

SMARTPHONE FREE CHILDHOOD NZ

WHO WE ARE. WHAT WE DO.

SCHOOL'S WELCOME GUIDE

Smartphone Free
Childhood Aotearoa
New Zealand



WHO'S TALKING ABOUT US

"The global parents' revolt against the phone-based childhood has just begun ...
bravo Smartphone Free Childhood!"

Dr Jonathan Haidt

NYU Professor and bestselling author of *The Anxious Generation*

"I support you guys [Smartphone Free Childhood NZ]; I think what you're doing is right. Research shows that this is not something we can argue back and forth about, saying it's just a correlation. There is now substantial evidence that social media is causing anxiety and depression in teen girls."

Nathan Wallis

Neuroscience Educator

"Parents need to have firm, loving boundaries around technology in order to protect their kids because Big Tech does not have our children's best interests at heart and research is now confirming the impacts on our kids' and teens' mental health. It's a lot easier to hold your ground when your kids are asking for a phone when other parents are doing the same."

Maggie Dent

Parenting author, educator & Ctrl+Shft advisor



The New Zealand Herald

The Post | TE UPOKO
O TE IKA

TOTS TO TEENS
IS ALL ABOUT CHILDHOOD



THE BREEZE

SUNDAY
STAR★
TIMES



+HR=E News

NewstalkZB



Woman's Day

Capsule



the am show Stuff



OUR MISSION

To shift the cultural norm away from giving tamariki smartphones, and to challenge the growing influence and impact social media is having on our rangatahi.

Let's talk...



Katrina Colombié - Co-Founder & Director

BUILDING AWARENESS & SUPPORT IN OUR COMMUNITIES

At Smartphone Free Childhood NZ, we are a charitable trust founded by a passionate group of parents, health professionals, and educators who are concerned about the growing impact of smartphones and social media on our young people. As part of a global movement with a presence in over 35 countries, we are dedicated to raising awareness, engaging communities and making a positive difference in the lives of children and families across New Zealand.

As parents and schools, we all want the best for our children. For many of us, giving them a smartphone once felt like a natural choice — a simple way to stay connected and help them access the world. But with the benefit of research, the evidence is clear: excessive screen time is linked to a range of issues that impact the mental and emotional well-being of young people. From disrupted sleep patterns and cyberbullying to the erosion of real-world social skills, the consequences are widespread and concerning.

Through our work, we have identified six key areas where smartphone use is harming our children. With these insights, we've created a range of practical solutions designed to support families, schools, and communities as they explore positive change together.

Our schools sit at the heart of our children's lives — places where they learn, grow, and discover who they are. But they're also communities that shape us as parents, offering connection, guidance, and a sense of shared principles. When schools and families move together, the ripple effect is extraordinary.

We're inviting you to be part of that movement; whether you're curious to learn more, keen to support parents who are taking steps, or ready to explore what positive change could look like in your own school.

Together, we can create environments where children thrive, parents feel supported, and school communities lead the way toward healthier, more connected childhoods.

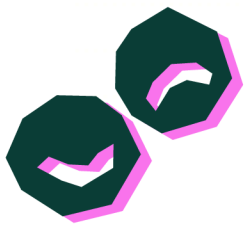
Katrina

So...what's the problem?

The shift from a play-based childhood to one dominated by smartphones and screens has profoundly disrupted both the social and neurological development of kids today.

When children first began using smartphones a decade ago, there was little research on their impact. But today the evidence is clear and overwhelming. Smartphones expose children to content that their developing brains aren't

prepared to handle, with far-reaching consequences. We've grouped these effects into six categories:



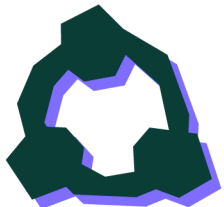
MENTAL & EMOTIONAL HEALTH

- Responsible for the huge increase in cyberbullying
- Increasing depression and anxiety in children
- Increasing loneliness in children
- Making children more likely to self-harm



PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Damaging children's eyes
- Contributing to obesity in children
- Preventing children playing outside
- Damaging development of children's spine
- Stopping kids getting enough sleep



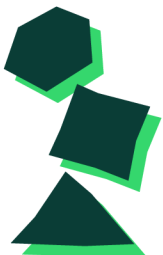
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

- Hinder development of social skills and relationships
- Damaging for family relationships



FOCUS & BRAIN CHANGE

- Addictive
- Reducing children's academic performance
- Creating structural changes to children's brains



OPPORTUNITY COST

- Spending more time on devices than playing — even though play is crucial for healthy development.
- Using digital devices for an average of 42 hours per week in Aotearoa (OECD).
- Leaving little time for the real-world activities and relationships that build the life skills needed for a healthy transition into adulthood.



