GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 22, 2026 @ 5:30 P.M.
PROJECT OCEANOLOGY, NORTH ROOM #243

MEMBERS PRESENT: Beverly Washington-Chairperson, Adrian Johnson-Vice Chairperson, Andrea Ackerman, Sean Corcoran, Ian Thomas, Jennifer White, Michael Whitney

MEMBERS ABSENT: Mitch Shinbrot, Jay Weitlauf

ALSO PRESENT: Susan Austin, Anne Marie Mancini, Clint Kennedy, Paul Weigle

Chairperson Washington called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. She stated that the purpose of the meeting was to conduct a Board Retreat.

I. Board Retreat

- Social Media & Children – Child Psychiatrist Paul Weigle, MD discussed the positive and negative effects of social media on children and their well-being. (Attachment #1)
- Social Media & Schools – IT Director Clint Kennedy discussed how generative artificial intelligence (gAI) is rapidly entering students' academic and personal lives. He shared key lessons learned from social media and stated that Board of Education leadership is essential in setting clear direction, ensuring equity, and supporting staff and families. (Attachment #2)
- Mission Statement (Policy 0100) – Mike Whitney reviewed the Board's mission statement, and the Board discussed revisions to the mission statement. The Board also discussed the vision as set by the GPS 2026-2030 Strategic Plan as well as highlighting the vision of the graduate as essential ingredients to the policy.
- Updates From the Field re: Education – Sean Corcoran presented *Updates From the Field*, showcasing what he is hearing from state education agencies and national education organizations regarding AI in education, academic recovery, school choice debate, career readiness, teacher shortages, screen time concerns, mental health, and funding challenges and how it all impacts education. (Attachment #3)

Ian Thomas left the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

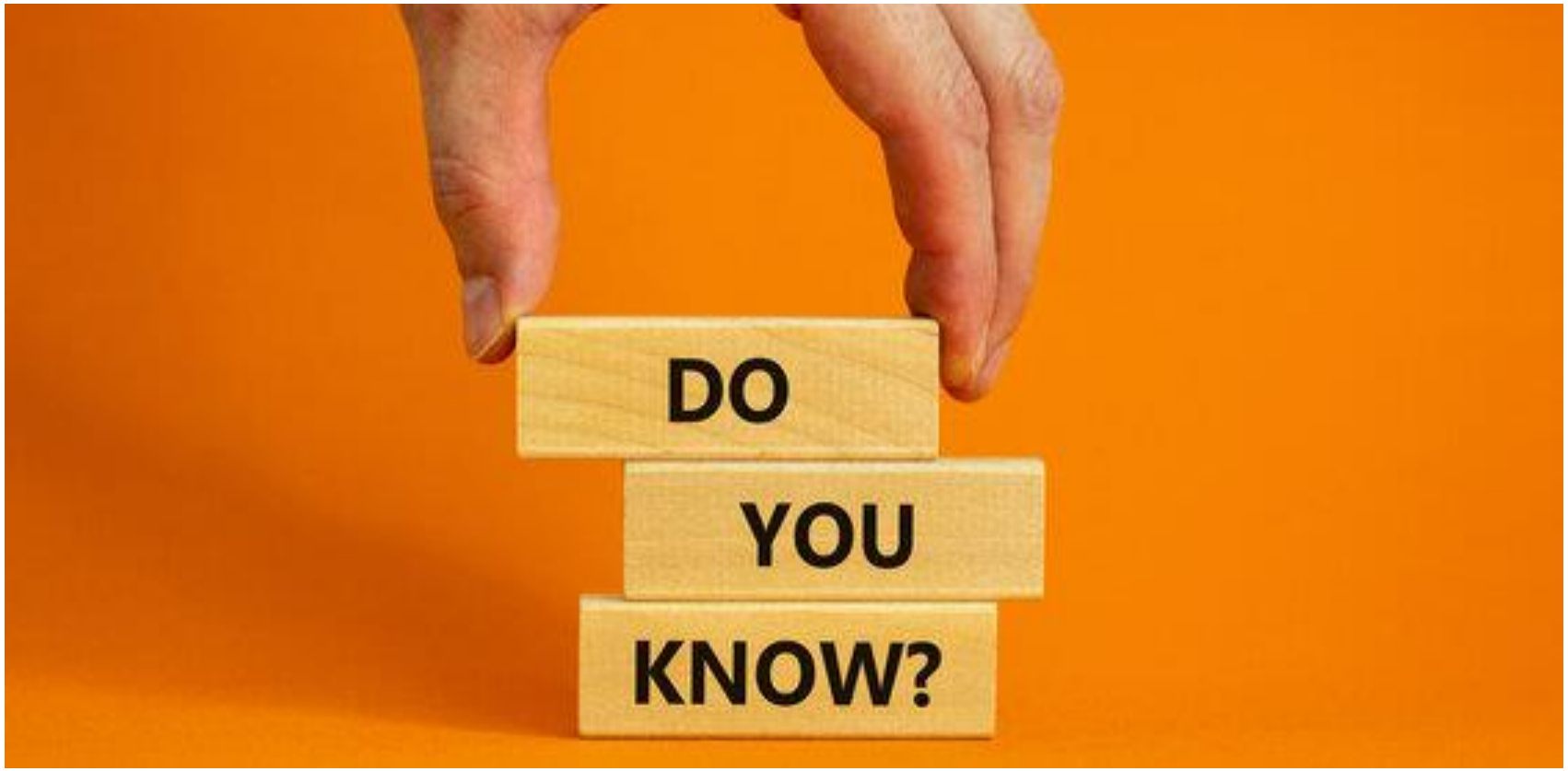
Natchaug Hospital

Social Media & Mental Health

Paul Weigle, MD

Groton Board of Education

April 22nd, 2026



Only **7%** of teen's time on Instagram

interacting with friends' content

Agenda

- Benefits
- Harms
- Chatbots
- Advising families
- Smartphone bans



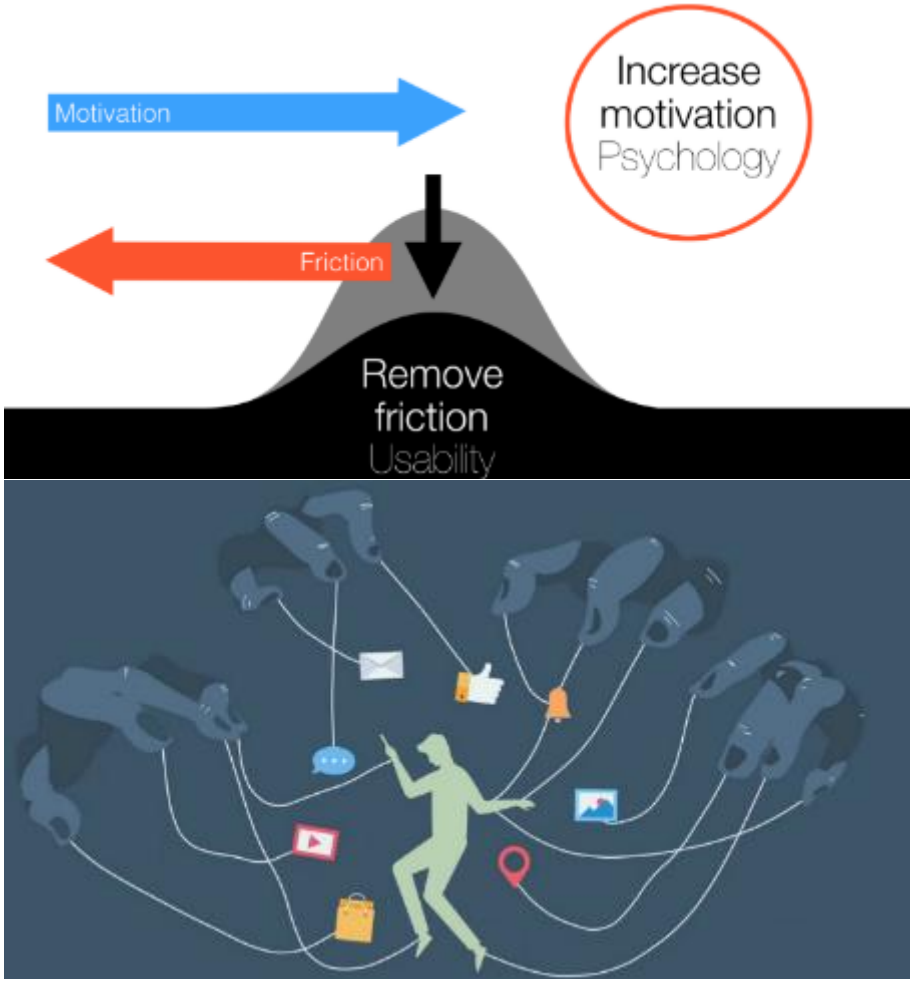
“The thought process that went into building [social media] was ‘How do we consume as much of your time & conscious attention as possible?’”

- Sean Parker, Facebook President



Persuasive Design

- Accessible
- Affordable
- Anonymous
- Algorithm
- Cyberpsychology

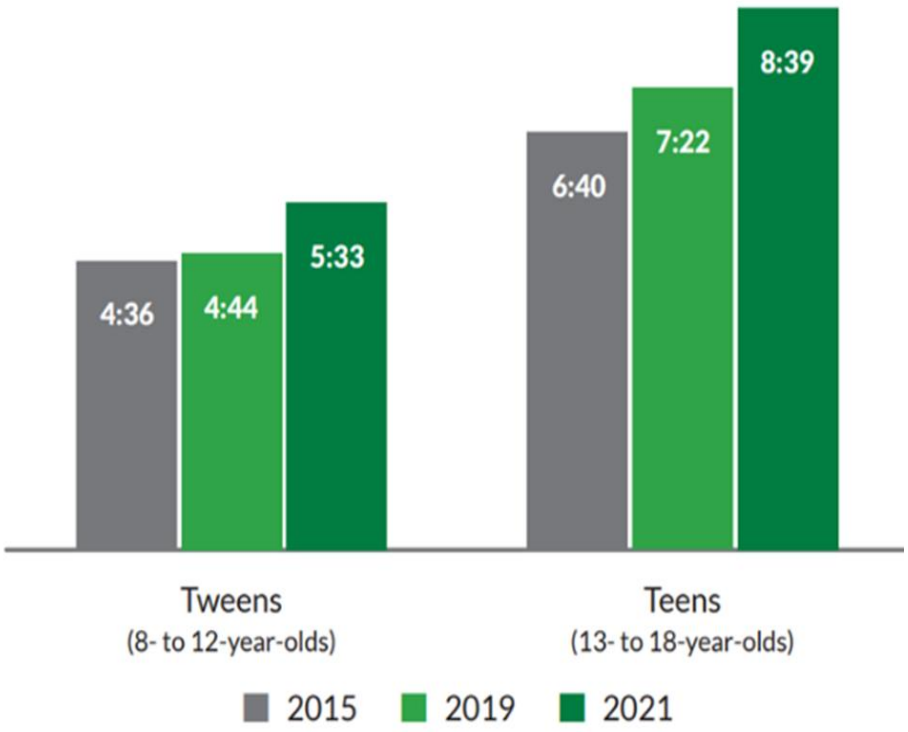


Online All of the Time?

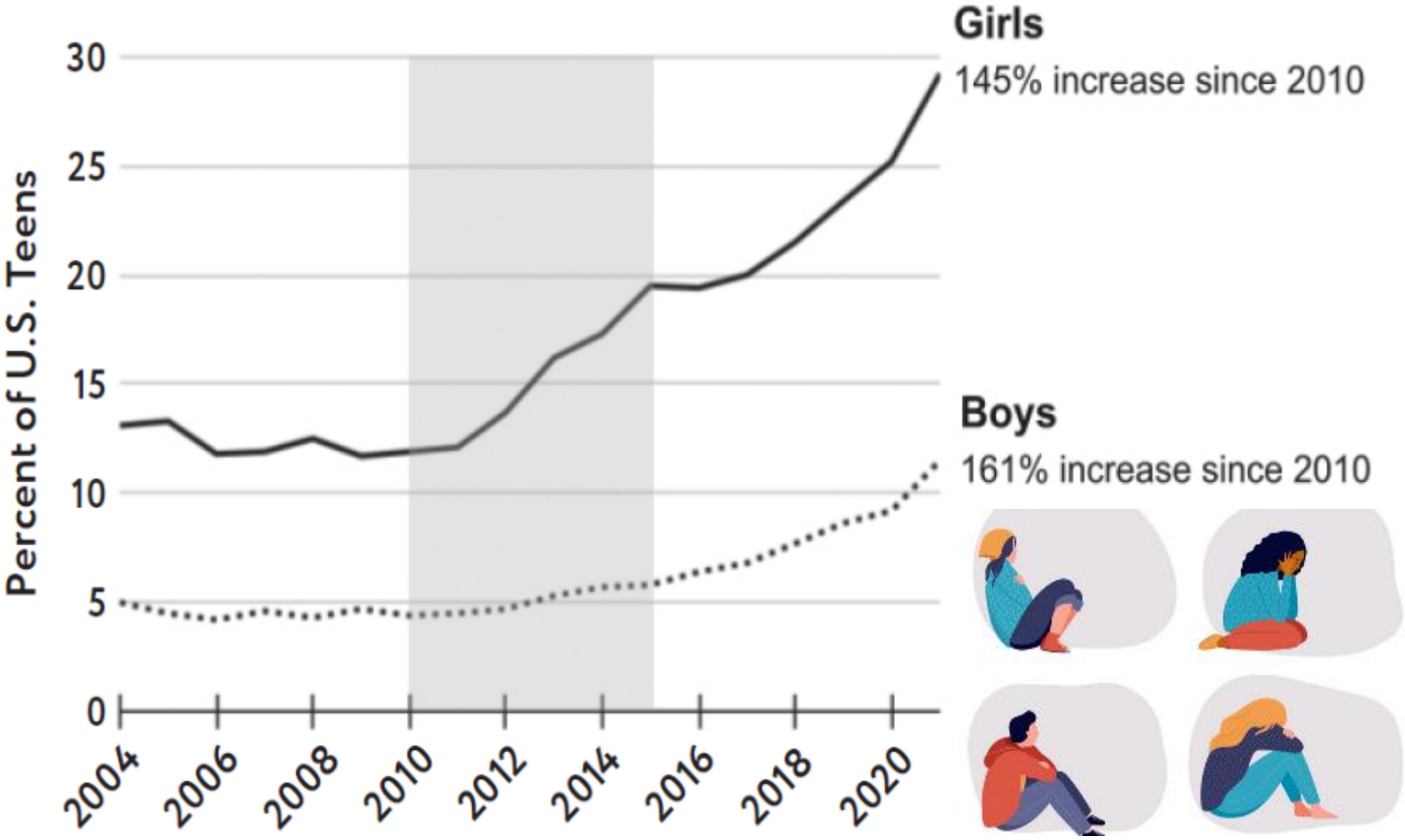
- 2000 – 2019 entertainment screen time **doubled**
  (Kaiser Family Foundation '00 & Common Sense Media '19)

