The Anxious Generation **Reader's Guide**
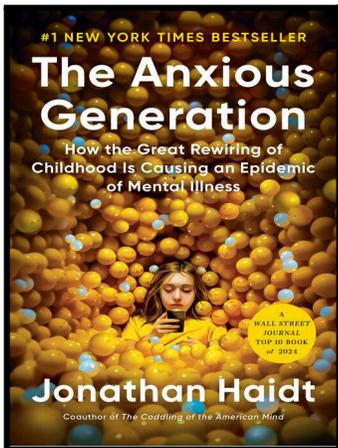
THOUGHT AND ACTION STARTERS FOR PARENTS

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I wrote The Anxious Generation with a firm belief that the challenges confronting our children and our families are solvable. However, addressing these challenges requires understanding the traps we have fallen into, so we can see the escape routes. The main escape routes are four new norms, four steps that are hard for any one family to do on its own, but they become much easier if we can coordinate and act together. The book and the website (anxiousgeneration.com) are designed to facilitate discussion among friends, family, book clubs, and communities, in order to change norms and reclaim human life for all generations. This guide offers conversation starters as well as some actions you can take on your own or with a few friends.

– Jon Haidt

TECHNOLOGY:
1. The book says that today we overprotect children and adolescents in the real world and underprotect them in the virtual world. Do you see this happening? Where?
2. What problems do smartphones, social media, and screens solve in your family, and what problems do they create?
3. Do you have any tech rules in your home? Do they work? Are there some that you have heard of, or would like to try?

4. What would you like to change, if anything, about your kids' relationship with smartphones and social media? What about video games and other screen-based activities?
5. How are your kids different online and offline?

PLAY:
6. The book says that one problem with a phone-based childhood is that it replaces the hours children would otherwise spend playing in the real world: "Children are, in a sense, deprived of childhood." Do you agree about this for children in general or your own? What exactly are kids missing out on?
7. Think back on your own childhood. What are your most thrilling memories? Could your child have a similar experience today?
8. What did you get from "just playing" as a kid?
9. "Free play" means playing without adults organizing or even supervising. What reservations do you have about allowing your own children more unsupervised time?
10. Jon and Lenore suggest a few ways to give your kids more unstructured, unsupervised opportunities for free play, such as keeping Fridays open so neighborhood kids can get together. What small steps could you take toward adding more free play to your children's lives?

INDEPENDENCE:
11. When you were your child(ren)'s age, what did your parents trust you to do on your own? How did that make you feel?
12. What are some things you do for your children that they could start doing for themselves?
13. What are some things you do for your family that your children could start doing for you?
14. Think about a time when you were a child and something went wrong when no adult was around. How did you solve the problem?
15. How can you give your kids more opportunities to be part of the real world rather than the virtual one?
16. Modern technology makes it very easy to track our children's whereabouts, grades, and even behavior electronically. This can become "the world's longest umbilical cord." Could you cut down on the ways in which you electronically track or watch your child in the real world? How?

FOR YOU:
17. What problems do smartphones, social media, and screens solve in your own life and what problems do they create?
18. Do you have any tech rules for yourself? Do they work?
19. What would you like to change, if anything, about your own relationship with smartphones and social media? What about video games and other screen-based activities?
20. How are you different online and offline?

OVERALL:
21. In what ways can we better prepare our kids to wisely navigate the virtual world?
22. In what ways can we better prepare our kids to wisely navigate the real world?
23. Would you want to grow up the way today's kids are growing up? Why or why not? What are some benefits of growing up today? What would you want to preserve/carry forward from your own upbringing?
24. What actions can you take, on your own and with like-minded parents, to lessen your kids' time spent in the virtual world and increase their opportunities for fun and responsibility in the physical world?

SOME POSSIBLE ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE:

TECHNOLOGY:
1. Partner up with a few other families to delay giving your child a smartphone until high school. Give them a flip phone instead.
2. Partner up with a few other families to delay giving your child access to social media until age sixteen.
3. Partner up with a few other parents to ask your school to go phone-free so you can give your kids seven hours of attention and in-person socialization.
4. Set tech boundaries in your household. For example, no screens during mealtime or before bed. Consider leaving phones in the kitchen overnight. (Buy an alarm clock!)

PLAY:
5. Keep Friday afternoons free for neighborhood play.
6. Partner up with a few other parents and ask your school to start a phone-free, mixed-age Let Grow Play Club before or after school.
7. On your block, arrange for one parent to sit outside each afternoon so the kids can play outside together.

INDEPENDENCE:
8. Ask your kids to start doing one thing inside the home (and let them!), without your assistance, that will help you.
9. Ask your kids to start doing one thing outside the home (and let them!), without your supervision, that will help you.
10. Have coffee with a friend and send your kids out together for a specific amount of time without a phone or tracker.
11. Ask your school to assign The Let Grow Experience, a homework assignment that asks kids to start doing something new on their own, with your permission.