SEXUAL CONTENT & BEHAVIOUR

- Exposing children to sexual & offensive content
- Pressuring young people into sending sexual images of themselves
- Exposing children to sexual abuse & grooming

What's our solution?

Here at Smartphone Free Childhood NZ, we aim at empowering and motivating parents, schools and communities in creating a movement that delays smartphones and social media by offering knowledge, resources, and community support.

KNOWLEDGE

We fund and bring the latest New Zealand and global research on this topic to youth, families, schools and communities through our talks and other platforms (website, media channels).

We provide expert advice tailored to our local context. Our talks and workshops foster connections within communities, making sure that attendees leave with new knowledge, resources and a clear action plan!

RESOURCES & SUPPORT

Our website provides free guidance, interviews, alternative ideas, and practical toolkits — from posters to research papers to principal and board guides — plus additional parent support through our ambassador program.

We equip hundreds of ambassadors in New Zealand with the tools they need to inspire and rally their communities.

COMMUNITY - OUR PARENT PACT

Our Parent Pact lets parents commit to delaying smartphones and social media for their children. It builds confidence by showing which other parents in their region, school, and year group have made the same commitment.

The live leader board, which displays the number of Parent Pact sign-ups in schools and regions across NZ can be used to motivate communities.

Partner schools and online communities provide a space for solidarity, support, and inspiration, reaching parents across the country.

Our Work – in detail

KEY ACTIVITIES



EDUCATE

School & Event Speakers

- Facilitate talks in schools (for parents, youth or teachers)
- Facilitate talks at professional conferences
- Promote expert speakers

Get the latest research to our child facing professionals and parents

- Share SFCNZ Funded independent NZ research
- Provide professional development (CPD) for teachers and medical bodies
- Engage with print media, podcasts, radio, and tv to spread our message



EMPOWER

Ambassador Program

- Provide ambassadors with resources and support
- Create community group within ambassador's school
- Advocate with local parents

Online Community

- Parent Pact tool bringing together parents who have committed to delay access to smartphones and social media for their children.
- Share information and host conversations across our website and three social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn)



RESEARCH

Funding

- Fund independent research within New Zealand
- Fund expert speaking events in schools

Sharing

- Sharing research findings with key stakeholders, including the MOE, schools, parents, media, and industry.
- Ensuring medical bodies have access to the latest research.
- Providing up-to-date research, evidence, and resources across our platforms, events, and media channels.

OUTPUT

Increased awareness among key target groups

OUTCOME Community of parents committed to limiting Smartphone & Social Media access

IMPACT

A new norm of delaying smartphones and social media for our kids

From One Principal to Another

By Gary Pasfield, Waimauku School Principal

Waimauku School is highly regarded as one of the top semi-rural schools in Auckland. Located on Muriwai Road, the Year 0–8 full primary school serves a community of around 700 pupils. It frequently receives praise for its strong pastoral care, play-based learning focus, and modern facilities.



Parents at Waimauku School have pledged for their children to be smartphone free. From left, Renee and Mia Phillips, Claire and Ella Thomas, Christie and Tyler Lyford with principal Gary Pasfield.

We've already taken the phones out of classrooms, and yes it works. Classrooms are calmer, students are more present and teachers can teach without competing against a screen.

But here's the reality: the problems don't stop at the school gate. Every morning, we are still seeing the impact of what happens the night before. Students arriving tired because they've been online too late, students emotionally wound up from group chats that escalated at 9pm and friendship issues that didn't start in the playground, but followed them into it.

A school-day ban fixes the immediate distraction, but it doesn't address the environment our children are immersed in once they leave.

It treats the symptom and not the cause, because the real issue isn't just phones at school, it's early, unrestricted access to smartphones altogether.

From an educator's perspective, delaying that access is one of the most effective things we can do. Childhood is a critical window for brain and social development. It's when young people learn how to navigate relationships, manage emotions, solve problems, and build resilience. Smartphones, particularly those driven by dopamine-based algorithms, interrupt that process.

They replace face-to-face interaction with digital substitutes and reward instant gratification over patience. They also expose children to social pressures they are not yet equipped to handle.

