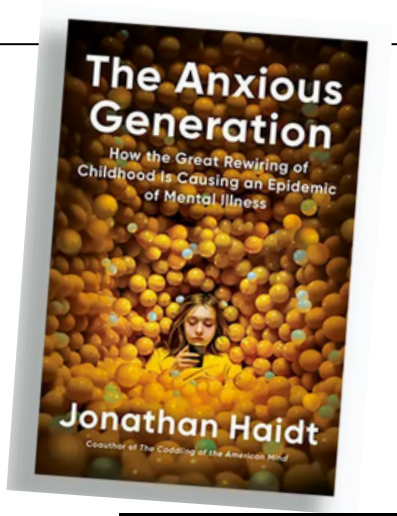
FALL ISSUE

The Anxious Generation



Viking Families,

This year, our staff is reading The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt together as part of our ongoing commitment to supporting the well-being of our students. The book explores how changes in childhood over the past decade—particularly the rise of smartphones, social media, and reduced opportunities for play—have contributed to increasing levels of anxiety and stress among young people.

As we read and reflect together throughout the year, we'll be sharing insights with you through this newsletter. Each issue will include brief chapter summaries, key takeaways, and practical home strategies you can use to help support your child's healthy development. Our goal is to learn as a community and work together to create environments—both at school and at home—where children can grow with confidence, connection, and balance.

Respectfully

Laura Januszewski
Pelican Rapids High School Principal

Chapter 1: The Surge of Suffering

Haidt notes the sharp rise in adolescent mental health problems—anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation—beginning and accelerating in 2010. This is a broad, real phenomenon—not isolated to one school or city. Kids are suffering more, and something changed in how childhood works around that time.

Key Takeaways
Mental-health "baseline" for many adolescents is worse than a decade ago.

The change is large, rapid, and coincides with shifts in technology rather than only economic or isolated social factors.

Though the chapter focuses on the data/epidemic, the emphasis is: this is a system-level shift in childhood, not just individual issues.

Home Strategies
Screen Time Awareness: Establish a baseline by logging time spent on devices in the evening.

Have Open Conversations: Use data as a conversation starter. "How do you feel about your time online?"

Evening Wind Down: Set a "device curfew" each night (e.g., no smartphones 30–60 minutes before bed).

Check Mood/Symptoms: "Are you feeling more stressed, sad, stuck, compared to usual?" Early detection matters

CHAPTER REVIEW SCHEDULE

FALL (Chapters 1-3)
Chapter 1
The Surge of Suffering

Chapter 2
What Children Need to Do in Childhood

Chapter 3
Discover Mode and the Need for Risky Play

Winter (Chapters 4-8)
Chapter 4
Puberty and the Blocked Transition to Adulthood

Chapter 5
The Four Basic Harms

Chapter 6
Why Social Media Harms Girls More Than Boys

Chapter 7
What Is Happening to Boys?

Chapter 8
Spiritual Degradation and Elevation

Spring (Chapters 9-13)
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 2: What Children Need to Do in Childhood

Children need time to learn skills (physical, social, emotional) before adulthood and identifies three foundational motivations supported through childhood:

- Free Play
- Attunement (Emotional/Social Connections)
- Social Learning (Learning by watching and imitating others)

Key Takeaways
Free, unsupervised, unstructured play helps kids experiment, learn risk/reward, negotiate with peers, resolve conflicts, build social competence.

Attunement (emotional connection to others) is central: Kids need real-world relational experience, face-to-face interactions.

Social learning: Kids need role models, opportunities to observe social behaviour, to imitate, to try things that adults or older peers do.

Home Strategies
Allocate "Free Play" Time
Allow for unstructured play—no adults directing every move, no set schedule, just freedom (within safe limits).

Encourage Offline Peer Interaction
Limit online gaming or social media chats.

Role Model
Engage in activities together that allow your child to watch and imitate

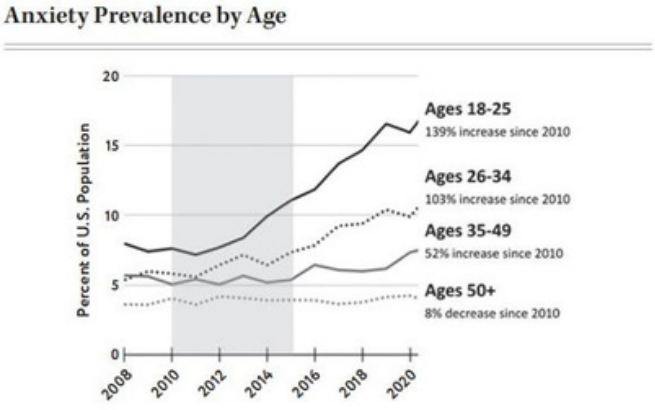


Figure 1.3. Percent of U.S. adults reporting high levels of anxiety by age group. (Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health.)[11]

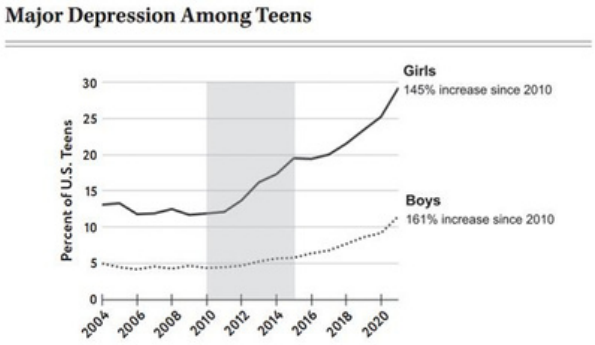


Figure 1.1. Percent of U.S. teens (ages 12–17) who had at least one major depressive episode in the past year, by self-report based on a symptom checklist. This was figure 7.1 in *The Coddling of the American Mind*, now updated with data beyond 2016. (Source: U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health.)[3]

Chapter 3: Discover Mode and the Need for Risky Play

This chapter differentiates "discover mode" and "defend mode". Healthy childhoods offer experiences in "discover mode": curiosity and reasonable risk-taking. Children are constantly shielded and supervised, and restricted in "defend mode" (alert, anxious, cautious).

Key Takeaways
Risky play isn't about recklessness—it's "safe enough" challenges: learning how to handle small failures, to judge risk, to self-regulate.

Children in "discover mode" build a feeling of "I can handle this. I can do that".

The combination of fewer unsupervised opportunities + more screen time = increased anxiety, less resilience.

Home Strategies
Supervised Independence
Give chances to explore, go to a friend's house on their own, ride a bike without adult oversight—age and maturity permitting.

Encourage Little Risks
For example: climbing a tree, building a fort, using tools (under supervision) to experience challenge, trial and error.

Adjust Fear Culture
Talk about risk: "What could go wrong? How might you handle it? Normalize failure and learning from it.

Balance Screen Time with Physical Play
Set structured times for device use, and ensure there's plenty of daily physical, real-world play time.