If you want to share the impact the book has had on you—maybe you're overprotecting a little less in the real world or have started protecting a little more online—please tell us your story at anxiousgeneration.com.

THOUGHT AND ACTION STARTERS FOR EDUCATORS

TECHNOLOGY:
1. The book says that today we overprotect children and adolescents in the real world and underprotect them in the virtual world. Do you see this happening? Where?
2. What problems do smartphones and social media solve in your school/classroom, and what problems do they create? What about screens more broadly (e.g., Chromebooks)?
3. Do you have any tech rules in your school/classroom? Do they work?
4. What school-wide tech rules would you implement if given the opportunity and why?
5. How do students' online activities (outside your classroom) impact what happens inside your classroom?
6. Do smartphones influence the way parents are involved in your school/classroom and your teaching approach? If yes, how?

PLAY:
7. The book says that one problem with a phone-based childhood is that it replaces the hours children would otherwise spend playing in the real world: "Children are, in a sense, deprived of childhood." Do you agree? What exactly are kids missing out on?
8. What did you get from "just playing" as a kid? What benefits do you think your students would gain if allowed more time to "just play"?
9. "Free play" means kids of different ages playing without adults organizing their activities or even intervening, except in emergencies. What reservations do you have about allowing your students to play this way?
10. How can you give your students more opportunities for mixed-age free play?

INDEPENDENCE:
11. What are some things you do for your students that they could start doing for themselves?
12. what are some things you do for your students or school that your students could start doing for you?
13. How can you give your students more opportunities to be part of the real world as opposed to the virtual one? In what ways could you encourage the parents of your students to do the same?
14. How would an increased sense of responsibility and independence benefit your students?

FOR YOU:
15. what problems do smartphones, social media, and screens solve in your own life, and what problems do they create?
16. Do you have any tech rules for yourself? Do they work?
17. What would you like to change, if anything, about your own relationship with smartphones and social media? What about video games and other screen-based activities?

18. How are you different online and offline?

OVERALL:
19. In what ways can we better prepare our students to wisely navigate the virtual world?
20. In what ways can we better prepare our students to wisely navigate the real world?
21. Would you want to grow up the way today's students are growing up? Why or why not? What are some benefits of growing up today? What would you want to preserve/carry forward from your own upbringing?
22. What actions can you take, alone or with allies, to lessen your students' time spent in the virtual world and increase their opportunities for fun and responsibility in the physical world?

SOME POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

TECHNOLOGY:
1. Partner up with a few other colleagues to advocate that your school go phone-free.
2. Consider setting more tech boundaries in your classroom.
3. For example, consider updating grade portals only once a week so that parents and students are less likely to spend each day checking and waiting for grades on quizzes and assignments.
4. Consider abstaining from posting behavior points and demerits, leaving the topic of a child's behavior for in-person discussions at parent-teacher night, not a daily record.
5. Leave your own smartphone locked away when you are teaching.

PLAY:
6. Partner up with a few other colleagues to advocate for longer recess and a mixed-age, phone-free Let Grow Play Club before and/or after school.

INDEPENDENCE:
7. Ask your students to start doing one thing inside the classroom that will help you.
8. Assign The Let Grow Experience, a homework assignment that asks kids to start doing something new on their own (with parental permission).

Collective action requires inspiration! If you take any of these actions and would like to share what happened next, please send your story (and/or photo or video) to: anxiousgeneration.com

THOUGHT AND ACTION STARTERS FOR YOUNG ADULTS (GEN Z)

1. The book says that we have overprotected you in the real world and underprotected you in the virtual world. Do you agree? Do you see this happening? Where?
2. What problems do smartphones, social media, and screens solve for your generation, and what problems do they create?

3. Do you have any rules or boundaries around the tech in your life? Do they work? Do you wish you had different ones? Who would you choose to make these?

4. What would you like to change, if anything, about your relationship with smartphones and social media? How about that of your friends? What about other screen-based activities?

5. In what ways do your online activities impact your friendships, your relationship with your family, and your relationships with others?

6. How do/did smartphones influence the way your parents are involved in your life?

7. In what ways would you like to see younger kids' tech use change?

8. How do you feel about the amount of time you spend online? Are there other activities you wish you had more time for? If yes, how can you create more opportunities to engage with the real world as opposed to the virtual one?

PLAY:

9. The book says that one problem with a phone-based childhood is that it replaces the hours children would otherwise spend playing in the real world: "Children are, in a sense, deprived of childhood." Do you agree? What do you feel you missed out on?

10. What do you get from having fun with friends in the real world that you don't get from having fun with friends online?

INDEPENDENCE:

11. What are some things you still have others do for you that you could do yourself?

12. What are some things you can start doing for others, such as your parents or other family members or friends?

13. If applicable: What are some things your parents don't let you do that you feel ready to do? What would it take to show them you are ready?

