
Phones and Mental Health

Link:

<https://stosselintheclassroom.org/both-sides-phones-and-mental-health/>

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. In the WGN video, Jonathan Haidt discussed the idea of a "play-based childhood." What does that term mean? Is a "play-based childhood" significantly different from modern childhoods? If so, how?
3. John Stossel said adults "always worry about new things." What are some "new things" of the past that caused moral panics? Were the concerns justified? Why/Why not?
4. Jonathan Haidt said that "there's not as much laughter as there used to be." What did he mean by this?
5. In the Stossel video, Chris Ferguson said he advised Jonathan Haidt not to publish *The Anxious Generation*. Why?
6. The anchor in the WGN video asked Jonathan Haidt if government intervention is the only way to solve this issue. Would government intervention be helpful? Why/Why not?
7. Chris Ferguson said that kids today are less violent and less likely to use drugs or smoke cigarettes. Does that surprise you? Why/Why not?
8. Jonathan Haidt said: "The trick is to realize that a smart phone is not the same as a phone." What did he mean by this?
9. John Stossel cited a study that found that in Europe, suicide rates dropped as cell phone usage increased. Does that debunk the idea that smart phones cause mental health issues? Why/Why not?
10. According to Jonathan Haidt, what distinguished Gen Z's experience with phones from the prior generation's experience?

11. Chris Ferguson said: "We look for the bad news and only attribute the bad news to something like social media or smart phones, and we don't attribute any of the good news." What did he mean by this?
12. Jonathan Haidt said that "most kids are spending five hours a day just on social media, seven-to-nine hours a day on other things on the phone." Were you surprised to hear that? Why/Why not? How does it compare to your own phone usage?
13. Chris Ferguson said that smart phone bans in schools could do more harm than good. What did he give as an example? What are other unintended consequences that could result from smart phone bans?
14. Do you have a smart phone? If so, how old were you when you got it? Has it affected your mental health? If so, how?
15. What are some of the advantages of having a smart phone?
16. What are some of the disadvantages of having a smart phone?
17. Has your school banned smart phone use? If so, what have the results been? If not, what do you think the results would be if it did?
18. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
19. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
20. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
21. What else would you like to learn about this topic?
22. For more on this topic, see [Both Sides: Social Media and Mental Health](#).