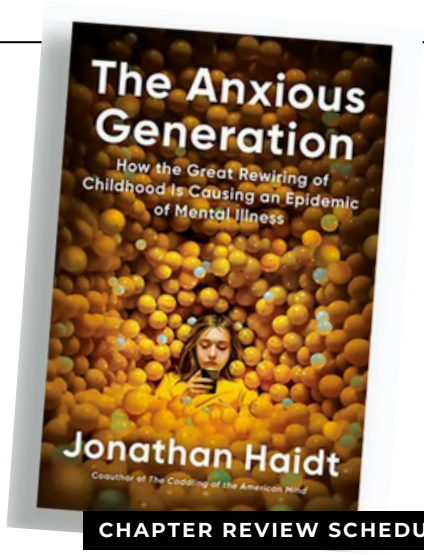
WINTER ISSUE

The Anxious Generation



Viking Families,

This year, our staff is reading The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt as part of our ongoing commitment to supporting the well-being of our students. In the opening chapters, Haidt outlines a powerful shift in childhood that has occurred over the past decade. He explains how children have moved from a play-based childhood—rich in independence, face-to-face interaction, and real-world problem-solving—to a phone-based childhood, where much of their social life, identity formation, and emotional regulation happens through screens.

This issue focuses on Chapters 4-8, which Haidt describes as "The Great Rewiring: The Rise of Phone-Based Childhood." These chapters examine how constant connectivity, social media platforms, and algorithm-driven content have reshaped how young people think, interact, and cope with stress. Haidt explores the developmental impact of this shift, highlighting how early and sustained exposure to phones and social media has altered attention, sleep, social relationships, and emotional well-being—particularly during adolescent years.

Our goal is to learn as a community and work together—both at school and at home—to create environments that foster confidence, resilience, connection, and balance for our children.

Respectfully

Laura Januszewski
Pelican Rapids High School Principal

CHAPTER REVIEW SCHEDULE

Spring

Chapter 9
Preparing for Collective Action

Chapter 10
What Governments And Tech Companies Can Do Now

Chapter 11
What Schools Can Do Now

Chapter 12
What Parents Can Do Now

Chapter 13
Bring Childhood Back To Earth

Chapter 4: Puberty and the Phone

Haidt explains that adolescence is a sensitive period of brain development. When smartphones and social media are introduced during puberty, they amplify peer evaluation, social comparison, and emotional intensity at a time when young people are especially vulnerable. This can increase anxiety, self-doubt, and emotional volatility.

Key Takeaways

- Adolescent brains are highly responsive to peer approval and rejection.
- Social media turns normal social stress into constant, public feedback.
- Early phone exposure during puberty can magnify emotions.

Home Strategies

- Delay smartphones or social media during early adolescence
- Talk about how online feedback affects mood and self-esteem.
- Remind your child emotional ups and downs are normal.
- Create phone-free spaces that support connection
  - Phones out of bedrooms at night
  - Phone-free meal time
  - Phone-free during homework
  - Create a family charging station

SIMPLE PHONE & WATCH OPTIONS

Features	Home phone	Flip phone	Smartwatch for kids	Limited Access Phone	Apple Watch	Smartphone designed for kids	iPhone set up for talk & text ONLY
	Ooma Tin Can	A wide variety of options. More info: dumbphones dumbwireless	Gabb Gizmo Garmin Cosmo Bark	Pinwheel Gabb Light Phone Wisephone	Apple Watch Parent must have an iPhone. Remove App Store, web browser, and distracting apps. Set up School Mode.	Bark Monitored social media available Troomi Social media unavailable	Remove App Store, web browser, and distracting apps. Watch video tutorial
Talk	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Text		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
GPS Tracking		Available on some brands	ON	ON	ON	ON	ON
App Store				Proprietary App Collection	OFF	OFF	OFF
Music				OFF	OFF	OFF	OFF
Video Games					OFF	OFF	OFF
Web Browser					OFF	OFF	OFF
Social Media					OFF	OFF	OFF

Chapter 5: The Four Foundational Harms

This chapter outlines four major ways phone-based childhood disrupts healthy development: **social deprivation, sleep deprivation, attention fragmentation,** and **behavioral addiction**. Haidt emphasizes that these harms often work together, compounding stress and undermining mental health.

