

# The Anxious Generation

## Thought and Action Starters for Parents

I wrote *The Anxious Generation* with a firm belief that the challenges confronting our children and our families are solvable. However, addressing these challenges requires understanding the traps we have fallen into, so we can see the escape routes. The main escape routes are four new norms, four steps that are hard for any one family to do on its own, but they become much easier if we can coordinate and act together. The book and the website ([anxiousgeneration.com](http://anxiousgeneration.com)) are designed to facilitate discussion among friends, family, book clubs, and communities, in order to change norms and reclaim human life for all generations. This guide offers conversation starters as well as some actions you can take on your own or with a few friends.

– Jon Haidt

*This document was created by Jon Haidt, Zach Rausch, and Lenore Skenazy, with assistance from Mckenzie Love, Nicole Kitten, and Ashley Fisher-Tranese*

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## Thought Starters

### Technology:

1. The book says that today we *overprotect children and adolescents in the real world and underprotect them in the virtual world*. Do you see this happening? Where?
2. What problems do smartphones, social media, and screens solve in your family, and what problems do they create?
3. Do you have any tech rules in your home? Do they work? Are there some that you have heard of, or would like to try?
4. What would you like to change, if anything, about your kids' relationship with smartphones and social media? What about video games and other screen-based activities?
5. How are your kids different online and offline?

**Play:**

6. The book says that one problem with a phone-based childhood is that it replaces the hours children would otherwise spend playing in the real world: "Children are, in a sense, deprived of childhood." Do you agree about this for children in general or your own? What exactly are kids missing out on?
7. Think back on your own childhood. What are your most thrilling memories? Could your child have a similar experience today?
8. What did you get from "just playing" as a kid?
9. "Free play" means playing without adults organizing or even supervising. What reservations do you have about allowing your own children more unsupervised time?
10. Jon and Lenore suggest a few ways to give your kids more unstructured, unsupervised opportunities for free play, such as keeping Fridays open so neighborhood kids can get together. What small steps could you take toward adding more free play to your children's lives?

**Independence:**

11. When you were your child(ren)'s age, what did your parents trust you to do on your own? How did that make you feel?
12. What are some things you do for your children that they could start doing for themselves?
13. What are some things you do for your family that your children could start doing for you?
14. Think about a time when you were a child and something went wrong when no adult was around. How did you solve the problem?
15. How can you give your kids more opportunities to be part of the real world rather than the virtual one?

16. Modern technology makes it very easy to track our children's whereabouts, grades, and even behavior electronically. This can become "the world's longest umbilical cord." Could you cut down on the ways in which you electronically track or watch your child in the real world? How?

**For you:**

17. What problems do smartphones, social media, and screens solve in your own life and what problems do they create?

18. Do you have any tech rules for yourself? Do they work?

19. What would you like to change, if anything, about your own relationship with smartphones and social media? What about video games and other screen-based activities?

20. How are you different online and offline?

**Overall:**

21. In what ways can we better prepare our kids to wisely navigate the virtual world?

22. In what ways can we better prepare our kids to wisely navigate the real world?

23. Would you want to grow up the way today's kids are growing up? Why or why not? What are some benefits of growing up today? What would you want to preserve/carry forward from your own upbringing?

24. What actions can you take, on your own and with like-minded parents, to lessen your kids' time spent in the virtual world and increase their opportunities for fun and responsibility in the physical world?

## Some Possible Actions You Can Take

### Technology:

1. Partner up with a few other families to delay giving your child a smartphone until high school. Give them a flip phone instead.
2. Partner up with a few other families to delay giving your child access to social media until age sixteen.
3. Partner up with a few other parents to ask your school to go phone-free so you can give your kids seven hours of attention and in-person socialization.
4. Set tech boundaries in your household. For example, no screens during mealtime or before bed. Consider leaving phones in the kitchen overnight. (Buy an alarm clock!)

### Play:

5. Keep Friday afternoons free for neighborhood play.
6. Partner up with a few other parents and ask your school to start a phone-free, mixed-age [Let Grow Play Club](#) before or after school.
7. On your block, arrange for one parent to sit outside each afternoon so the kids can play outside together.

### Independence:

8. Ask your kids to start doing one thing inside the home (and let them!), without your assistance, that will help you.
9. Ask your kids to start doing one thing outside the home (and let them!), without your supervision, that will help you.
10. Have coffee with a friend and send your kids out together for a specific amount of time without a phone or tracker.

11. Ask your school to assign [The Let Grow Experience](#), a homework assignment that asks kids to start doing something new on their own, with your permission.