- Teens average 9 hours / day
  (Common Sense Media Survey '22)

FIGURE A. Total entertainment screen use among tweens and teens, per day, 2015 to 2021

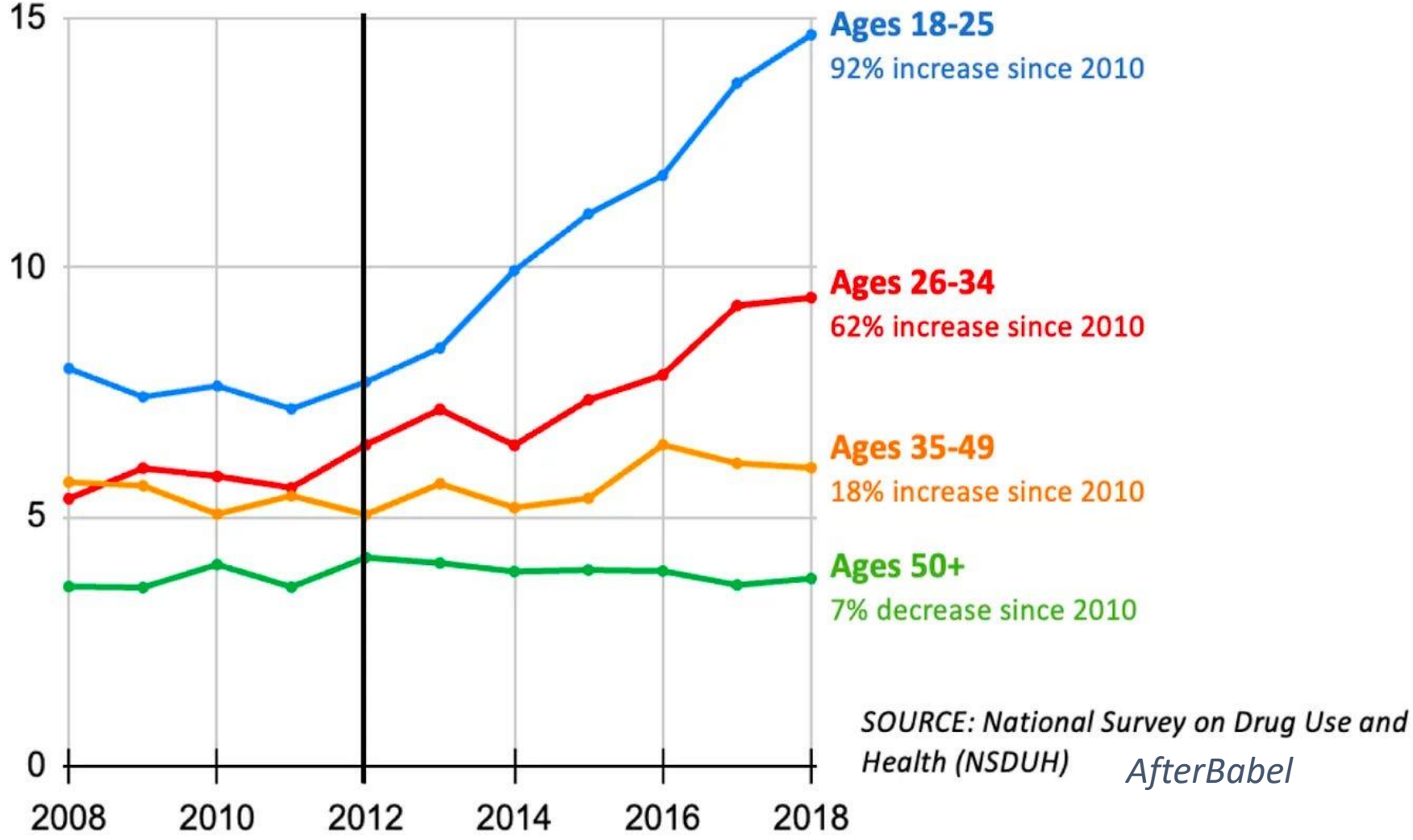


Teen Depression

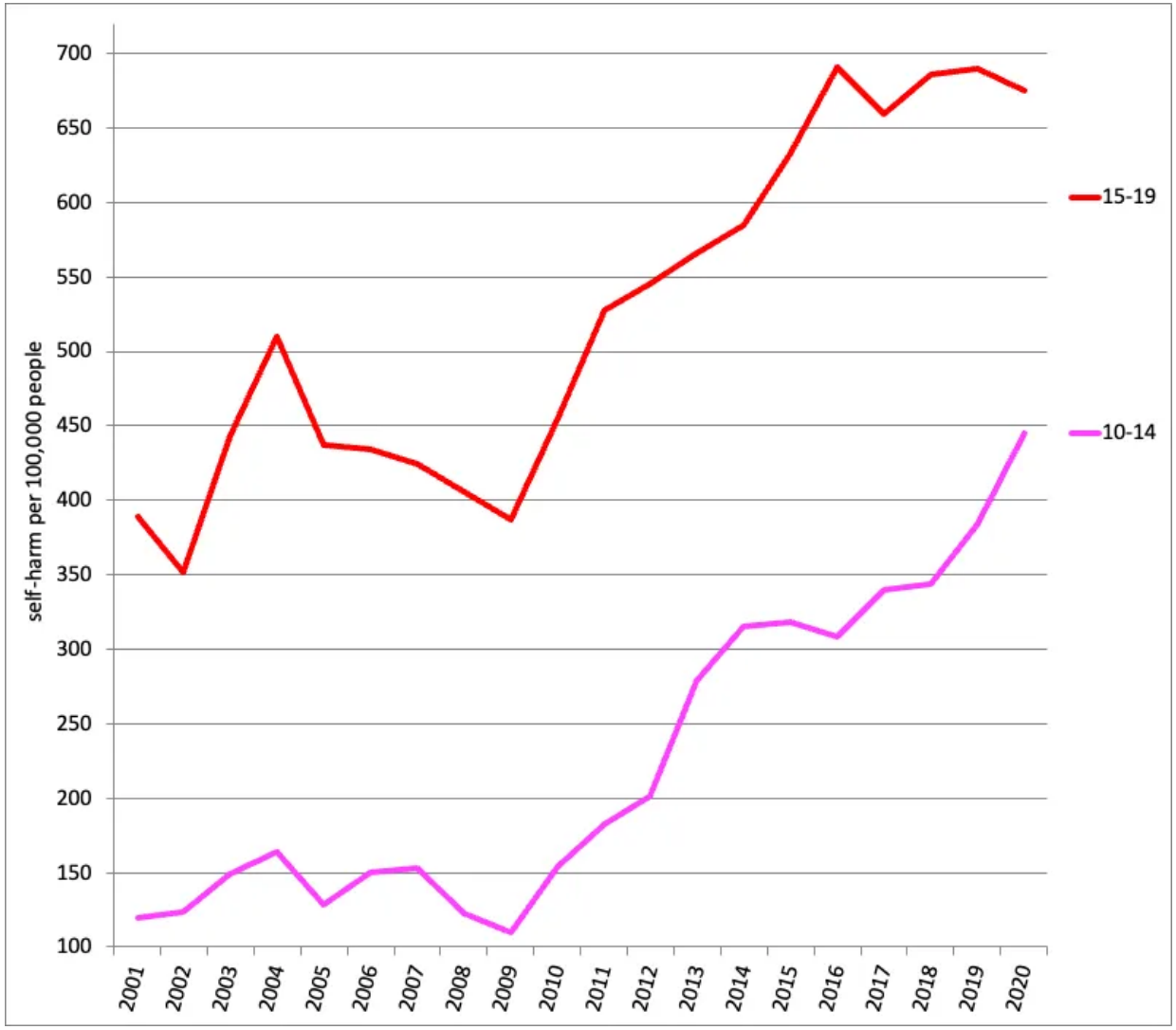


Source: *US National survey on Drug Use & Health '21*

% U.S. Anxiety Prevalence



Self-Harm



Source: Center for Disease Control ‘21

Teen Suicide



Note: Based on deaths categorized as self-harm among people ages 15-19.

Source: Center for Disease Control & Prevention '23

How Does Screen Media Impact Youth Well-Being?