Key Takeaways

Social Deprivation: Social development depends on frequent, in-person interactions where children learn to read facial expressions, manage conflict, take turns, and build empathy. Over time, reduced real-world interaction can lead to loneliness, weaker social skills, and increased social anxiety. Children may feel "connected" online but still experience isolation because their need for genuine human connection is unmet.

Sleep Deprivation: Sleep is foundational to mental health, emotional regulation, attention, and learning. Smartphones interfere with sleep in multiple ways: late-night scrolling delays bedtime, notifications interrupt sleep cycles, and blue light suppresses melatonin production. Adolescents are especially vulnerable because their natural sleep rhythms already shift later during puberty. Chronic sleep deprivation increases the risk of anxiety, depression, irritability, and poor academic performance.

Attention Fragmentation: Digital platforms are designed to capture and hold attention through constant notifications, infinite scrolling, and rapid content changes. This environment trains the brain to expect frequent stimulation, making sustained focus increasingly difficult. Over time, children may struggle with concentration, persistence, and frustration tolerance.

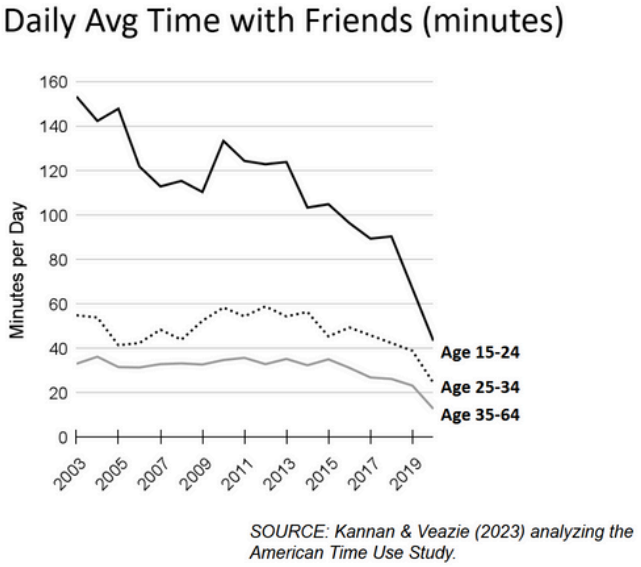
Attention fragmentation can also increase stress, as the brain is continually switching tasks and responding to alerts. This constant cognitive load leaves less mental energy for deep thinking, creativity, and emotional regulation.

Behavioral Addiction: Many apps and games are intentionally designed using psychological principles that encourage habitual use, such as variable rewards, streaks, and social validation. These features activate the brain's reward system, making it difficult for children and teens to disengage.

Over time, this can lead to compulsive use, emotional dependence on devices, and distress when access is limited. Children may use screens to escape boredom, stress, or discomfort, reducing opportunities to develop healthy coping skills.

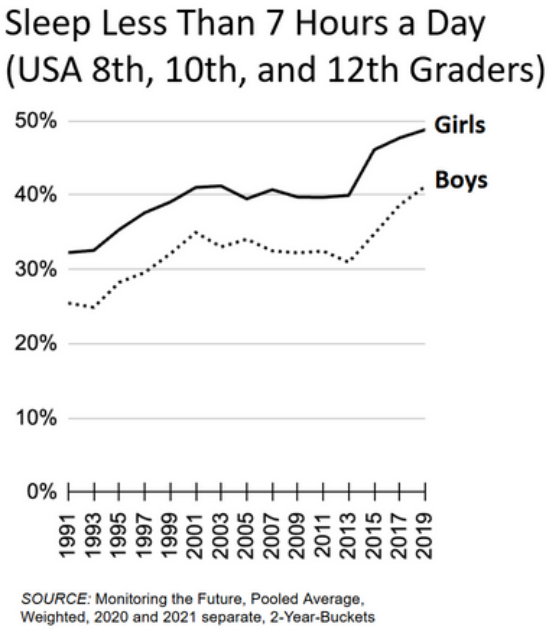
Home Strategies

- Establish consistent screen-free times, especially before bed.
- Help your child create a consistent nighttime routine, including a regular bed time.
- Charge phones outside bedrooms overnight.
- Encourage activities that build sustained attention, such as reading or creative play.