But when we delay smartphones, we give children the chance to reach those milestones first and without that interference.

At Waimauku School, we've seen what happens when families take that step together. More than 70 families in our community have signed on to the Parent Pact through Smartphone Free Childhood NZ, agreeing to delay giving their children smartphones. And while the changes are not always easy to measure on paper, they are being felt.

We're dealing with fewer online-related issues spilling into the school day. The kinds of conflicts that once started on a screen and landed in the classroom are less frequent. But perhaps more telling is what we're hearing from parents, they're telling us it's easier to say no and that matters.

Because for many families, the challenge has never just been the device itself, it's the social pressure around it. For a child, being the only one without a phone can feel like social exile, but when parents move together, that fear of missing out disappears. The pressure lifts, for both the child and the parent and suddenly, "no" becomes not just possible, but normal.

That collective approach is what makes the Parent Pact so powerful.

There's also a practical reality here because policing what a child does on a smartphone is incredibly difficult but monitoring the absence of a device is not.

In that sense, delaying smartphones is not just more effective, it's more realistic for families.

It's also important to be clear about what this isn't. This isn't about being anti-technology. Technology is an essential part of modern life, and it has a place in education and development, but it should be used as a tool and not something that shapes childhood in ways we don't fully understand.

We want our children to be confident, capable users of technology, not products of it.

This is not about perfection, it's about progress and it's about recognising that while legislation and regulation may take time, there are steps families can take right now.

Because what happens outside of school hours is shaping what we see inside them, and if we want to truly support our children - not just academically, but socially and emotionally, we need to look beyond the classroom.

The conversation about smartphones can't start and end at the school gate.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Pasfield". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Waimauku School Principal

What can schools do?

Schools have enormous influence on children, parents, and the wider community, and they feel the impact of smartphone and social media use every day. Even though most of this use happens outside school hours, the fallout arrives at school each morning — tired kids, online conflicts spilling into classrooms, constant distraction, and rising anxiety. Because schools carry so much of this burden, they are uniquely placed to support the shift toward healthier norms and help families delay phone and social media use in a way that protects learning, wellbeing, and connection.

Below are practical ideas for what schools can do, each connected to key issues and supported by research.

Amplify the message

THE RESEARCH TELLS US...

44% of Kiwi kids want school to help them transition away from social media *

25% of Kiwi parents or caregivers indicated that their child has been a victim of cyberbullying**

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO SUPPORT OUR KIDS & FAMILIES

- Have SFCNZ posters/ leaflets at school on the notice board or at the front desk.
- Host our logo and a link to more information on your school internet page.
- Share the pre written SFCNZ school newsletter posts (covering basic information, updates, guidance and additional resources)
- Share SFCNZ resources in the school welcome pack, at significant transition times or other (eg. before moving from primary to intermediary school)
- Organise SFCNZ speakers to talk with your parents and teachers.
- Organise a SFCNZ speaker for students so they can better understand the science behind their smartphone and social media use.
- Share the bulk discount of basic phones available to parents through Tone Down Tech.
- Promote the Parent Pact so parents know there is an optional tool to delay as a collective.



PARENT PACT



SPEAKER LIST



RESOURCES

Lead by example

Around ¼ of Kiwi teens have problematic use of social media **

OECD data in 2018 showed that youth in NZ used digital devices 42 hours per week on average, compared to 35 hours globally ***

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO SUPPORT OUR KIDS & FAMILIES

- Schools and extra-curricular teams could avoid using social media platforms to communicate with students (Whatsapp, Facebook groups etc.)
- Model healthy habits. Teachers and School staff' own device behaviour shapes norms; visible, balanced use helps children learn self-regulation.
- Upskill staff with SFCNZ CPD on how to spot and support children with smartphone and social media addiction.
- Provide accessible after school activities for all children with plenty of child-led, screen free play opportunities.
- Publish the SFCNZ logo and/or an endorsement to the movement on your website explaining why the school encourages delaying smartphones and social media.

Support your Ambassador



IF YOUR SCHOOL HAS A SFCNZ AMBASSADOR

- With hundreds of SFCNZ ambassadors across the country, your school may have one. If you are lucky enough to have an ambassador they will be your best asset. A motivated, well resourced and well connected individual or pair who wants to see change in their community.

Ambassadors goals include:

1. EDUCATION - Building awareness around the benefits of delaying smartphones and social media for kids.
2. SUPPORT - Letting other parents know they aren't alone, build community and promote the Parent Pact to create a new norm around smartphones and social media.

