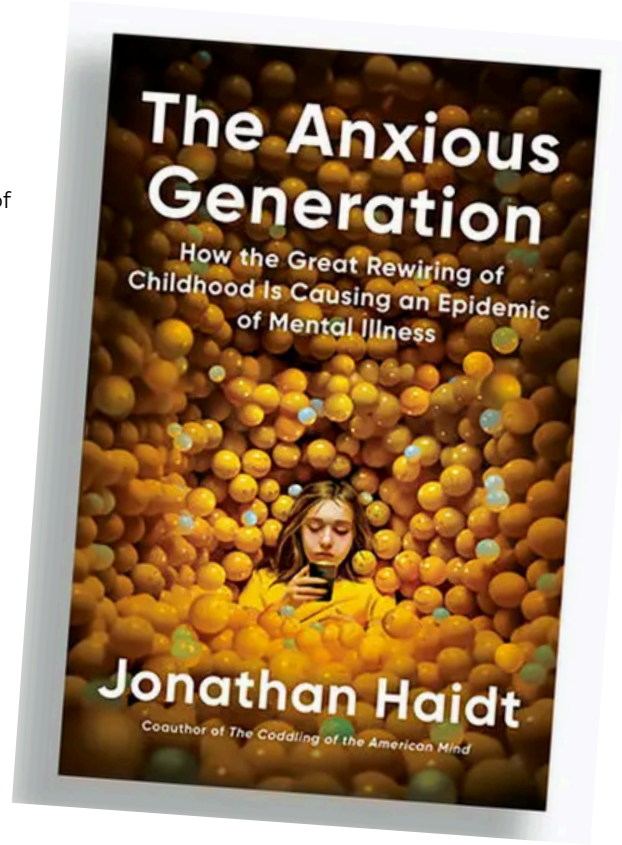
SPRING ISSUE

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 10-12, which shift from understanding the challenges facing today's youth to exploring practical solutions for families, schools, and communities. These chapters highlight the importance of working together to create healthier environments for our children—both online and offline—and offer simple, age-appropriate strategies parents can use at home to support confidence, independence, and strong mental health. We hope these summaries provide helpful guidance and spark meaningful conversations within your family.

Respectfully

Laura Januszewski
Pelican Rapids High School Principal

Chapter 10: What Governments and Tech Companies Can Do

In this chapter, Jonathan Haidt focuses on the broader systems shaping adolescent mental health—particularly the role of technology companies and government policy. Many digital platforms are designed to maximize attention and engagement, often without considering the developmental needs of young users.

Haidt highlights how features like infinite scrolling, algorithm-driven content, and social comparison can contribute to anxiety, sleep disruption, and reduced self-esteem. Because these systems are so influential, he emphasizes the need for structural changes—including stronger protections for minors, better age verification, and increased accountability for tech companies.

Chapter 11: What Schools Can Do Now

Haidt highlights the role schools play in improving student mental health and restoring balance in adolescence. He notes a Polynesian expression: "Standing on a while, fishing for minnows" and notes it is sometimes better to do a big thing rather than many small things. Haidt suggests two big things schools can do: create phone-free schools and offer more free play.

Key Takeaways
Haidt notes four ways governments and tech companies can improve the virtual world for adolescents:

- Assert a Duty of Care
- Raise the Age of Internet Adulthood to 16
- Facilitate Age Verification
- Encourage Phone-Free Schools

Haidt asks schools to turn their attention:

- Phone-free environments improve learning and connections - support initiatives focused on phone-free school days
- Students need to be encouraged to explore on their own through independence and free play

Home Strategies

- Reinforce school phone policies and help your child understand the purpose behind them
- Encourage your child to engage fully in class, activities, and conversations without distractions
- Encourage your child to participate in clubs, sports, arts, or activities
- Stay informed about school initiatives and support your child's academic and social growth.

Chapter 12: What Parents Can Do Now

Haidt highlights the role schools play in improving student mental health and restoring balance in adolescence. He notes a Polynesian expression: “Standing on a while, fishing for minnows” and notes it is sometimes better to do a big thing rather than many small things. Haidt suggests two big things schools can do: create phone-free schools and offer more free play.

A phone-free school where smartphones are removed from classrooms and common spaces, creates an environment where students are more engaged academically, interact more with peers, and experience fewer distractions and social pressures. This help shift culture back toward in-person connections and belonging.

Beyond technology, the chapter emphasizes the importance of free play. Extended play time, longer recess, and unstructured play time helps build strong relationships, fostering a sense of community, and creating opportunities for students to collaborate, communicate, and feel connected to others in meaningful ways.

The Anxious Generation Resources

Looking to dig deeper?

The Anxious Generation’s website offers practical resources such as parent and youth guides, technology agreements, and conversation tools.

Additional book recommendations, podcasts, videos, and courses focused on youth mental health and healthy technology use are available.

It also includes ideas for taking action at home, in schools, and within communities, helping families apply the book’s key concepts in meaningful, everyday ways.

anxiousgeneration.com

Age-Based Recommendations

Elementary and Middle School Children (Ages 6 to 13)

Children at this age need to take on more advanced challenges, including those that are social.

More (and better) experiences in the real world

- Practice letting your kids out of your sight without them having a way to reach you
- Encourage sleepovers with friends
- Encourage walking to school in a group
- After school is for free play
- Go camping
- Find a device-free sleepaway camp
- Form child-friendly neighborhoods and playborhoods

Less (and better) experiences on screens

In general, no more than two hours per day is recommended for screen-based recreational activities

- Learn to use parental controls and content filters
- Focus on maximizing in-person activities
- Provide structured daily and weekly schedules
- Look for signs of addicition or problematic use
- Wait until 16 for social media accounts
- Talk about the risks with your child

Teens (Ages 13-18)

Use this time as a opportunity to increase freedoms and responsibilities as your child begins the path to adulthood

More (and better) experiences in the real world

- Increase their mobility with transportation
- Add responsibilities at home
- Encourage part-time jobs and activities
- Find ways for them to mentor younger kids
- Find bigger thrills and adventures

Less (and better) experiences on screens

The frontal cortex is not fully developed until the mid-20s, but children should be given more autonomy than younger children.