SOURCE: Kannan & Veazie (2023) analyzing the American Time Use Study.





SOURCE: Monitoring the Future, Pooled Average, Weighted, 2020 and 2021 separate, 2-Year-Buckets

Chapter 6: Why Social Media Harms Girls More

Haidt explores why girls have experienced sharper increases in anxiety and depression with the rise of social media. He points to image-based platforms, social comparison, and relational aggression as key contributors, noting that online conflict can follow girls everywhere. Studies show that social media use is a *cause,* not just a correlate, of anxiety and depression.

Key Takeaways

- Social media intensifies appearance-based comparison and self-criticism.
- Online drama and exclusion can feel constant and overwhelming.
- Girls are more likely to internalize social stress.

Home Strategies

- Discuss how social media images are curated and often unrealistic.
- Reinforce self-worth based on character, effort, and strengths—not appearance.
- Check in regularly about online friendships and social pressures.

Chapter 7: Why Social Media Harms Boys More

This chapter focuses on how boys are affected differently by phone-based childhood. Haidt highlights the impact of gaming, online content, and social withdrawal, noting that boys are more likely to disengage from real-world challenges and relationships.

Key Takeaways

- Excessive gaming and screen use can reduce motivation and social engagement.
- Online spaces may replace opportunities to build real-world competence.
- Boys may struggle to express emotions when much of life happens online.

Home Strategies

- Set clear, consistent limits for gaming and screen time.
- Encourage physical activity, teamwork, and hands-on hobbies.
- Help boys practice emotional expression and problem-solving offline.

Chapter 8: Spiritual Elevation and Degradation

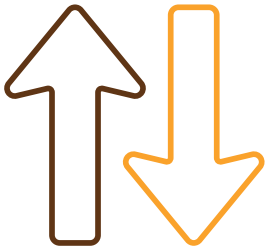
This chapter explores how society has shifted from being rooted in real-world experiences—family life, friendships, community, nature, service, play, and meaningful challenges—to being heavily shaped by screens and digital content.

We need experiences that create "spiritual elevation"—moments where we feel connected, inspired, grounded, and part of something bigger than ourselves. These experiences build character, purpose, gratitude, empathy, and resilience.

At the same time, constant exposure to online content can lead to "spiritual degradation"—not necessarily in a religious sense, but in a human sense: content that pulls toward cynicism, shallow validation, impulsivity, cruelty, sexualized content, constant judgment, or identity based mainly on appearance and popularity.

Spiritual elevation builds resilience and character from experiences like:

- Being part of a team or group
- Helping someone
- Spending time in nature
- Working hard at something meaningful
- Being trusted with responsibility
- Learning to handle discomfort and effort



Home Strategies

Intentionally build "elevation" into your week

- Family walks or hikes
- Volunteer together once a month
- Help cook dinner or care for siblings/pets
- Music, art, faith/community activities
- Join sports or clubs that build belonging

Set boundaries that support values, not just rules

- "We protect sleep in this house."
- "We prioritize family time."
- "We don't let a device shape our mood."

Replace screentime, don't just remove

- Friend time in person
- Hobbies that create pride and skill
- Exercise/movement
- Creative projects
- Structured responsibilities (chores, jobs)

Repeated exposure to certain content influences:

- Mood and outlook
- Self-worth
- Values and empathy
- Attention and self-control

The internet often pushes **degradation**
Online spaces can normalize:

- Cruelty and humiliation
- Constant comparison and judgment
- Sexualized content and objectification
- Shallow validation (likes/followers)

MORE RESOURCES AVAILABLE:

https://www.anxiousgeneration.com/take-action/parent