* Problematic social media use common among NZ teens; government examines age limits. (2025). Public Health Communication Collective. Retrieved November 26, 2025

** Ipsos (2018). Cyberbullying in NZ 3rd highest of 29 countries surveyed. Ipsos Global Advisor Cyberbullying Study. Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/en-nz/cyberbullying-nz-3rd-highest-29-countries-surveyed>

*** University of Auckland. (2024, April 15). Excessive screen time bad for kids. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2024/04/15/Excessive-screen-time-bad-for-kids.html>

The Parent Pact:

A practical, community-driven solution for schools

The Parent Pact is a simple but powerful commitment made by families to delay smartphones and social media for their children. It removes the pressure from individual parents and replaces it with a shared, school-wide culture of support. When families act together, children are no longer singled out, and the difficult conversations around “everyone else has one” become far easier for both parents and educators.

For schools, the impact is immediate and tangible. Communities that adopt the Parent Pact report calmer classrooms, fewer online-related incidents, and stronger in-person friendships. Research consistently shows that early smartphone and social media use is linked to increased distraction, disrupted sleep, and higher rates of anxiety and cyberbullying. By supporting the movement of delaying access collectively, schools help protect student wellbeing and reduce the pastoral load on staff.

The Parent Pact also strengthens the partnership between home and school. It gives principals a clear, positive message to share with families: we are doing this together. Parents gain confidence knowing others in their child’s year group are making the same commitment, and schools benefit from a united community approach that aligns with their existing wellbeing and digital citizenship goals.

In a landscape where technology pressures are growing and arriving earlier each year, the Parent Pact offers schools a practical, community-driven solution. It empowers families, supports staff, and creates an environment where tamariki and rangatahi can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically —without the weight of premature digital expectations.



PARENT PACT

A PROACTIVE APPROACH

Delaying smartphones isn't something that can wait until children are 11 — by then, the pressure, habits, and expectations are already deeply embedded.

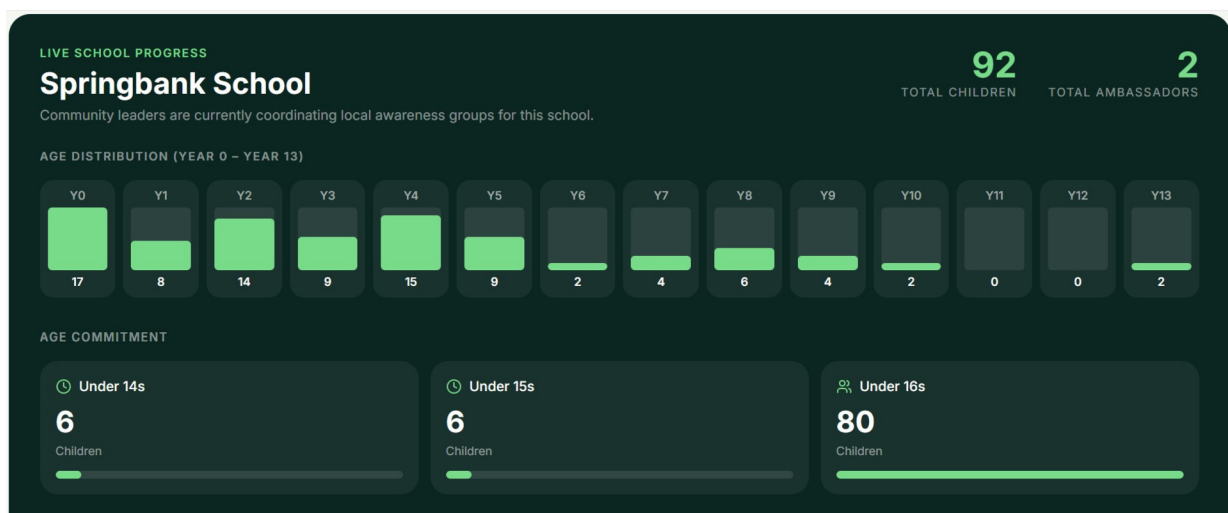
Schools that take a proactive approach help shift this trajectory early, building connected parent communities from the moment children enter the school gates. When families feel supported rather than isolated, they're far more confident saying “not yet” when the first requests for a phone begin.



The Parent Pact interactive map displays SFCNZ communities across Aotearoa, showing each participating school and indicating where active ambassadors are in place. Screenshot from June 2026.