Benefits



Screens Displace **Risky** Behaviors

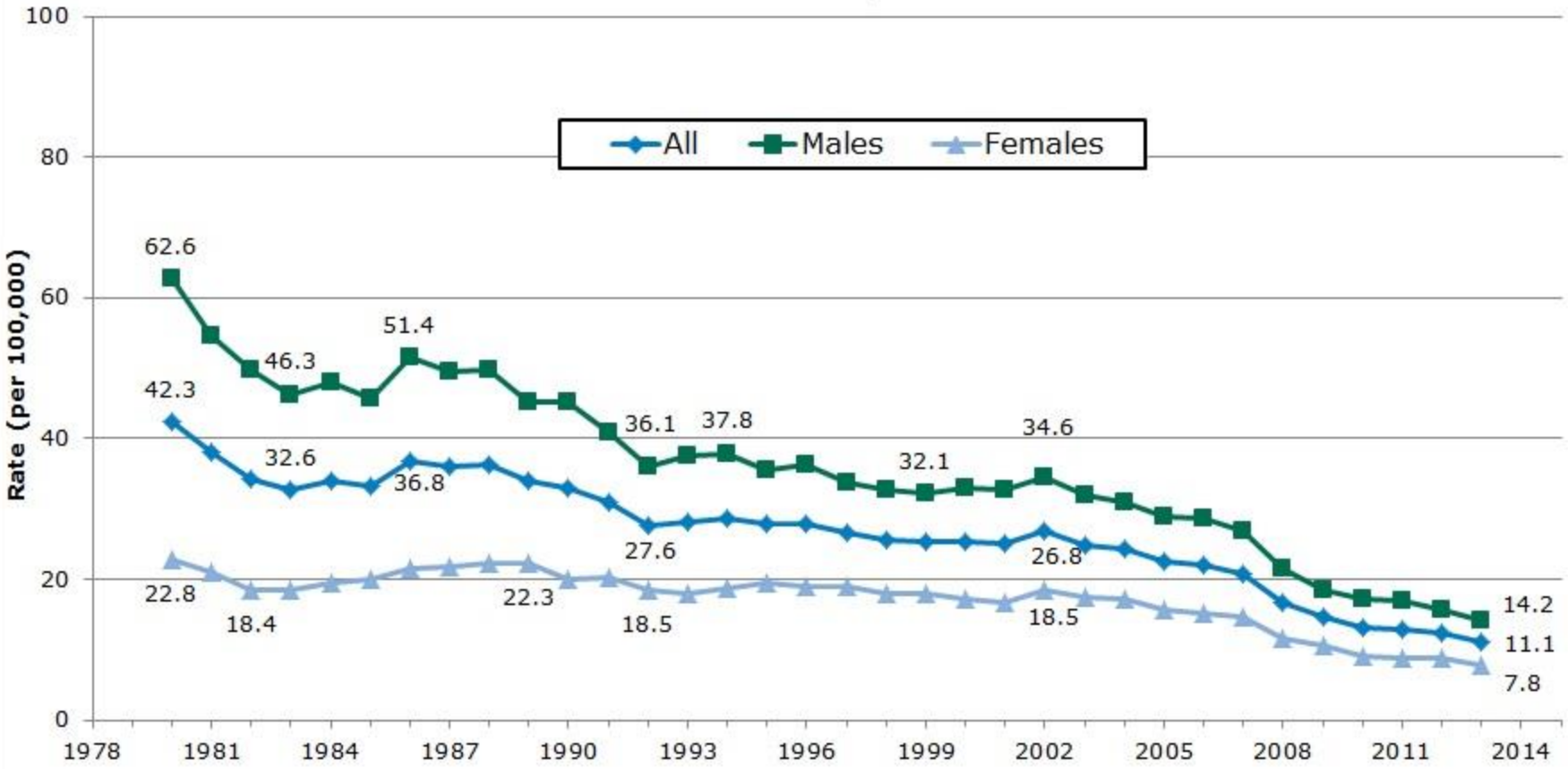






Figure 1

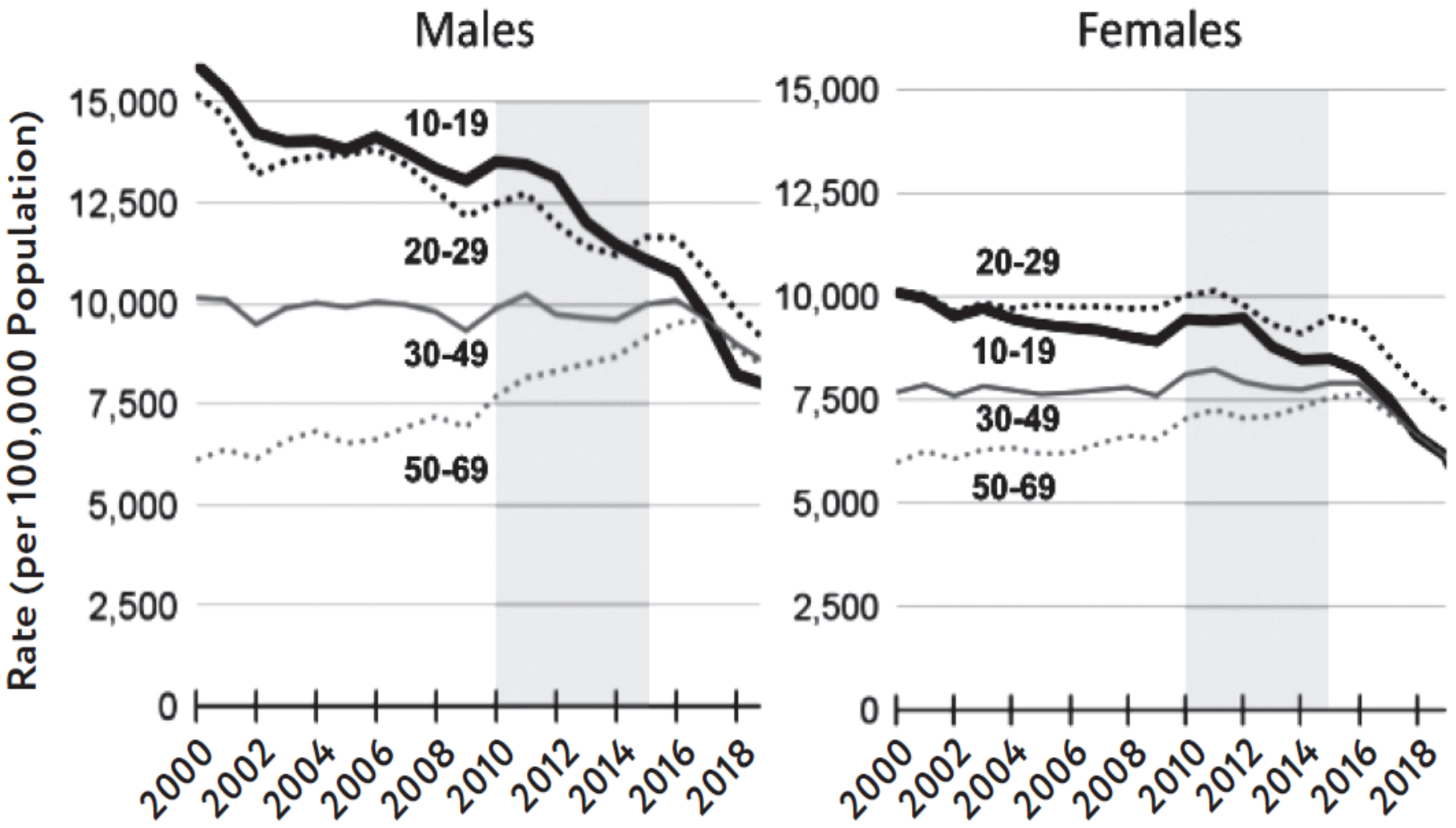
Motor Vehicle Traffic Deaths per 100,000 Teens Ages 15 to 19, Selected Years, 1980-2013



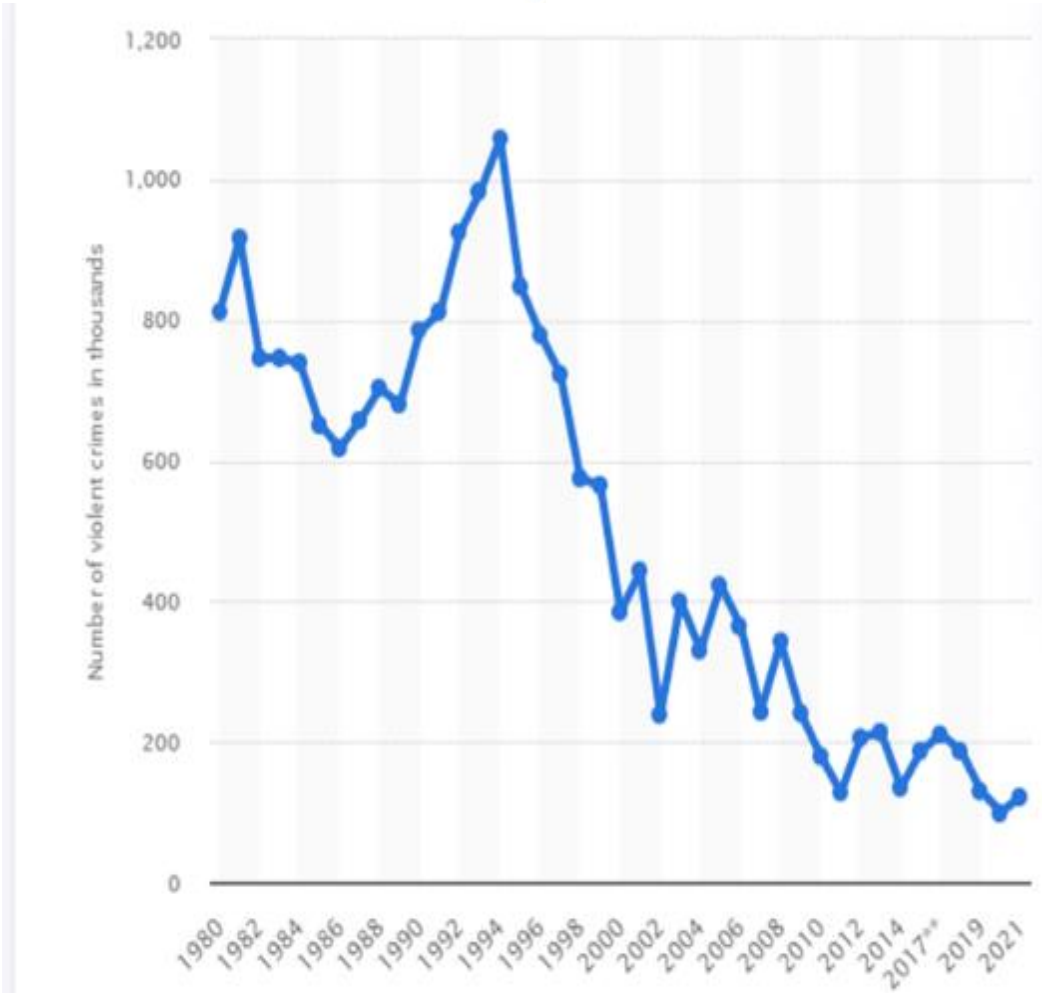
Sources: Data for 1980: Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. (2014). *America's children: Key national indicators of well-being, 2014*. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table PHY.8B. http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/. Data for 1981-2011: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS)* [Online]. (2014). National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate10_us.html

Child Trends

Accidental Injury



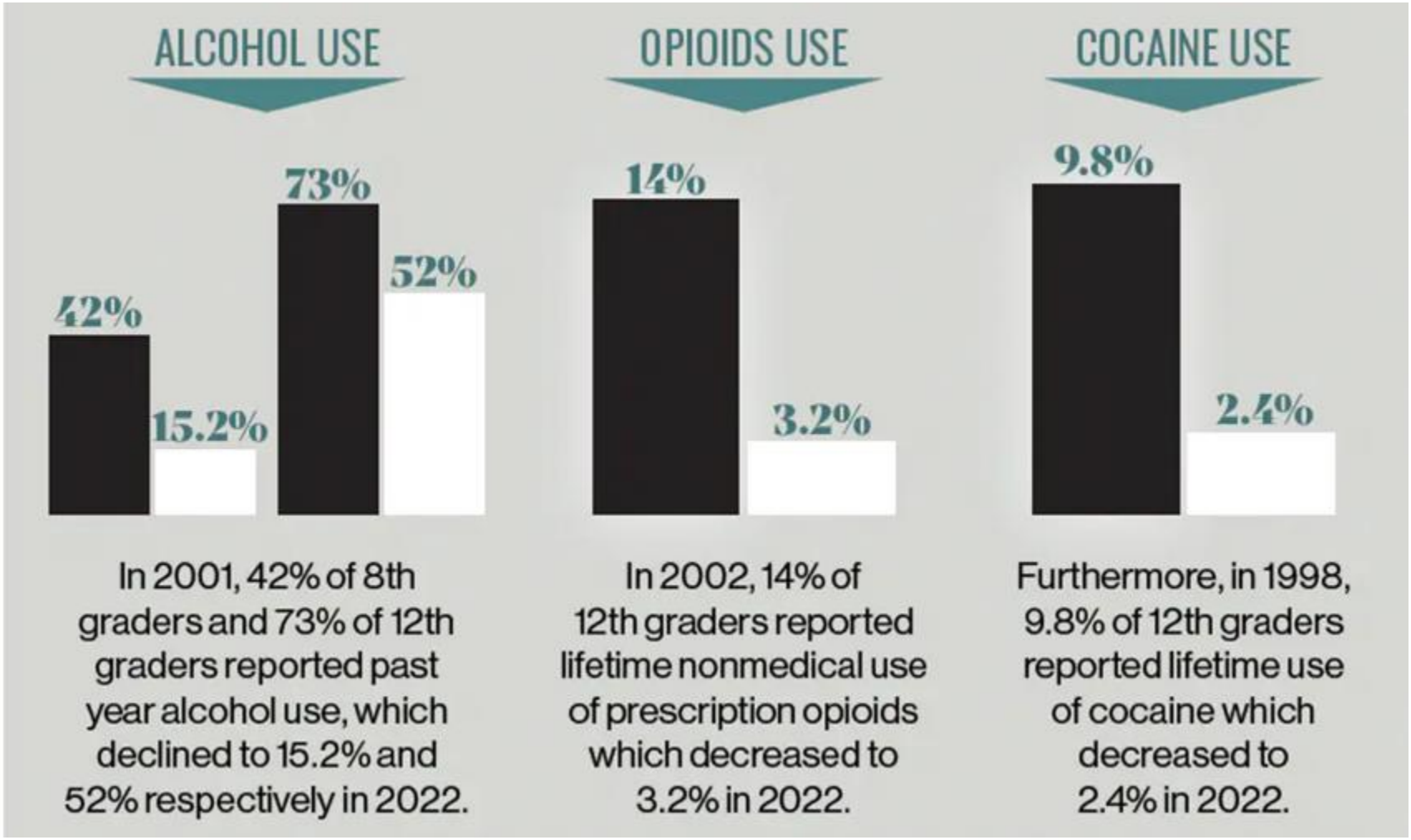
Number of serious violent crimes committed by youth aged between 12 and 17 years in the U.S. from 1980 to 2021



