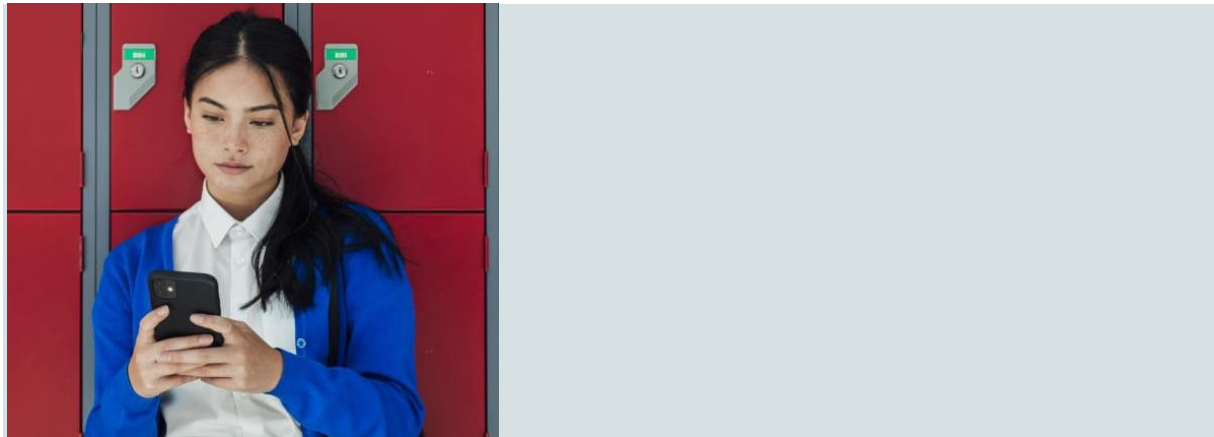


## This is the right age to give your child a smartphone, according to an NYU mental health researcher



A medium close-up front view of a teenage girl who is sending text messages to a friend and checking her social media as she waits in the corridor of the high school she attends.

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Parents around the world are debating when to give their children smartphones, as evidence grows that [smartphones can have negative effects on the mental health of](#) children.

Research indicates that young people’s mental health was worse the earlier they got their first smartphone, according to a [Sapien Labs study](#) published last year, which used data from 27,969 18-24-year-olds across 41 countries.

Some 74% of girls who received their first smartphone at age six said they felt distressed or were struggling, the study found. This decreased to 52% for those who got their first smartphone at age 15.

Meanwhile, 42% of boys who got their first smartphone at age 6 experienced feeling distressed or struggling, and this reduced to 36% for those who received a smartphone at age 18.

But smartphones have become an essential part of everyday life in an increasingly online world and many parents want to give their children devices so they can keep track of their location and stay in touch with them when they leave the home. So how soon is too soon?

Zach Rausch, a research scientist at New York University Stern School of Business and the lead researcher for Jonathon Haidt’s No. 1 New York Times bestseller “The Anxious Generation,” said it’s particularly important to keep smartphones away from preteens.

“We suggest in the book to delay smartphones in the U.S. until high school, so that’s around age 14,” Rausch told CNBC Make It in an interview. “Social media, we suggest delaying until 16, so a little older.”

“Then we suggest phone-free schools from at least kindergarten through middle school in the U.S., but ideally also through high school,” he added.

It comes as grassroots organizations advocating for delaying giving smartphones to kids are gaining traction around the world.

Both [Smartphone Free Childhood](#) in the U.K. — which was founded after an “accidental” social media post went viral in February and now has almost 70,000 Instagram followers around the world — and [Delay Smartphones](#) in the U.S. cite the research and recommendations of Rausch and Haidt.

Some academics and scientists remain unconvinced of a causal link between smartphones and poor mental health, however. Earlier this year, [psychology professor Christopher Ferguson](#) said the concerns are the latest iteration of recurring moral panic which sees older people “freak out” about new and unfamiliar technology.

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### **Middle school is key**

For Rausch, the recommended ages of 14 for smartphones and 16 for social media are important for a couple of key reasons.

“The first is that in the United States, we want to get the phones out of middle school because it is the period when you’re in early puberty, which is when you’re just extremely sensitive and insecure. It’s already a hard time, we don’t need to add the phones in there,” he explained.

Middle School typically includes grades six to eight, or children between the ages of 11 and 14 — essentially, the dreaded preteen years.

This is the “period of highest vulnerability during puberty,” Rausch said

He added that in the seventh grade, which is around ages 12 to 13, “there is the most bullying of any grade out there,” and so delaying smartphone use prevents amplifying the issue even further.

Rausch admitted that the ages suggested in “The Anxious Generation” are “in some ways arbitrary,” but that they’re trying to set a “collective norm” that parents can agree on and follow.

“If we can agree upon it together, then it makes it much easier to act,” he explained. “So if we delay until 14, which is a reasonable ask, we can help at least get it out from the younger ages, which is what we’re seeing is that larger and larger proportions of 10-year-olds and six-year-olds already have their own personal device.—[www.cnbc.com, July 19, 2024](#)”