This is why promoting the Parent Pact is so powerful: it creates a shared commitment long before the pressure peaks, ensuring the next generation of students grows up in an environment where healthy digital boundaries are normal, expected, and reinforced together.

For intermediate and secondary schools, the Parent Pact remains a critical tool even as students reach ages where smartphone ownership is increasingly normalised and peer pressure intensifies. By providing parents with a clear, collective framework, schools can help families see that they are not acting in isolation, even when “everyone else already has a phone” becomes a familiar refrain.



Example of Springbank School Parent Pact data. By displaying the sign ups per year group, this gives parents the knowledge and power that other parents are also delaying for their child. Screenshot from June 2026.

Our talks

The SFCNZ speakers are a group of passionate experts dedicated to helping parents, educators, and communities navigate the challenges of raising children in a digital age. Our speakers come from a variety of backgrounds and are committed to sharing research-led, valuable insights and practical solutions. They are all independent speakers who believe in the work SFCNZ are doing.

Our sessions are designed to:

- Inform parents and educators about the issue from a research-driven perspective.
- Share expert advice and practical solutions for moving forward.
- Foster community support and solidarity among parents, empowering them to tackle this issue together, because together we are stronger.
- Answer questions and provide guidance on how to create a healthier, more balanced relationship with technology for ourselves and our young people.

"Raising Resilient Kids in a Digital World was fantastic. It was pretty sobering listening to all the ways smartphones and social media are impacting our children's mental health - especially the real-life stories. I'd already decided not to give my son an iPhone next year, and this just confirmed my decision. However I also came away feeling more empowered with some practical tips to make things easier. A must-listen for all parents!"

Mum to an 11yr old and a 9yr old, Point Chev School

"A very informative talk by Dr Marsh. The statistics are overwhelming, providing a strong case for delayed social media and smartphone access. This is the information we need as parents of children growing up in a digital world. Let's reclaim childhood."

Dad to 9yr old and 6yr old, Balmoral School



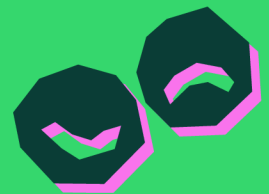
Sexual Content
& Behaviour



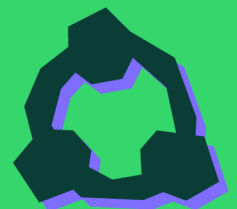
Physical Health



Focus &
Brain Change



Mental &
Emotional Health



Social Development

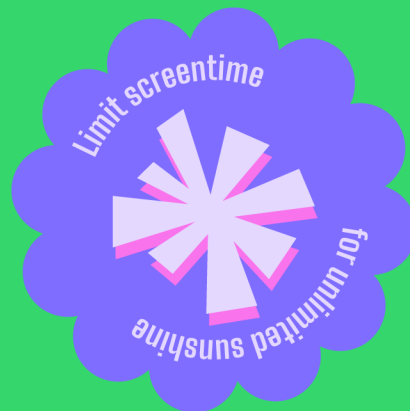


Opportunity Cost

HELP THE MESSAGE STICK

SFCNZ

SPEAKERS LIST

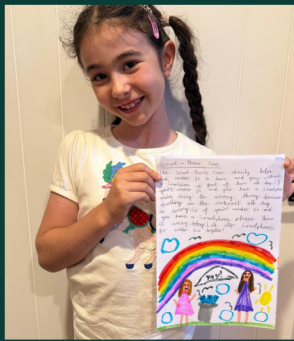


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Childhood Aotearoa
New Zealand

HOW SOME SCHOOLS HAVE SUPPORTED SFCNZ GROUPS ACROSS AOTEAROA.



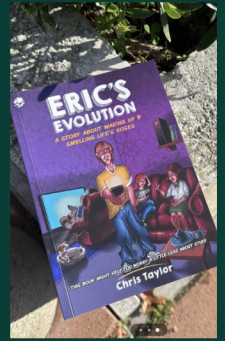
Study The Amazing Generation



School related assignments



Support SFCNZ parent groups



Hold a play about this topic



Speak with journalists for national papers



Partner with local businesses for events



Speak with journalists for national TV



Local newspaper coverage



Get the school to publically support



Host a table at a speaker event



Host a coffee morning



Hold a table at your school fair



Help promote a landline club



Host SFCNZ events



Host an expert speaker

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