14. What are some things you could start doing for your parents?

OVERALL:

15. Would you want the next generation of kids to grow up as you grew up? Why or why not? Which aspects of your childhood would you like the next generation to experience, and which do you hope to see change?

16. In what ways can we better prepare future generations to wisely navigate the virtual world?

17. In what ways can we better prepare future generations to wisely navigate the real world?

Collective action requires inspiration! If you take any of these actions and would like to share what happened next, please send your story (and/or photo or video) to: anxiousgeneration.com

SOME POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

TECHNOLOGY:
1. Do the obvious: Leave your phone outside the bedroom at night.
2. Take a digital sabbath—a day off a month when you don't use any internet-connected devices. You will live.
3. Try a no-phone get-together.
4. Partner with a few friends to advocate for a phone-free space (or school, classroom, or dining hall, depending on your stage of life).
5. Keep the phone in another room the whole time you visit Grandma.

INDEPENDENCE:
6. Learn how to do something that someone else currently does for you. Do it.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
anxiousgeneration.com

Substacks:
After Babel, Jon Haidt
Designing Tomorrow, The Neely Center
Techno Sapiens, Jacqueline Nesi, PhD
Of Boys and Men, Richard V. Reeves
Generation Tech, Jean M. Twenge
GIRLS, Freya India
Play Makes Us Human, Peter Gray
The Eternally Radical Idea, Greg Lukianoff

Books:
The Coddling of the American Mind, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt
Free-Range Kids, Lenore Skenazy
The Happiness Hypothesis, Jonathan Haidt
The Righteous Mind, Jonathan Haidt
The Canceling of the American Mind, Greg Lukianoff and Rikki Schlott
Awe, Dacher Keltner
Dopamine Nation, Anna Lembke, MD
Generations, Jean M. Twenge, PhD
iGen, Jean M. Twenge, PhD
How to Have a Good Day, Caroline Webb
Indistractable, Nir Eyal with Julie Li
A Nation of Wimps, Hara Estroff Marano
The Opposite of Spoiled, Ron Lieber
Urban Playground, Tim Gill
When Men Behave Badly, David M. Buss
The Age of Addiction, David T. Courtwright

Of Boys and Men, Richard V. Reeves
Unwired, Gaia Berstein
The Age of Surveillance Capitalism, Shoshana Zuboff
The End of Men, Hanna Rosin
Boys Adrift, Leonard Sax, MD, PhD
Free to Learn, Peter Gray
Outrage Machine, Tobias Rose-Stockwell
Untangled, Lisa Damour, PhD
Stolen Focus, Johann Hari
Deep Work, Cal Newport
Digital Minimalism, Cal Newport
The Gardener and the Carpenter, Alison Gopnik
The Disappearance of Childhood, Neil Postman
Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, Marshall McLuhan
Paranoid Parenting, Frank Furedi
Bowling Alone, Robert D. Putnam
Never Enough, Jennifer Breheny Wallace
The Emotional Lives of Teenagers, Lisa Damour, PhD
How to Raise a Healthy Gamer, Alok Kanojia, MD, MPH
The Screen Strong Solution, Melanie Hempe, BSN
Quiet, Susan Cain
The Family Firm, Emily Oster
Mortal Combat, Patrick M. Markey, PhD, and Christopher J. Ferguson, PhD
Unequal Childhoods, Annette Lareau

School resources:
letgrow.org (school programs)
everyschool.org
phonefreeschoolsmovement.org

Parent resources for tech:
screenstrong.org
fairplayforkids.org
gamequitters.com
screentimenetwork.org
waituntil8th.org
healthygamer.gg
protectyoungeyes.com
delaysmartphones.co.uk
lookupnonprofit.com
smart-families.org
oktodelay.org
getmediasavvy.org
smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk

screensanity.org
wearemama.squarespace.com
parentssos.org

Parent resources for play and independence:
letgrow.org
outsideplay.org
montanawildernessschool.org
nifplay.org
nols.edu
onbeing.org
afsusa.org/study-abroad
americanexchangeproject.org
outwardbound.org
wildernessadventures.com
ycamp.org/wilderness-trips
boystomen.org/

Gen Z resources:
designitforus.org
gamequitters.com
healthygamer.gg
logoffmovement.org
nosonovember.org

Tech company resources:
humanetech.com
reset.tech

Researcher resources:
commonsense.org
aibm.org
psychoftech.org
alltechishuman.org
childrenandscreens.org
counterhate.com

Speakers:

Jon Haidt: Washington Speakers Bureau:.wsb.com/speakers/jonathan-haidt
Zach Rausch: zach-rausch.com
Lenore Skenazy: bit.ly/LenoreSpeak

See more at anxiousgeneration.com