

The New Childhood

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What Happened?

There has been a rapid and sudden increase in anxiety and depression among adolescents, especially noticeable from 2010 to 2014 and beyond. While not the only factor, one major contributor is the *New Childhood*, which has two critical elements: *Overprotection in the Physical World* and *Underprotection in the Digital World*.

Overprotected Childhood

- **Antifragility Explained:** Children are designed to be antifragile, growing stronger when faced with challenges, risk, and disappointment.
 - **Examples:**
 - *Fragile:* Computers—damaged when stressed.
 - *Antifragile:* Trees—strengthened by wind; immune systems—improved through exposure.
- **Impact on Development:**
 - Limited free play stifles the development of resilience.
 - Overemphasis on safety leads to weaker coping mechanisms in adulthood.
 - *Quote:* “We spent so much time trying to make our kids happy that we never help them become strong. In the process, they become neither.” — Abigail Shrier
- **Obstacles to Free Play:**
 - Overprotective parenting.
 - Loss of community trust.
 - High focus on structured extracurriculars and college admissions.

Underprotected in the Digital World

Despite physical overprotection, children are underprotected online.

Four Foundational Harms of Social Media:

1. **Social Deprivation:** Social media promises connection but often isolates teens. Face-to-face interactions have dropped from 2.5 hours to 45 minutes per day.
2. **Sleep Deprivation:** Constant scrolling and blue light exposure disrupt sleep patterns.
3. **Attention Fragmentation:** Teens face 237 notifications per day, leading to constant distraction and impaired academic and spiritual focus.
4. **Addiction:** Platforms use variable rewards and investment strategies (e.g., Snapchat streaks) to maintain user engagement, reinforcing addictive behaviors.

Suggestions for Home

- Delay smartphone use until age 16. Provide flip phones for essential communication.
- No phones or tablets in bedrooms; create a central charging station.
- Power down phones one hour before bedtime and avoid phone use at meals.
- Avoid using smartphones before Bible reading.
- Regularly evaluate app usage to understand time investment.

Suggestions for Church and Family

- Implement phone-free youth groups, mission trips, and camp experiences.
- Encourage outdoor play and peer rule-making during free play.
- Foster perseverance in relationships by sticking with friendships even when conflicts arise.

Why Camp?

Camp is uniquely positioned to support healthy development by:

- **Balancing Safety and Risk:** Focus on being “as safe as necessary,” not “as safe as possible.”
- **Promoting Risk-Taking:** Allow space for kids to take reasonable risks to develop courage and resilience.
- **Encouraging Conflict Resolution:** Let kids work through conflicts without adult intervention.
- **Being Phone-Free:**
 - **Social Reconnection:** Real face-to-face time replaces digital isolation.
 - **Improved Sleep:** Adolescents may finally get restful nights.
 - **Reduced Attention Fragmentation:** Full engagement in teaching and activities without phone distractions.
 - **Breaking the Addictive Cycle:** Camps offer a break from digital streaks, fostering freedom from social media dependency.

Sources for Further Reading:

1. *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt.
2. *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* by Tony Reinke.
3. U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
5. *Spectacles* by Tony Reinke.
6. American Time Use Study.