Application Guide

Mental Health and Our Kids with Zach Rausch and Sissy Goff

KEY TAKEAWAYS

From interview with Zach Rausch



Zach Rausch
Lead Researcher,
The Anxious Generation

Zach Rausch highlights the two-part tragedy contributing to the current mental health crisis among children:

1. **Loss of Play-Based Childhood:** The shift away from unsupervised play and free time
2. **Transition to a Phone-Based Childhood:** The increasing use of smartphones and social media

Between 2010 and 2015, a "Great Rewiring of Childhood" occurred, changing how adolescents interact. During this period, mental health statistics dramatically worsened, especially for girls:

- **Depression rates doubled** among adolescent girls by 2019.
- **Self-harm rates tripled** among preteen girls (10–14).

This change was driven by the introduction of smartphones, social media, and the cultural shift from in-person connection to online interaction.

Key Solutions to Combat This Shift

1. **Delay smartphones** until high school.
2. **No social media** until age 16.
3. **Phone-free schools** to reduce distractions and foster in-person learning.
4. **Encourage free play** and independence in the real world.

These shifts aim to restore balance in children's development and protect their mental health from the negative impacts of technology.

Spiritual Practices as a Protective Factor

Research shows that adolescents connected to a **faith community** experience **less of a mental health decline**. Religious communities provide in-person connection and rituals that act as stabilizers during a time when technology is constantly vying for attention.
Faith communities also have a unique opportunity to set boundaries and help guide families in managing technology's influence on children's lives.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

From interview with Sissy Goff



Sissy Goff
Counselor and Author,
The Worry-Free Parent

Sissy Goff emphasizes the **rising anxiety epidemic**:

- **One in four kids and one in three adolescents** struggle with anxiety.
- **Girls** are twice as likely as boys to experience anxiety.

Connection Between Anxiety and Technology

- **Constant stimulation from screens** can trigger and sustain an anxious state in children, preventing the brain from learning self-regulation.
- **Social media** exacerbates comparison, pressure to perform, and emotional disconnect, particularly for girls.

Parenting Tips to Address Technology

1. **Set boundaries early**—delaying access to smartphones and social media until the child is developmentally ready.
2. **Empathize** with the child's desire for technology while still setting clear boundaries.
3. **Be involved:** Conversations about the effects of technology are more effective than simply blocking access.
4. **Model healthy use** of technology and involve the entire family in discussions about digital habits.

Advice for Educators: Setting Boundaries in the Classroom

- **Establish Phone-Free Classrooms:** Early in the school year is an excellent time to set clear parameters about technology use. A phone-free classroom allows students to engage more meaningfully without the constant distractions of their devices. Educators can frame the policy humorously to encourage compliance (e.g., “I’ll enjoy keeping some extra phones during the school day!”).
- **Involve Parents:** Sending a note or email to parents explaining the classroom's phone-free policy can help ensure alignment. Encourage parents to read materials like *The Anxious Generation* or *The Worry-Free Parent* to understand the impact of technology on their children’s mental health. Frame it as a team effort for the well-being of the kids.

Final Thoughts on Parenting in the Digital Age

Parents are encouraged to provide **warmth and empathy**, while also allowing kids to take risks and develop independence. Technology check-ins and open conversations can help families navigate the challenges of raising children in a highly connected world. By delaying and carefully monitoring technology, parents can protect their children's mental health and promote healthier emotional development.

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