to buy it for the kids. We marketed it and they don't want to buy it. So now I'm thinking, well now maybe it's doing better. Um, but and maybe because of Jonathan and his book. But the idea is that if you can keep smartphones and social media away from your children until they're 16, there's a lesser there's a greater chance that they'll see it as something to deal with and an adversity, but not something that will bury them or drown them.

Uh, do you think we this is the interesting challenge of our times that there's a lot of things about what works because because we evolved in them and because they're natural that are no longer you don't need to do them anymore and so they're and so now you have to do it consciously. And as somebody who doesn't want the government to do very much, if the government's not going to do it, we the people in civil society have to do it, which relies on a culture that supports that.

So how do you how do you think about on this issue in particular? So are you in favor of government regulatory action on this front or is it like, that's going to go nowhere good. How do you think about it? So I'm not a libertarian. Um, but I also don't believe in excessive regulation, but I do believe in regulation. I do believe the government has a role to play um, in providing structure. So there's another structure. If a libertarian wants to deconstruct the use of government, it's not important. I think government is is another institution that has its use and is important. Like family, like marriage, like faith, um it has its use.

It shouldn't be a And um so what would that look like? There are some things that government regulating is helpful for. And in this case, I think that parents cannot be trusted to parent anymore. And that's a terrible thing to say. But I think >> government in charge of that? I'm not about that. >> No. No. But I think by creating structures So I treat parents who are drinking and drugging with their kids because they think it's a good idea to be peers with their children. Again, take the structure out. The authoritarian approach to parenting where parents are above children and have authority and power over them.

You know, this is part of what society is suffering with. So you're trusting parents to do the right thing. And I'm saying I'm not sure I do trust parents to know what the right thing is. I'm I'm not saying I trust parents. I'm saying I don't trust voters any more than I don't trust parents. That's all I'm saying. >> Right. So what could what could the government do? The government could say that um that social media is illegal for children under the age of 16. That would be a start.

Uh they could say that they could put I guess warnings on smartphones and say buying your child a smartphone is hazardous to your child's health under the age of 16. Um in the end, parents can sneak social media, can sneak, you know, I've seen parents sneak their children drugs and alcohol. >> Right. Right? >> Black market will happen. >> So right. So um you're trusting individual parents. And I'm saying sometimes you can and sometimes

you can't. And so you need some structure in society and laws.

Having said that, um I think if you are of a libertarian approach, then you live in a community where people are like-minded with you, a religious community. That it's been shown that if you live in a religious community, a Christian community, a Jewish community, where people have similar values and you educate your children in the, you know, but then what you're saying is um people should live in shtetls again, should isolate, should, right? I mean, so essentially that's what what it would mean to live in community.

>> perhaps. But okay, so then you live in a community uh where people have similar values to you and you say to all of the parents in your community, it's another way of going about it. You say we're all going to agree not to give our children a smartphone or social media until they're 16. I think this is actually happening in an emergent way, especially among the parents who have decided to home school. Yes. And to a greater extent in the aftermath of COVID, where you saw the school system being a uh a barbaric parasite creature that it is, and so And in your religious communities.

>> Yeah, and saying like, "I'm out of this." And then you find and so my sister's now homeschooling her kids and she's part of this hybrid academy and she has found built a community and so she has um Community of similar values. Yeah, a community of similar values and I can let my son go to your house and you can let your son come to my house because we don't have the phones in either house. So it's not like I can have my rules, but then as soon as you go outside, the rules are out the door, which is the other part that's so hard as an individual parent. But in a heterogeneous society, cuz that's talking about homogeneity of values, which is you could say we used to live like that.

You know, you lived in small communities and you you had a group of people that had the same value system as you, but we live in a heterogeneous society with people of different faiths and beliefs and values and cultures, and and so and that's both good and difficult because that means you are thrown together and your children are thrown together with children of other families with other value systems. I've tried to disentangle myself from the internet and as I've done that it's strange because I'm I get memories back from before I was internet addicted where as I spend less time online, I'm I'm like wait these were memories from my childhood. This was like I used to love running around in the forest and uh I I remember going out in the creek and what the way the world was in like 2005 Pennsylvania because as I disconnect from the internet I realized that my internal monologue was connected to the internet.

And so the attitude I had as I did it as I thought wait, I'm missing out on this but I don't want any of the things I'm missing out on. It's necessary to have long periods of unconstrained undistracted time because if you goes for hours straight without looking your phone, you don't having very different thoughts. You start processing your life on a deeper level, your sense of time grows where I I I I I put I use app blockers for example. I'll just if I have the slightest urge I'll block my phone for 4 hours. It's an immediate instinctual thing I do now and I develop little rules like I try not to use the my phone on the toilet. I try to put my phone in a different room from where I sleep because the phone gets you because on a behavioral psychological level and it often exploits liminal states. And what I mean by that is I'm done with work, I'm about to like go to somewhere. I have 15

minutes to spare. I'm going to look at my phone and that's an instinctual reaction. So every time you're supposed to be resting, instead you get stuck in this sort of psychological hyper arousal which keeps you in a state of discordance where you never really rest.

And so you're constantly getting into these feedback loops with your phone, and it gradually sucks you into it. So, your phone becomes your internal monologue. So, like an addiction, >> Yeah. you have to build out distinct psychological polarities in your mind. So, that the And what I've come to find is the internet is profoundly boring. Once I Because I I I I do an activity where every time I open my phone and I close my phone, I think, "Am I happy?"

And if you put together in your mind, "I have my phone hundreds of times, and 70 what percent of the time I am not happy, why am I doing this?" And people don't put it together because they're so hooked up to the phone, they've lost the frame of comparison. If you liked this clip, you should check out the full video and all the other great content we've got at Dad Saves America. So, be sure to hit the like button, subscribe, and ring that bell so you won't miss our new stuff as it drops each week.