

Social psychologist says kids shouldn't have smartphones before high school

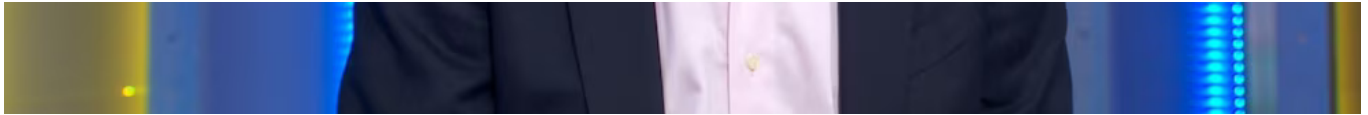
Jonathan Haidt is the author of a new book on kids and mental health.

By [Katie Kindelan](#) via



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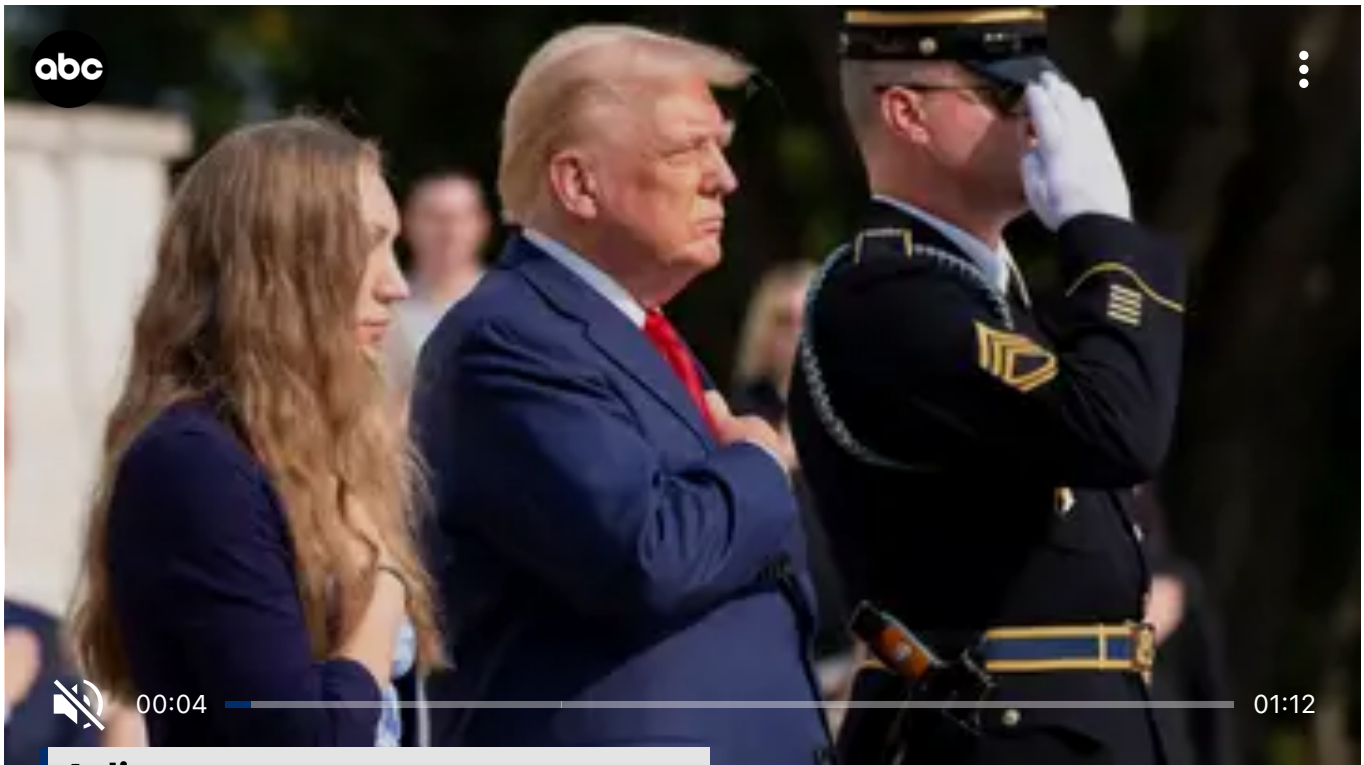


Jon Haidt talks new book, 'The Anxious Generation' The author and social psychologist explores the effects of social media and smartphones on children's mental well-being. STOCK PHOTO/Getty Images

A social psychologist whose new book explores the reasons behind a [sharp decline](#) in kids' [mental health](#) says there are questions parents can ask themselves to help their kids.

Jonathan Haidt, the author of "Anxious Generation," said he encourages all parents to ask themselves, "What did you love about your childhood? What are your best memories?"

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The typical answer, he said, can help show parents the importance of getting their kids off technology and outside, interacting with in-person with other kids.

"It's being outside with other kids playing. You make up the rules. You are having fun. That's nature's way of having mammals wire up their brains," Haidt said Tuesday on "[Good Morning America](#)." "Kids need play and independence if they're going to become healthy, happy, and independent adults."

Haidt said he wrote "Anxious Generation" to explore why, after years of stability, the levels of mental illness in kids began to spike starting in 2012 and 2013, including anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide.



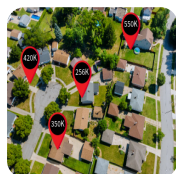
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The primary reason for the increase, Haidt said he found, is the growing use of smartphones.

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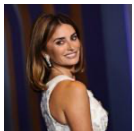
Haidt writes in the book that Gen Z, the generation of people born in 1997 and onward, is an experiment of what happens when young people have full access to smartphones.