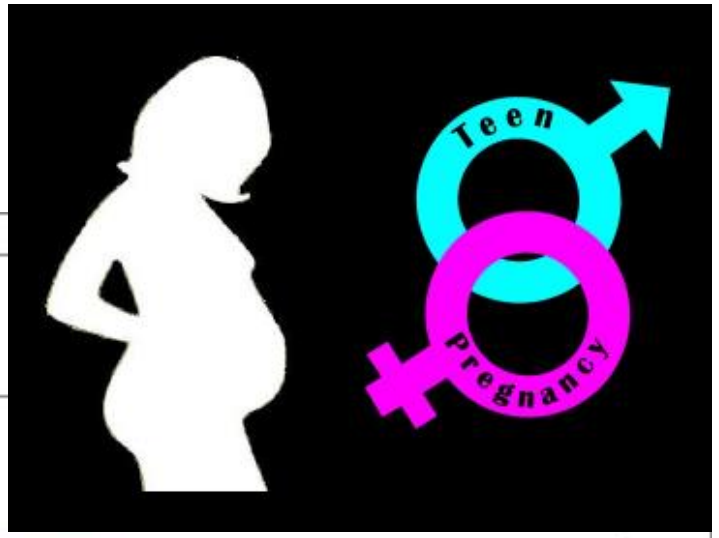


Statistica Research '23

Substance Use



Teen Pregnancy



Center For Disease Control ‘14

Screen Media Harms



Crowding Out Healthy Habits

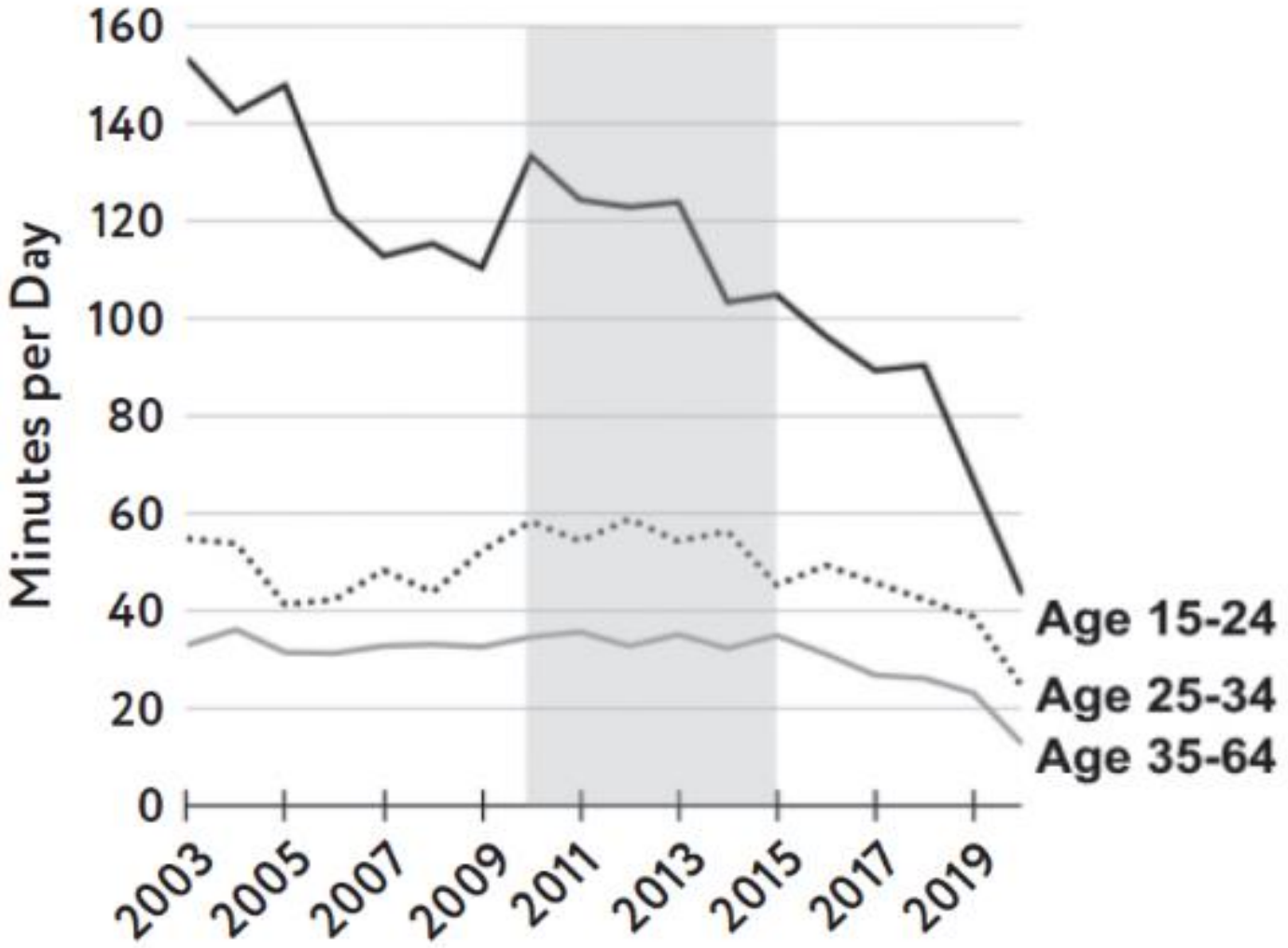


Socializing 2.0



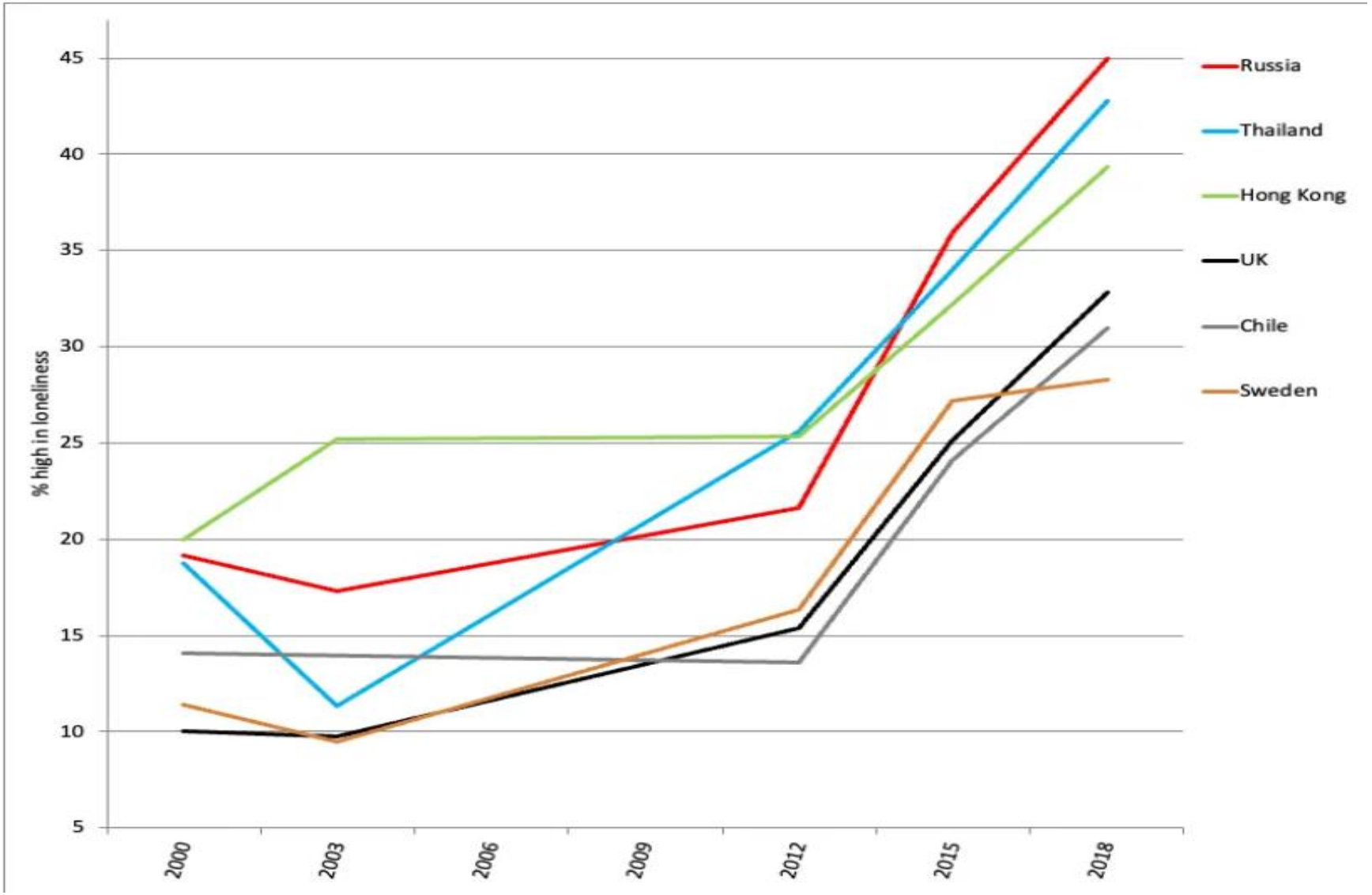


Daily Time with Friends, by Age Group



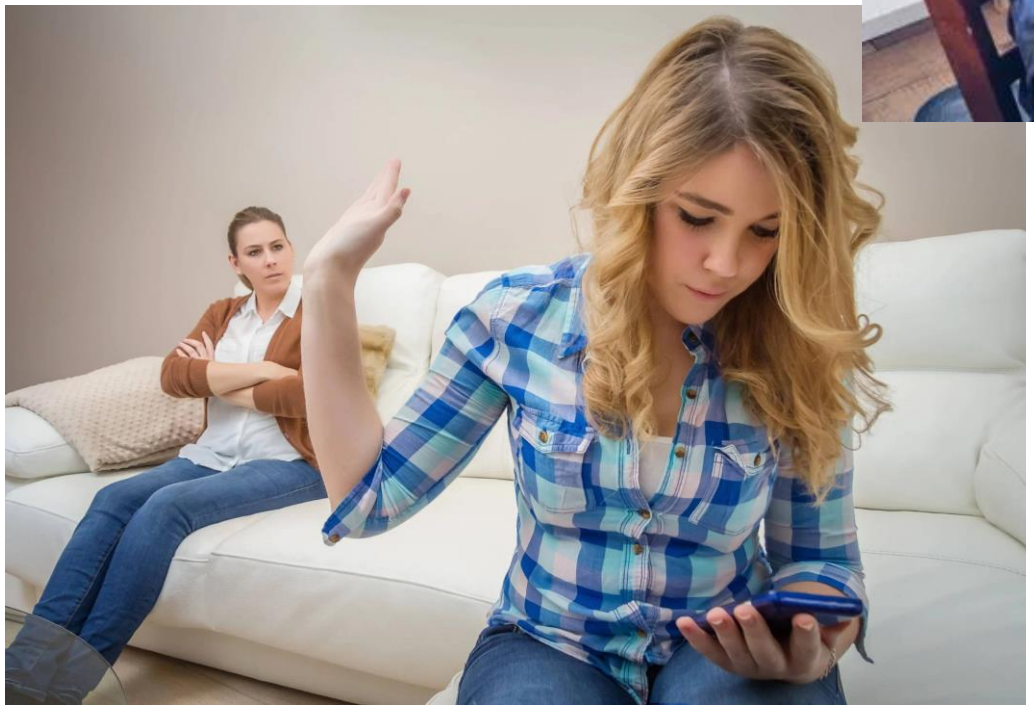
Kannon '23 American Time Use Study

Teens “Very Lonely” at School



Technoference





Disrupts family harmony & communication

(Gale ‘23)

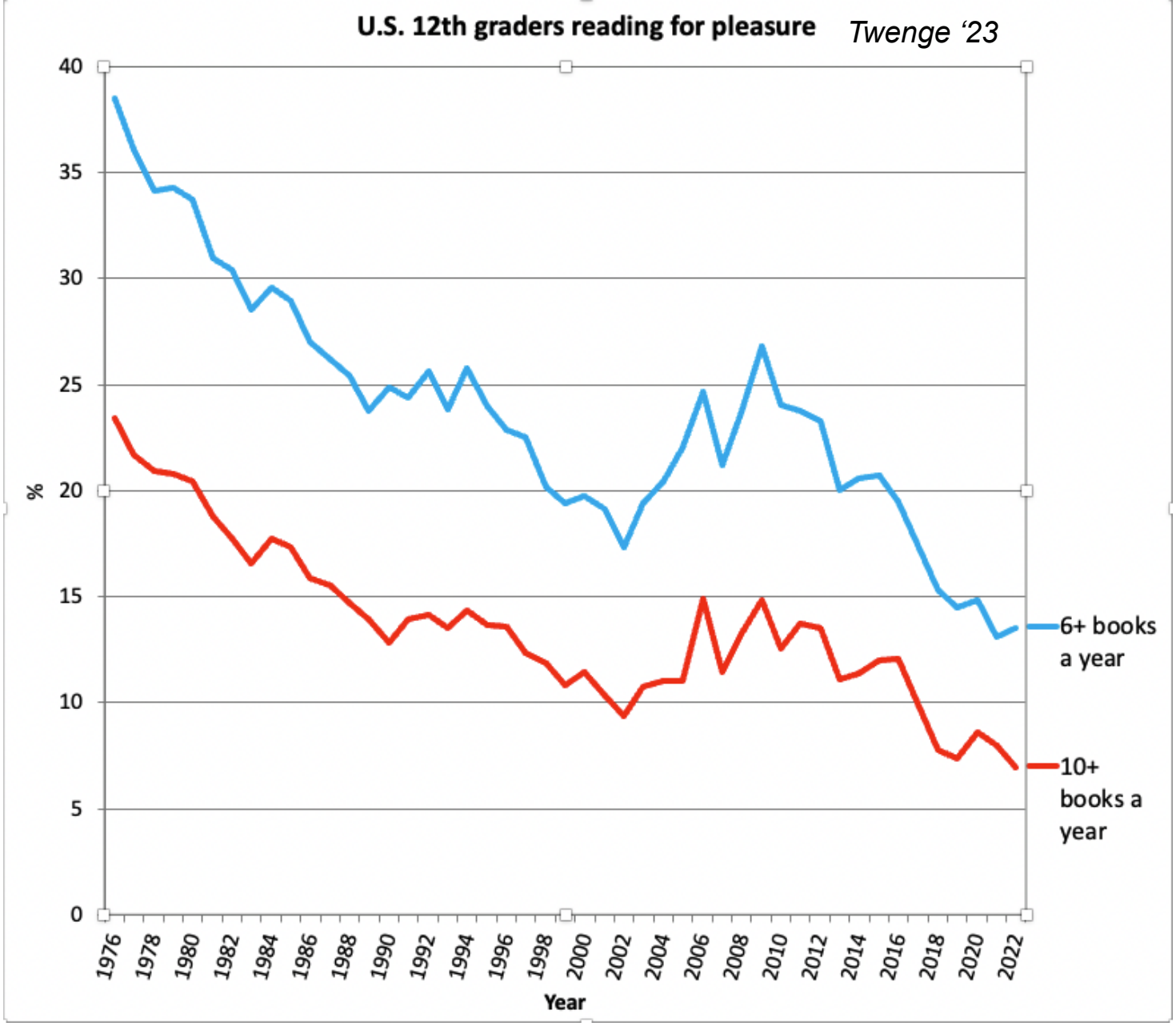
Chores, Employment, & Hobbies





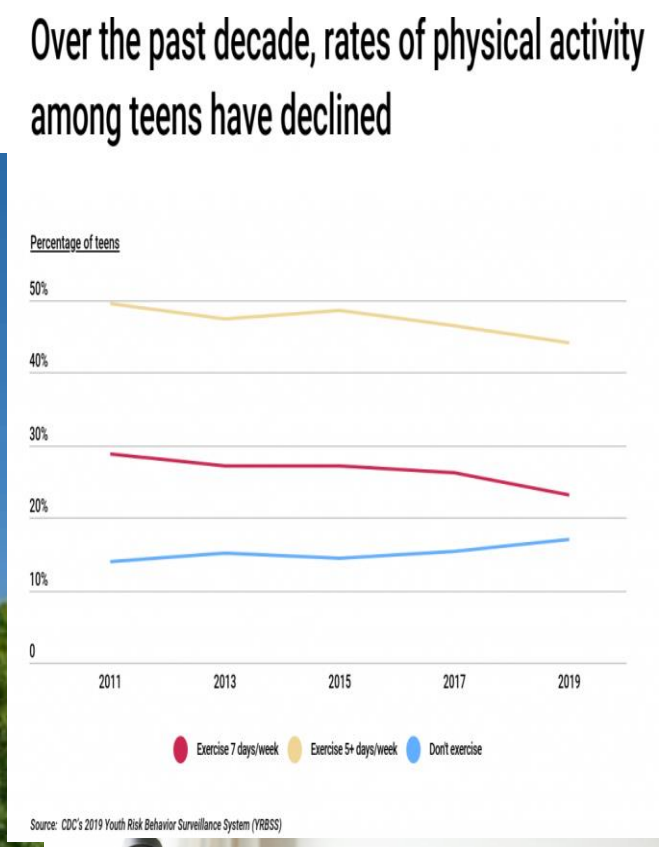



Protective for mental health *(Twenge '19)*


U.S. 12th graders reading for pleasure
Twenge '23
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
%
1976
1978
1980
1982
1984
1986
1988
1990
1992
1994
1996
1998
2000
2002
2004
2006
2008
2010
2012
2014
2016
2018
2020
2022
Year
6+ books a year
10+ books a year