**If you want to share the impact the book has had on you—maybe you're overprotecting a little less in the real world or have started protecting a little more online—please tell us your story at [anxiousgeneration.com/take-action](https://anxiousgeneration.com/take-action).**

## Additional Resources

anxiousgeneration.com

### Substacks:

*After Babel*, Jon Haidt  
*Designing Tomorrow*, The Neely Center  
*Techno Sapiens*, Jacqueline Nesi, PhD  
*Of Boys and Men*, Richard V. Reeves  
*Generation Tech*, Jean M. Twenge  
*GIRLS*, Freya India  
*Play Makes Us Human*, Peter Gray  
*The Eternally Radical Idea*, Greg Lukianoff

### Books:

*The Coddling of the American Mind*, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt  
*Free-Range Kids*, Lenore Skenazy  
*The Happiness Hypothesis*, Jonathan Haidt  
*The Righteous Mind*, Jonathan Haidt  
*The Canceling of the American Mind*, Greg Lukianoff and Rikki Schlott  
*Awe*, Dacher Keltner  
*Dopamine Nation*, Anna Lembke, MD  
*Generations*, Jean M. Twenge, PhD  
*iGen*, Jean M. Twenge, PhD  
*How to Have a Good Day*, Caroline Webb  
*Indistractable*, Nir Eyal with Julie Li  
*A Nation of Wimps*, Hara Estroff Marano  
*The Opposite of Spoiled*, Ron Lieber  
*Urban Playground*, Tim Gill  
*When Men Behave Badly*, David M. Buss  
*The Age of Addiction*, David T. Courtwright  
*Of Boys and Men*, Richard V. Reeves  
*Unwired*, Gaia Berstein  
*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff  
*The End of Men*, Hanna Rosin  
*Boys Adrift*, Leonard Sax, MD, PhD  
*Free to Learn*, Peter Gray  
*Outrage Machine*, Tobias Rose-Stockwell  
*Untangled*, Lisa Damour, PhD  
*Stolen Focus*, Johann Hari  
*Deep Work*, Cal Newport  
*Digital Minimalism*, Cal Newport  
*The Gardener and the Carpenter*, Alison Gopnik  
*The Disappearance of Childhood*, Neil Postman  
*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Marshall McLuhan  
*Paranoid Parenting*, Frank Furedi

*Bowling Alone*, Robert D. Putnam  
*Never Enough*, Jennifer Breheny Wallace  
*The Emotional Lives of Teenagers*, Lisa Damour, PhD  
*How to Raise a Healthy Gamer*, Alok Kanojia, MD, MPH  
*The Screen Strong Solution*, Melanie Hempe, BSN  
*Quiet*, Susan Cain  
*The Family Firm*, Emily Oster  
*Mortal Combat*, Patrick M. Markey, PhD, and Christopher J. Ferguson, PhD  
*Unequal Childhoods*, Annette Lareau

### **School resources:**

letgrow.org (school programs)  
 everyschool.org  
 phonefreeschoolsmovement.org

### **Parent resources for tech:**

screenstrong.org  
 fairplayforkids.org  
 gamequitters.com  
 screentimenetwork.org  
 waituntil8th.org  
 healthygamer.gg  
 protectyoungeyes.com  
 delaysmartphones.co.uk  
 lookupnonprofit.com  
 smart-families.org  
 oktodelay.org  
 getmediasavvy.org  
 smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk  
 screensanity.org  
 wearemama.squarespace.com  
 parentssos.org

### **Parent resources for play and independence:**

letgrow.org  
 outsideplay.org  
 montanawildernessschool.org  
 nifplay.org  
 nols.edu  
 onbeing.org  
 afsusa.org/study-abroad  
 americanexchangeproject.org  
 outwardbound.org  
 wildernessadventures.com  
 ycamp.org/wilderness-trips  
 boystomen.org

**Gen Z resources:**

[designitforus.org](https://designitforus.org)  
[gamequitters.com](https://gamequitters.com)  
[healthygamer.gg](https://healthygamer.gg)  
[logoffmovement.org](https://logoffmovement.org)  
[nosonovember.org](https://nosonovember.org)

**Tech company resources:**

[humanetech.com](https://humanetech.com)  
[reset.tech](https://reset.tech)

**Researcher resources:**

[commonsense.org](https://commonsense.org)  
[aibm.org](https://aibm.org)  
[psychoftech.org](https://psychoftech.org)  
[alltechishuman.org](https://alltechishuman.org)  
[childrenandscreens.org](https://childrenandscreens.org)  
[counterhate.com](https://counterhate.com)

**Speakers:**

Jon Haidt: Washington Speakers Bureau: [wsb.com/speakers/jonathan-haidt](https://wsb.com/speakers/jonathan-haidt)  
Zach Rausch: [zach-rausch.com](https://zach-rausch.com)  
Lenore Skenazy: [bit.ly/LenoreSpeak](https://bit.ly/LenoreSpeak)

**See more at [anxiousgeneration.com](https://anxiousgeneration.com)**