"Millennials went through puberty with flip phones, and flip phones aren't particularly bad. You use them just to communicate," Haidt said. "It was when we gave kids smartphones and then right around that time, they also got ... social media accounts. When kids move their social lives onto social media like that, it's not human. It doesn't help them develop. And right away, mental health collapses."

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American Psychological Association issues advisory for teens and social media

Last year, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy [issued an advisory](#) warning of an urgent public health issue regarding social media usage and youth mental health.

Around the same time, the American Psychological Association issued [first-of-its-kind guidance](#) to ensure that teens get the proper training on how to use social media safely. The guidance is primarily directed toward parents

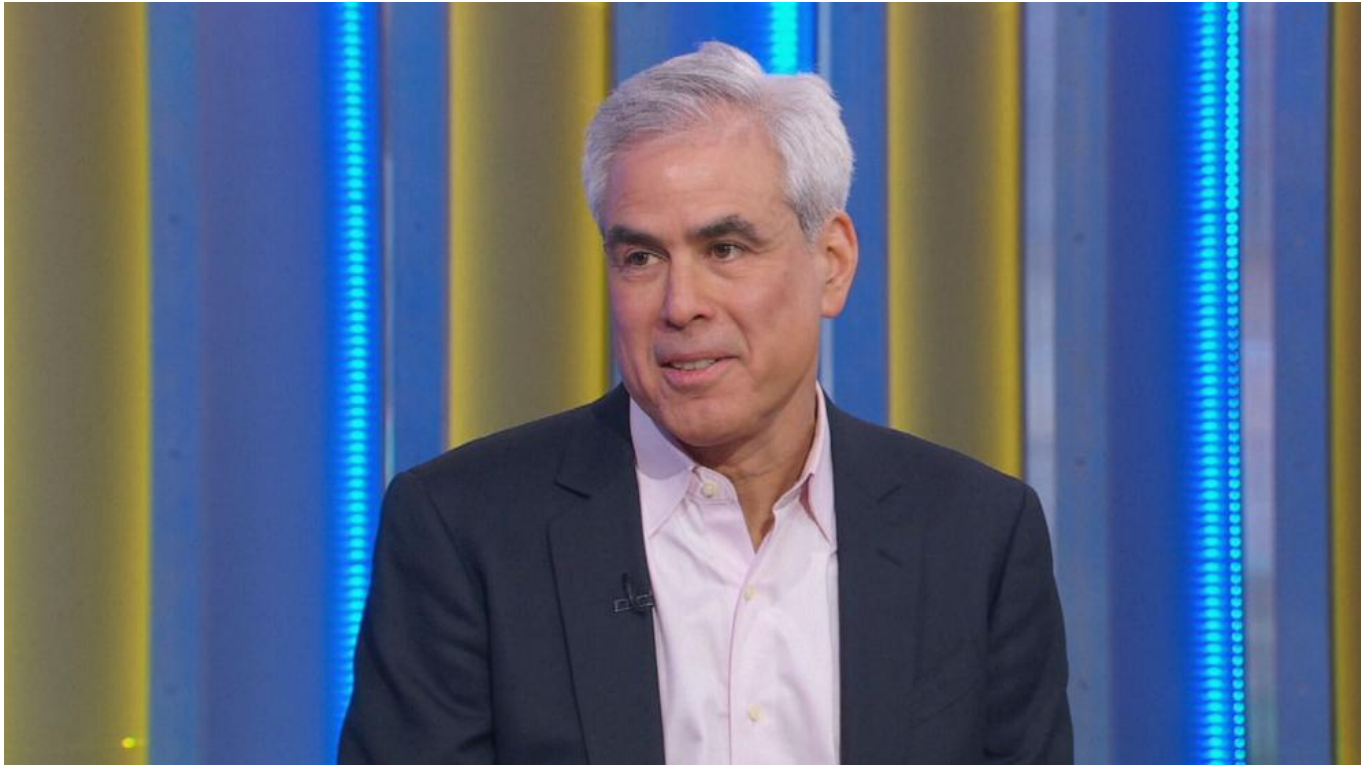
and formalizes prior recommendations around social media use, including setting time limits, family discussions about social media, and parental monitoring.

On Monday, Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a bill into law that will ban social media accounts for children under 14 and require parental permission for 14- and 15-year-olds, [according to The Associated Press](#).

Most social media sites currently [require users](#) to be 13-years-old. In most cases, social media sites require people to enter their birth dates in order to sign up as users.

In other states, including Connecticut, some schools are [testing bans](#) on smartphones at schools in order to help keep students more engaged and cut down on bullying.

Haidt said for individual parents, trying to keep a child from using a smartphone or being on social media can feel like trying to "hold back the tide."



📷 "Anxious Generation" author Jonathan Haidt speaks with Rebecca Jarvis on "Good Morning America," March 26, 2024.

ABC News

"We're having trouble because we don't want to be the only one who doesn't give our kid a phone," Haidt said of parents.

[+ MORE: Connecticut schools testing smartphone ban](#)

As a result, Haidt said he is proposing making four guidelines on phone and social media usage as "norms" across the country.

1. No smartphones before high school. Haidt suggests giving kids flip phones before high school so they can still stay connected for safety purposes.

2. No social media before age 16.

3. Phone-free schools. Haidt recommends asking school officials for options like lockers for students' phones.

4. More free play and responsibility in the real world.

Overall, Haidt emphasized again the need for kids to simply play, whether it's in their backyard, at a local park, or on a school playground.

"What kids really need to be doing is playing," he said. "We're mammals. This is what all mammals do. Anyone who has had a puppy or a kitten, they want to play all the time, and so do toddlers, young children, even teenagers."