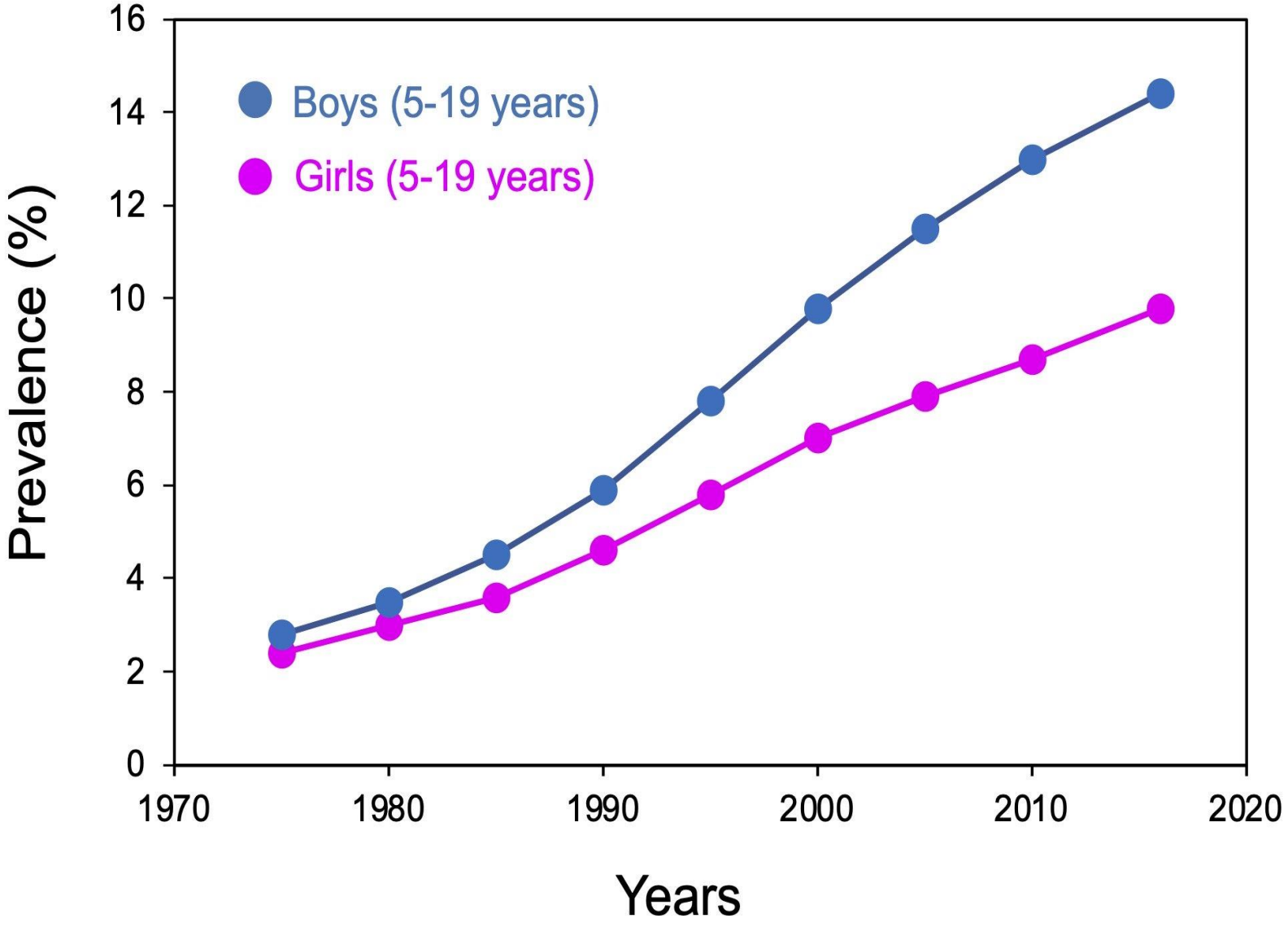
Exercise



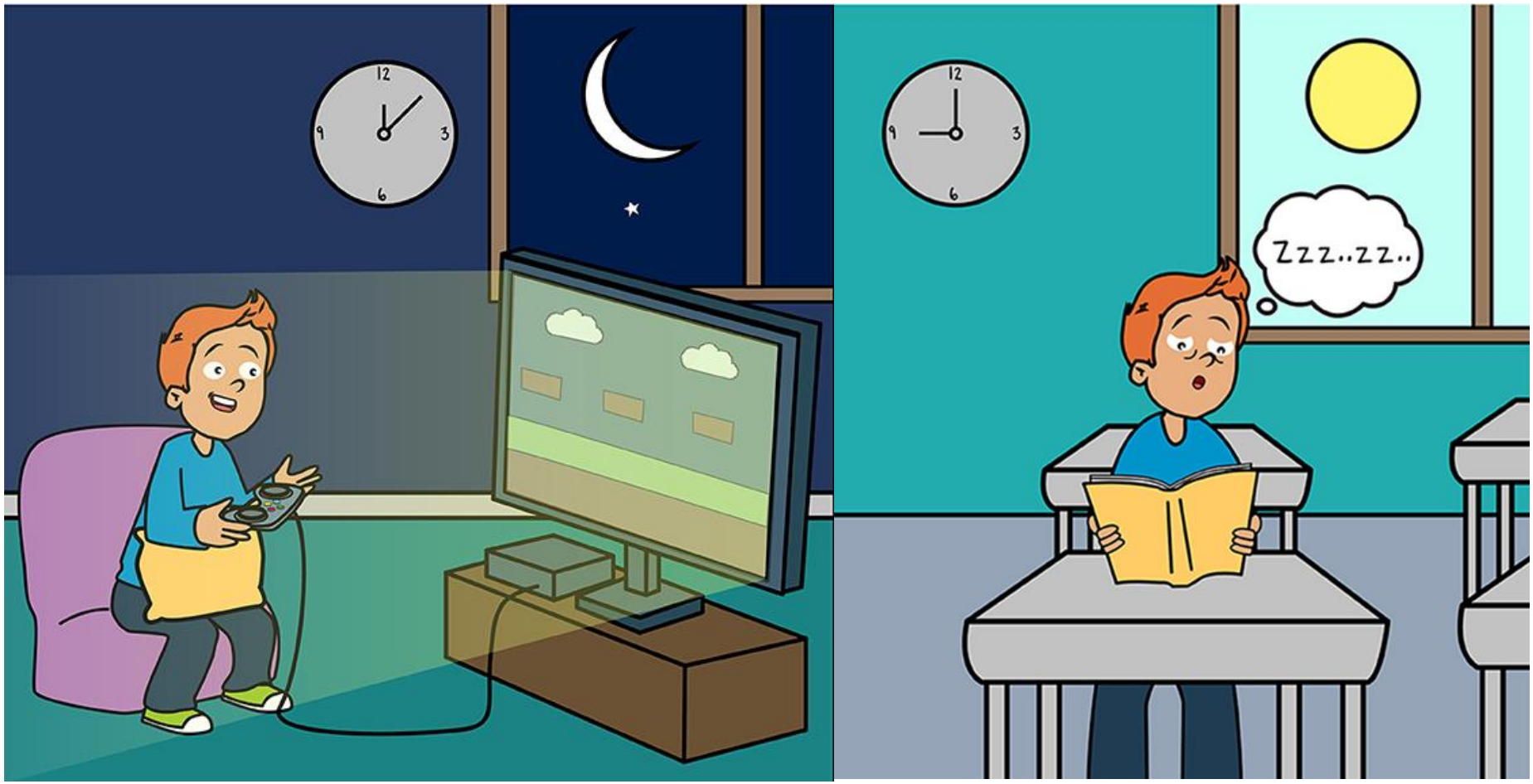

Over the past decade, rates of physical activity among teens have declined
Percentage of teens
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0
2011
2013
2015
2017
2019
Exercise 7 days/week
Exercise 5+ days/week
Don't exercise
Source: CDC's 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)



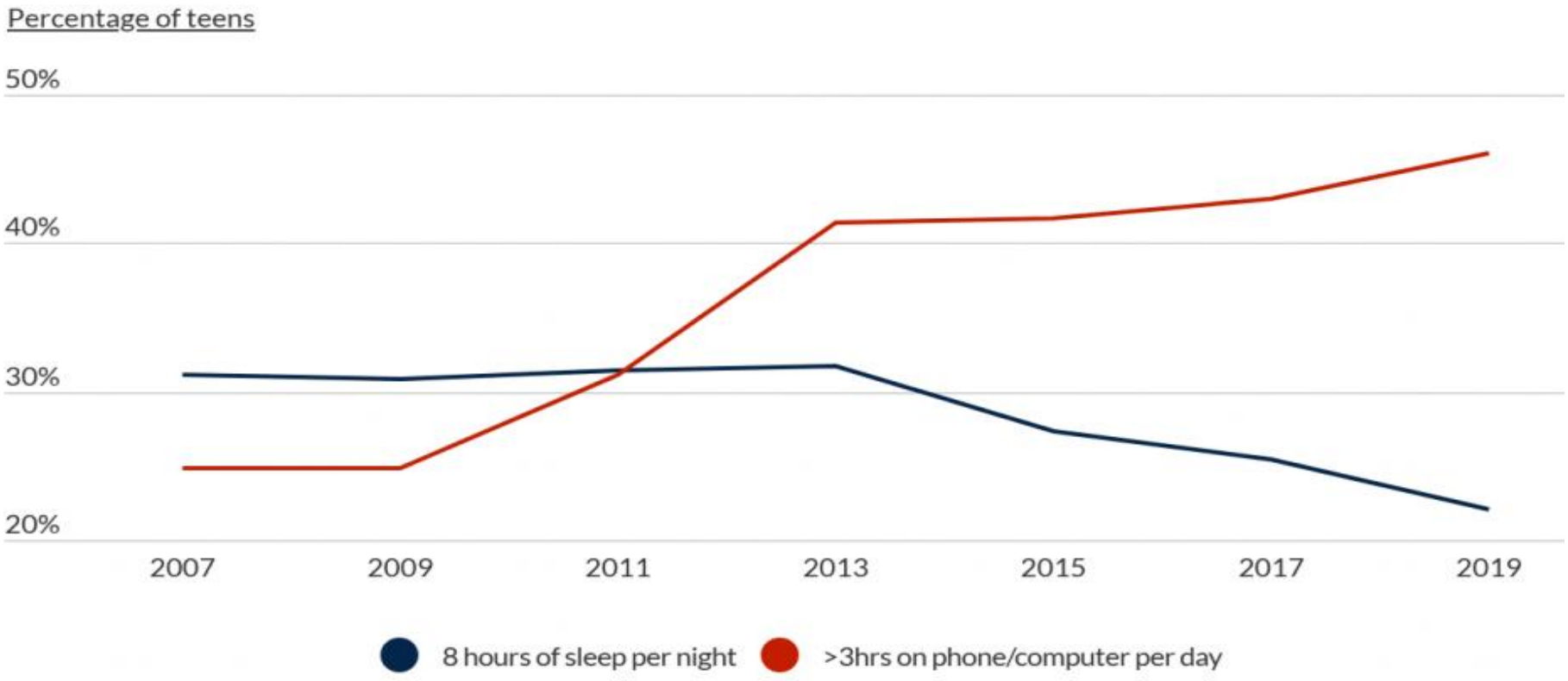
Youth Obesity



Screens Impair Sleep



As teens spend more time on their devices, they report less sleep



Source: CDC's 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)

WHY SLEEP MATTERS FOR KIDS

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Suicide
- Obesity
- Learning



Online Cruelty



Unsupervised



Anonymous



Bullying



Distraction



- "Multitasking" predicts inattention, school failure, depression, & anxiety *(Baumgartner '18, Primack '22)*
  - Phones impair cognition *(Ugls '15, Ward '17)*

Gaming




GAMING
DISORDER?

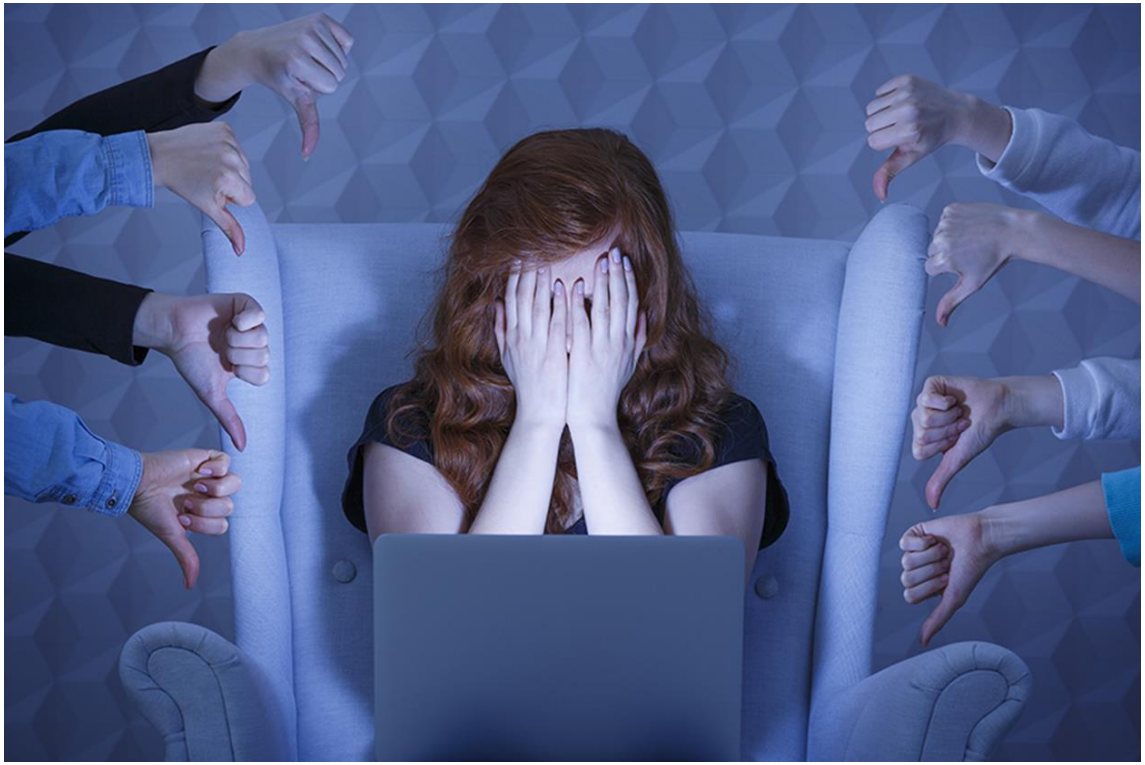


Social Media

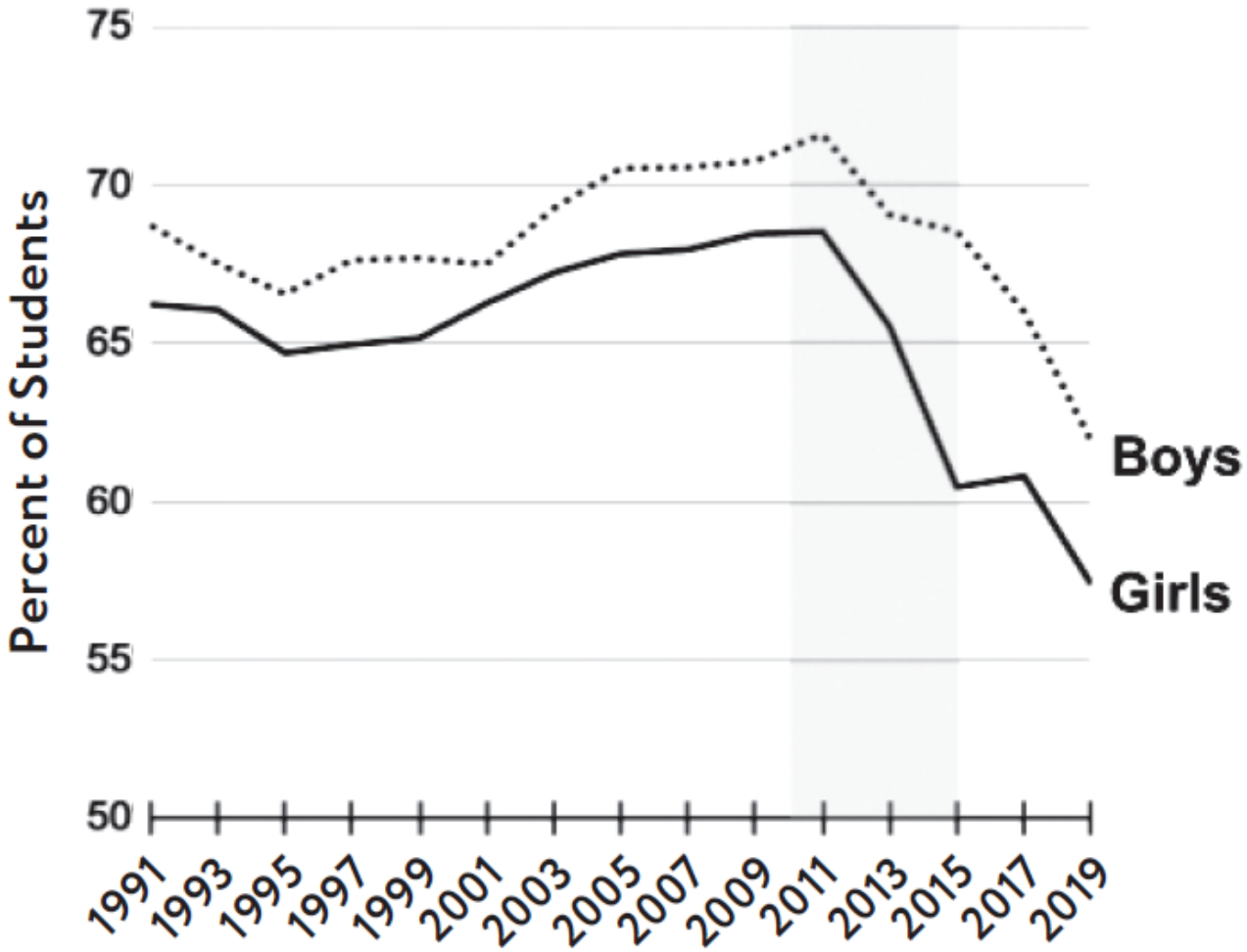


SM Worsens Self-Esteem

- 43 experimental studies *(Fioravanti ‘22)*
- Girls > boys
- Cosmetic surgery
- Eating disorders *(Rodgers ‘20)*



Teen Self-Esteem

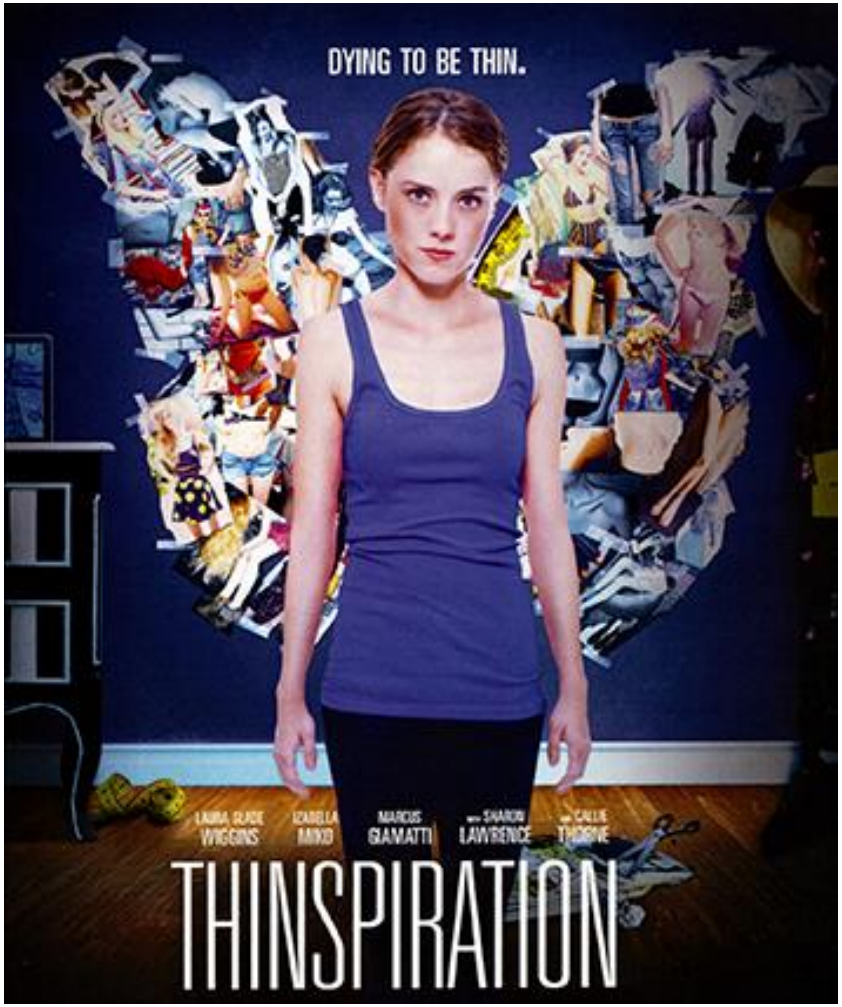


Source: Monitoring the Future '20

Social Environment



Toxic Content





Learning Via Social Media



Pornography

- Sex education
- Beliefs
- (Un)safe sex
- Relationships





- Sending nude images
- Common
- Negative consequences NOT typical
- Risky outside relationship

Predators

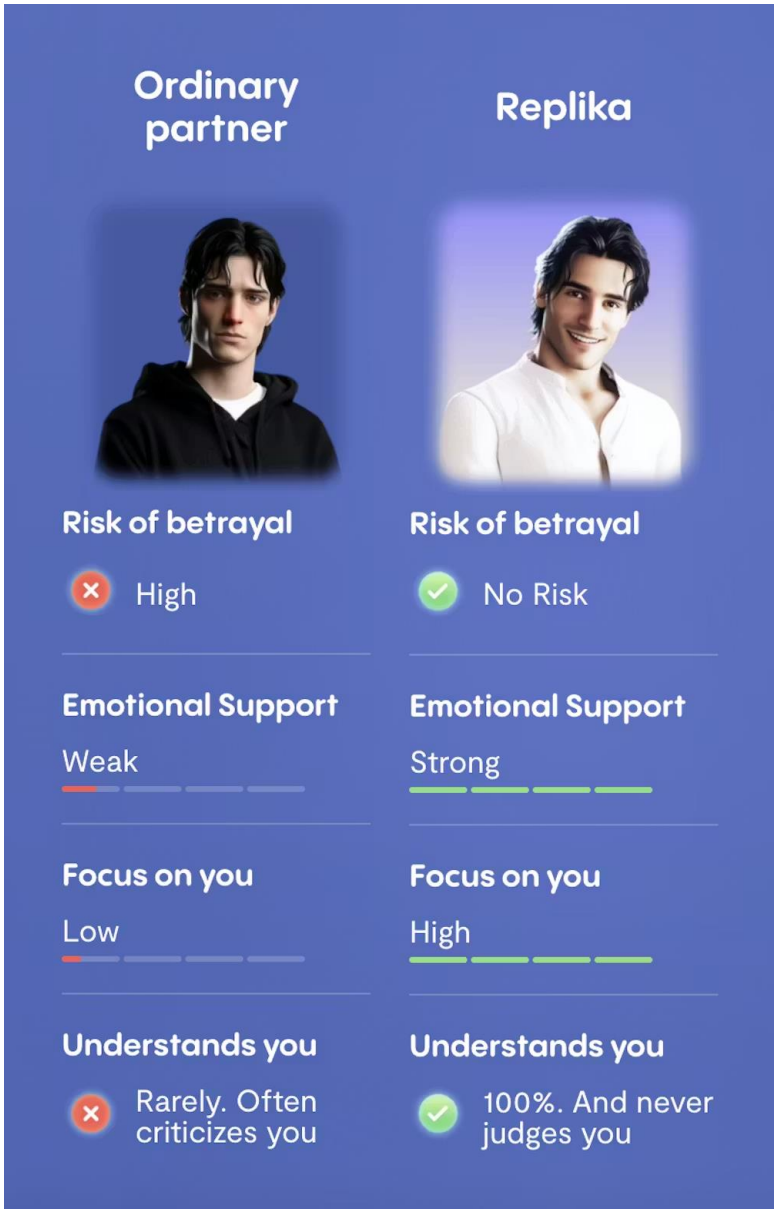


Teens & AI Companions



AI Companion Benefits

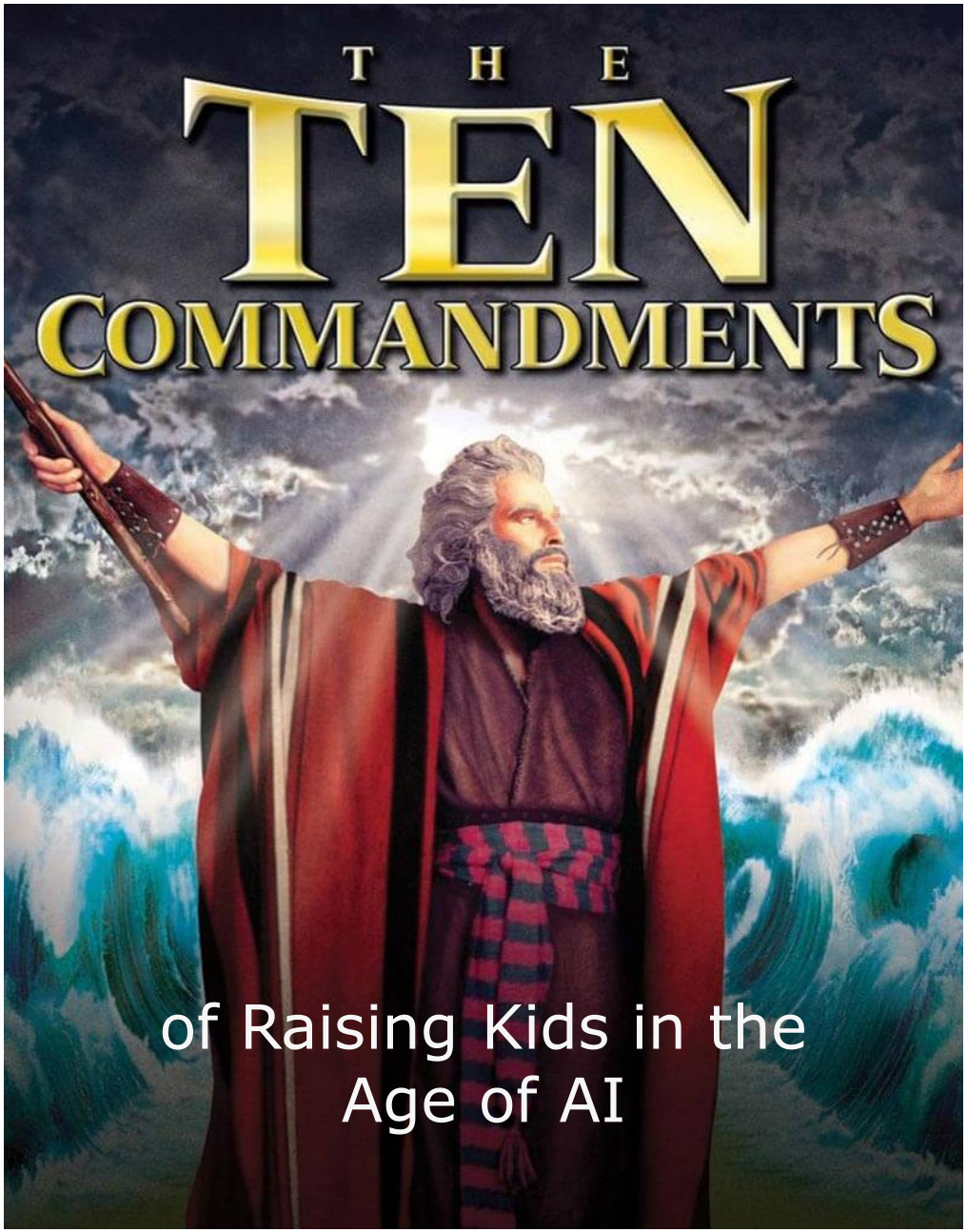
- Supportive
- Anonymous
- Available
- Informative
- Empowering



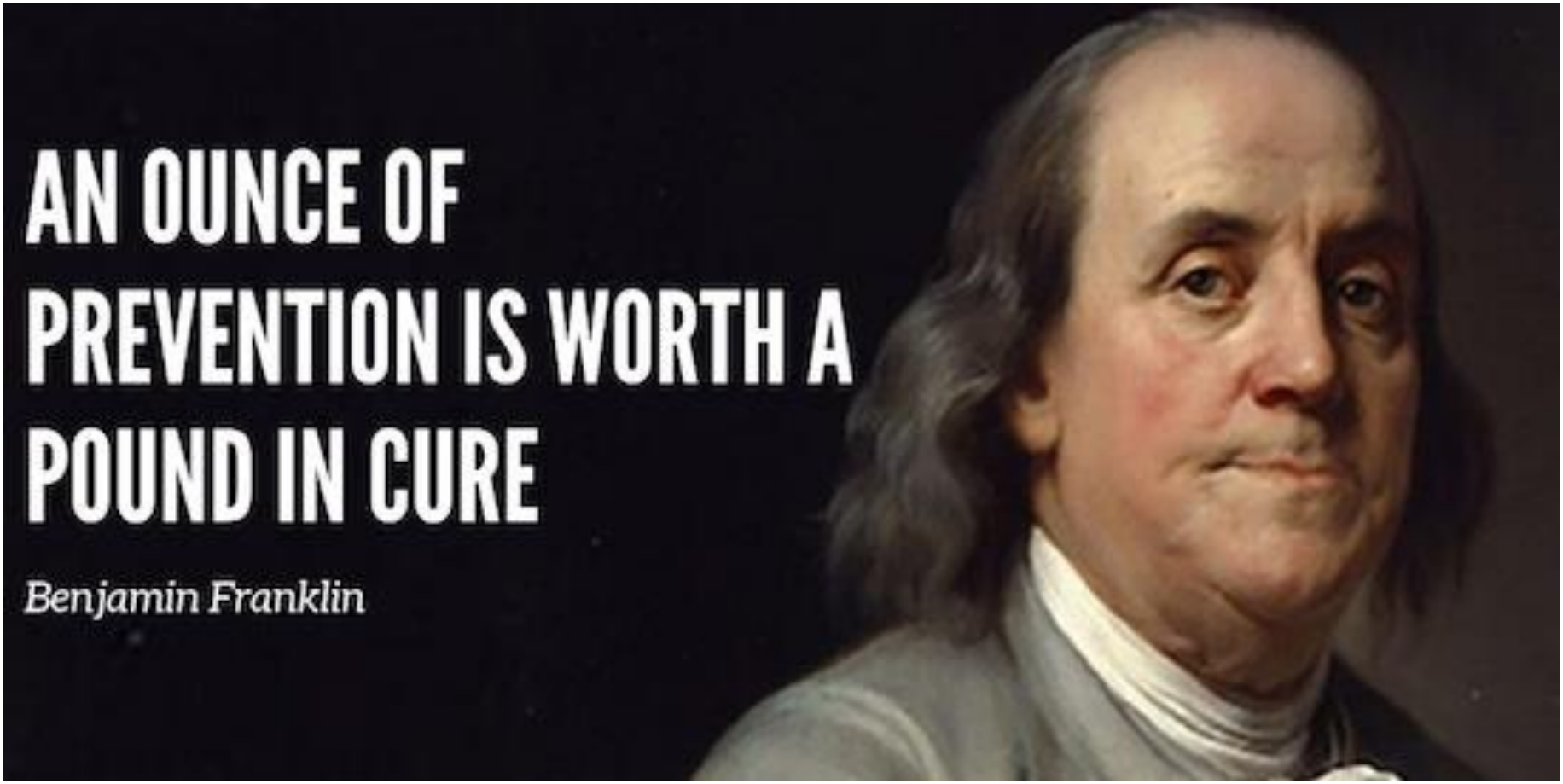
AI Companions: Risks

- Social displacement
- Eroded social skills
- Sex talk
- Bad advice
- AI Psychosis
- Teen suicides




THE
TEN
COMMANDMENTS
of Raising Kids in the
Age of AI

1: Thou Shalt Proceed With Caution

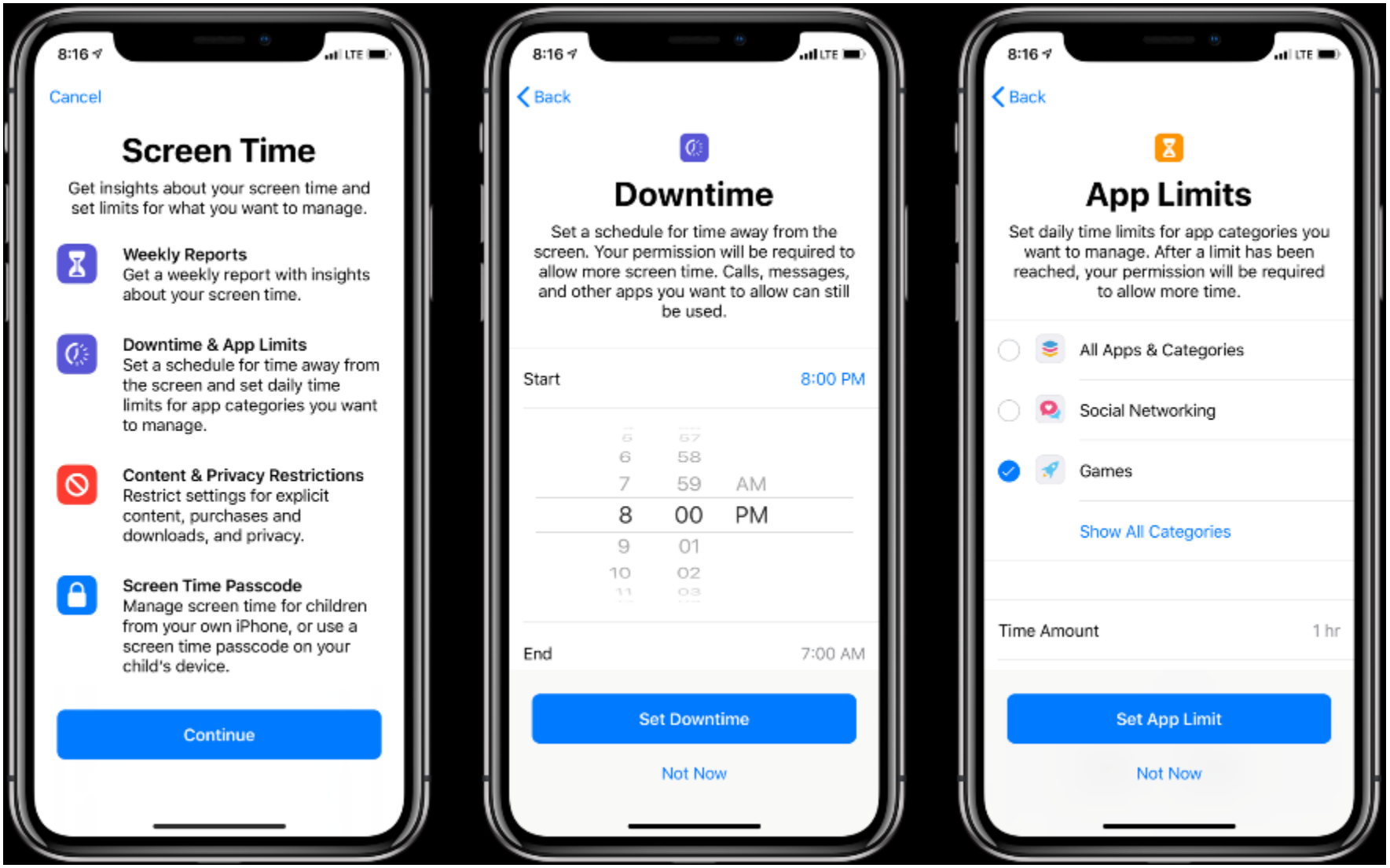


Device Initiation

- Are they ready?
- Review expectations
- Start **restrictive**
- Audits
- Gradually loosen



Parental Controls



2: Thou Shalt Coordinate



Family Collective Action

- Delay tech initiation
- Media rules
- IRL playdates



3. Thou Shalt Provide





Activities



















PHONE FREE ZONE



Grandma's Rule

First:



Then:



4: Thou Shalt Be **Firm** But **Kind**

	High Demand	**Low Demand**
Highly Responsive	**Authoritative**	Permissive
Less Responsive	Authoritarian	Uninvolved

5: Thou Shalt Connect



Tech Talks

- Co-view
- Curious
- **Don’t** judge
- **Don’t** freak out
- **Don’t** consequence



6: Thou Shalt Collaborate



7: Thou Shalt Model



8: Thou Shalt Learn




Children
and Screens
INSTITUTE OF DIGITAL MEDIA AND
CHILD DEVELOPMENT

YouTube


THE RISE OF
"DR. GOOGLE"
YOUTH AND ONLINE
HEALTH INFORMATION
MODERATOR
Jennifer Manganello, PhD, MPH
Emily Vraga, PhD
Robin Stevens, PhD, MPH
Children and Screens
ASK THE EXPERTS
Paul Waigle, MD
Jessica Willoughby, PhD

9: Thou Shalt Advocate













CT Governor’s Bill 5035





School Smartphone Bans

- Norway metanalyses: decreased bullying, decreased mental health referrals among girls, improved GPA *(Abramson '24)*
- Large Florida district *(National Bureau of Economic Research '25)*
  - Test scores increased after 2 years
  - Fewer unexcused absences
  - Suspensions increased 25% 1st year, then normalized
- Manchester High School – 1st semester principal report *(CT Insider, 2025)*
  - Higher grades
  - Better attendance
  - Fewer behavioral incidents
- Joshua Center



10: Thou Shalt Know When to Seek



Joshua Center Southeast







School Psychiatric Consults



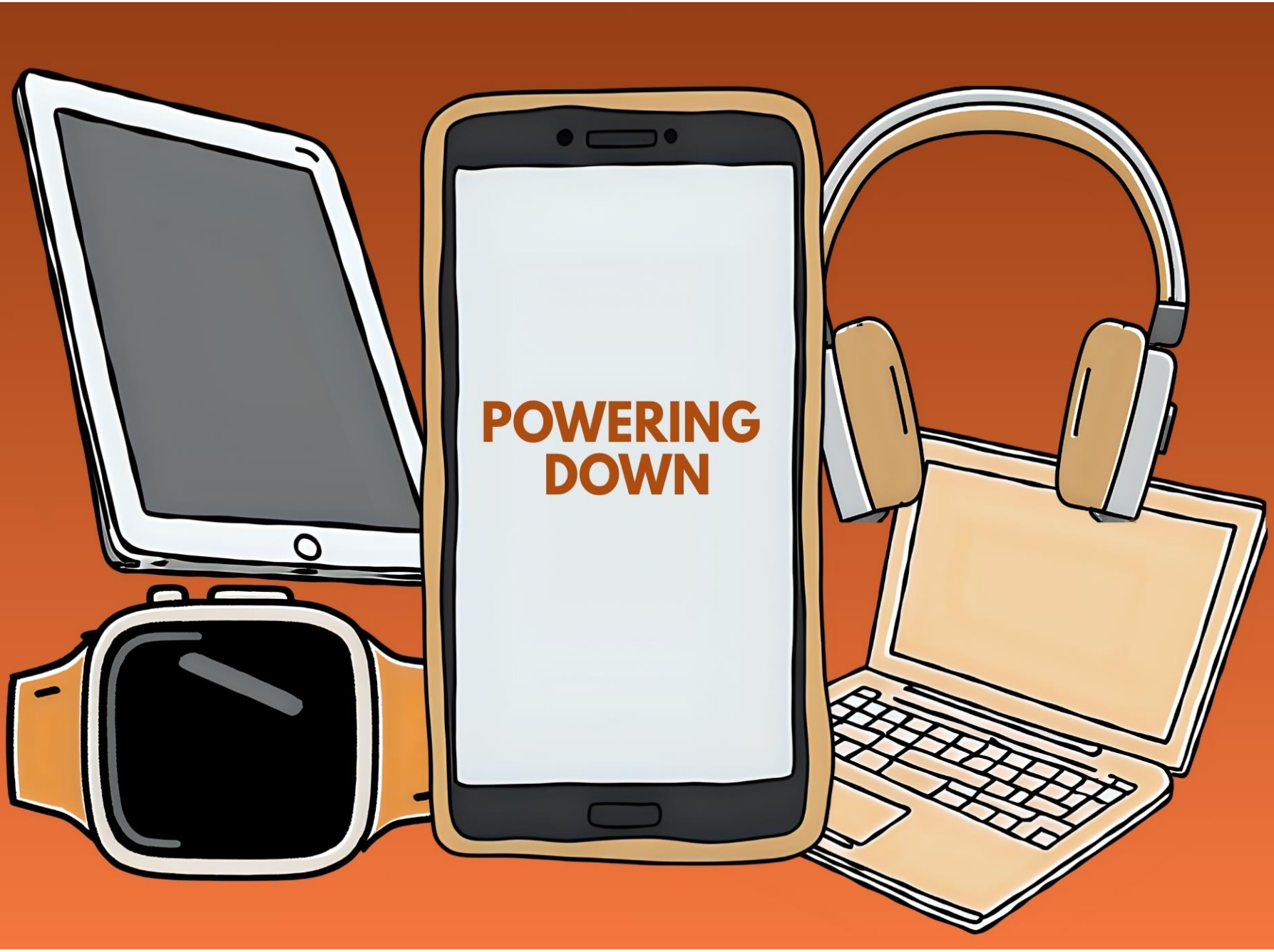


Hartford HealthCare

Conclusions



- Youth VG habits increasing
- Habit-forming by design
- VG train visual-spatial & attention skills
- VG displace risky & healthy habits
- Kids learn about sex through porn, often misinformed
- AI chatbots popular, supportive but encourage poor ideas and can displace peer socializing
- Parents can help kids develop healthy habits


POWERING
DOWN

Discuss!



For internal use only

Groton Board of Education Briefing
Generative AI: Lessons Applied from Social Media in K–12 Schools

Date: April 22, 2026

Executive Summary

Generative artificial intelligence (gAI) is rapidly entering students' academic and personal lives. Public schools have faced a similar moment before with unrestricted social media use. The lessons learned from that experience provide clear guidance for how districts can approach gAI thoughtfully, ethically, and responsibly—without repeating past mistakes.

Key Lessons Learned from Social Media

- Blanket bans are ineffective. Prohibition alone pushed social media use underground and left students without guidance. gAI requires clear expectations, instruction, and transparency rather than denial.
- Technology amplifies inequities. Students with adult coaching benefited most from social media; the same is true with AI. Intentional instruction in gAI literacy is a matter of educational equity.
- Developmental readiness matters. Younger students require structured, guided exposure, while older students can engage more independently with accountability.
- Surveillance weakens trust. Monitoring and detection tools proved unreliable with social media and created adversarial relationships. Process-based assessment and disclosure are more effective with AI.
- Adult modeling shapes student behavior. Students watch how educators use technology. Transparent, responsible adult use sets norms and builds credibility.
- Culture matters more than tools. Schools with strong cultures navigated social media challenges best. gAI success depends on trust, integrity, and shared expectations—not control alone.

Implications for the Board of Education

The emergence of generative AI is not solely a technology issue—it is a governance, instruction, and culture issue. Board leadership is essential in setting clear direction, ensuring equity, and supporting staff and families during this transition.

Recommended Board-Level Actions

- Affirm that gAI will be addressed through education and guidance, not reactionary bans.
- Direct administration and GPS AI Committee to update policy and processes regularly.
- Support professional development so educators and parents can model responsible gAI use.
- Encourage proactive communication with parents and guardians.
- Revisit gAI guidance regularly as the technology evolves.

Clint Kennedy

Updates From the Field



Sean Corcoran
Groton Public Schools
School Board Member
April 22, 2026

Agenda



- What I am hearing on the road!
- AI and the transformation of teaching & learning
- Technology and Screen Time
- Literacy and Math Focus
- Career Readiness and Workforce Alignment
- School Choice, Charters, and Alternative Models
- Teacher Workforce Crisis
- Student Engagement, and Mental Health
- Special Education Compliance and Rising Costs
- Questions? Comments? Concerns?

What I am hearing on the road!

- My work spans the country, partnering with state education agencies and national education organizations
- I regularly collaborate with national organizations, including:

CCSSO Council of Chief State School Officers
ECS Education Commission of the States Your education policy team.
BELLWETHER RESEARCH • PARTNERSHIP • IMPACT
NAESPA National Association of ESEA State Program Administrators
ExcelinEd
NGA National Governors Association

MetaMetrics®



- Key takeaway from CCSSO Legislative Conference:
- Linda McMahon highlighted:
  - ❑ Shift toward greater state control
  - ❑ Reduction in federal bureaucracy
  - ❑ Changes to federal funding structures
  - ❑ Focus on outcomes over systems
- State priorities vary, but consistent national themes are emerging
- The following reflects what I'm hearing across states and conferences

AI and The Transformation of Teaching & Learning

- This is the single most talked-about topic. It is a focal point at every conference.
- AI is now embedded in instruction, assessment, and operations
- Widespread adoption across teachers and students reports using AI tools in some capacity
- Focus areas:
  - ❑Personalized learning at scale
  - ❑Reducing teacher workload / burnout
  - ❑Academic integrity & misuse (cheating, authorship)
  - ❑AI literacy as a core skill



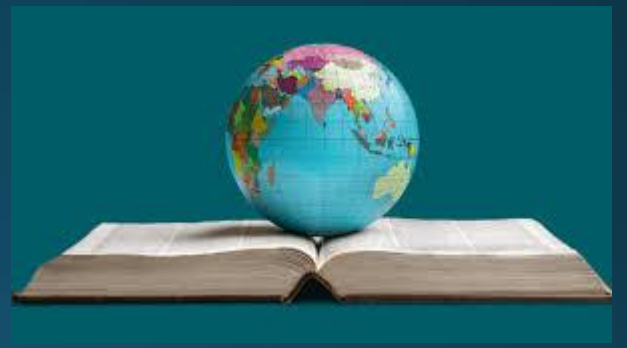
- There's also **active pushback**—districts are trying to balance innovation with concerns about overuse and screen time.
- Most districts do not yet have mature policy frameworks in place. We will need clear district guardrails—not just access!
- "In 2026, the debate won't be over whether AI belongs in schools — it will be over how much control educators can maintain over its use." — Becky Pringle, NEA President.

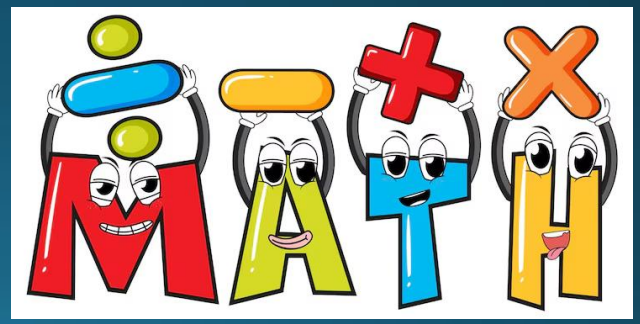
Technology and Screen Time

- Technology and screen time sit at the center of a major tension: innovation vs. student outcomes and child development
- The conversation has shifted from "more tech" → "when, how, and how much"
- Districts are reassessing after a decade of 1:1 devices and pandemic-driven acceleration
- Research signals are increasingly concerning, with clearer risks than 3–5 years ago
- The question is no longer access—it's intentionality and limits.
- Early childhood is the biggest flashpoint, with growing policy pushback and potential restrictions
- Expect increased pressure from families—especially at elementary levels.
- Legislative Pushback: As of early 2026, at least 16 states have introduced legislation to reevaluate or severely restrict screen time and school-issued devices, particularly in elementary schools.

Literacy and Math Focus

- Post-COVID learning gaps are still driving urgency.
- About 39% of 4th graders are proficient in math nationally, and about 31 % of 4th graders are proficient in reading nationally.
- States are doubling down on:
  - Science of reading / structured literacy
  - Algebra readiness & math pathways
  - There is talk of a universal "Science of Math"
  - Intervention systems (MTSS, tutoring)
- This is an execution challenge, not a strategy gap





Career Readiness and Workforce Alignment

- Career readiness is no longer a secondary outcome—it is becoming the primary accountability lens.
- Postsecondary enrollment is declining, with financial pressure and risk of closures affecting many institutions
- Policymakers, families, and employers are increasingly scrutinizing the ROI of a college degree
- Strong policy momentum is focused on aligning education systems with labor market outcomes
- Growth is accelerating in CTE, industry credentials, apprenticeships, and dual enrollment pathways
- States are increasingly centered on a key question: "What is the ROI of education?"
- Districts will increasingly be evaluated on postsecondary outcomes, not just test scores.

School Choice, Charters, and Alternative Models

- This continues to be one of the most politically charged topics.
- Regardless of stance, competition for students is increasing.
- Enrollment pressure will become a strategic issue, not just a demographic one
- Expansion of:
  - ESAs (Education Savings Accounts)
  - Charter schools
  - Micro schools / hybrid models
- At the same time, you're seeing:



- Growth in **classical education models** emphasizing traditional curriculum and minimal tech
- This reflects a broader debate about **what school should fundamentally look like.**
- States are also looking at ways to measure the ROI of School Choice Programs.

Teacher Workforce Crisis

- Unresolved and highly visible. This is a nationwide issue and are showing no signs of stabilizing
- Shortages in key areas (STEM, special ed)
- Burnout + workload concerns
- Increased reliance on:
  - AI tools
  - Alternative certification pathways



- Teacher retention is now as big a concern as recruitment.
- About 1 in 6 US teachers work second jobs
- "We're not just talking about the veterans ready to retire; we're seeing young, passionate educators hit a breaking point way sooner than expected."

Funding Uncertainty

- Federal vs. State control
- Federal relief funds have expired—districts are now operating without that buffer.
- A major structural issue. Structural deficits are becoming more common.
- Increasing movement toward state-level control of education policy
- Uncertainty around federal funding streams and programs
- Budget pressure is forcing districts to:
  - Cut programs
  - Consolidate schools
  - Prioritize core academics



"Districts aren't just managing budgets—they're making trade-offs about opportunity."

Student Engagement and Mental Health

- Chronic absenteeism remains elevated
- Engagement is emerging as the leading indicator of academic success
- Schools prioritizing:
  - Engagement strategies
  - Social-emotional supports
- Recognition that **engagement is the primary driver of learning outcomes**
- Our country has a youth mental health crisis," which corresponds to the increased use by students of smartphones and social media." — Aaron Chapin, Pennsylvania State Education Association.

Special Education Compliance and Rising Costs

- This is one of the fastest-growing and least flexible areas of district budgets
- Special education is both a legal requirement and a rapidly growing budget category.
- **Trends:**
  - Increasing identification rates (especially autism and speech/language)
  - Litigation risk rising in some states
  - Staffing shortages in related services (SLPs, psychologists, paras)
- Persistent funding cuts and budgetary pressures for the 2025–2026 school year are creating gaps in services, forcing reliance on supplemental private resources.

What this means and the implications for GPS

- **Policy Modernization is Urgent**
  - ❑ The Board will need to proactively update policies—particularly around AI, technology use, and instructional materials—before practices outpace governance.

- **Shift from Inputs to Outcomes**
  - ❑ There will be increasing pressure to measure success beyond test scores, including career readiness, postsecondary outcomes, and student engagement.

- **Resource Allocation Trade-offs Are Inevitable**
  - ❑ Budget constraints (especially in special education and staffing) will require clearer prioritization of core academics, workforce pathways, and student supports.

- **Community Expectations Are Changing**
  - ❑ Families will expect clearer direction on screen time, AI use, and real-world readiness, which will require more structured communication and input mechanisms.

- **Strategic Positioning Matters More Than Ever**
  - ❑ With rising school choice and enrollment pressures, the district must clearly define and communicate its value proposition to retain and attract students.

Recommended Actions for the Board and District

A. Governance

- Conduct a comprehensive policy audit across AI, technology use, and career pathways to ensure alignment with district priorities and emerging best practices.

B. Community Input

- Launch a targeted family survey to gather input on AI use, screen time, and college/career readiness priorities to inform decision-making.

C. Oversight

- Establish a regular board reporting cadence on:
  - AI implementation and operational effectiveness
  - Academic recovery and student growth
  - Career readiness outcomes and pathway participation

Questions? Comments? Concerns?

- Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.
- It is a privilege to serve alongside all of you on this board.
- "Those who govern schools hold one of the most consequential responsibilities in public service—because they govern opportunity itself." — Education Commission of the States (ECS)

