



We are asking you to write to the new Secretaries of State to insist that they commit to protect children from smartphone harms by adopting a regulatory framework for addictive smartphones and applications alongside enforcing existing laws on harmful content.

Do feel free to personalise the template we provide below by adding your own experiences and perspectives.

Please also copy in your local MP.

You can find your MP [here](#).

Copy all of the following email addresses into the 'To' field of your email:

bridget.phillipson.mp@parliament.uk

peter.kyle.mp@parliament.uk

wes.streeting.mp@parliament.uk

Copy all of the following email addresses into the 'Cc' field of your email:

keir.starmer.mp@parliament.uk

damian.hinds.mp@parliament.uk

Victoria@victoriaatkins.org.uk

andrew.griffith.mp@parliament.uk

daisy.cooper.mp@parliament.uk

munira.wilson.mp@parliament.uk

layla.moran.mp@parliament.uk

nigel.farage.mp@parliament.uk

hello@safescreens.org

[Your local MP's email address]

Copy the following text into the 'Subject' field of your email:

Please commit to addressing the urgent threat smartphones pose to our children

Copy the following text into the main body of your email, adding any personal perspectives that you would like to include:

To :

Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education

Peter Kyle, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology

Wes Streeting, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Cc. Your MP [<https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP>]

Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer

Shadow Secretary for Education, Damian Hinds

Shadow Secretary for Health and Social Care, Victoria Atkins

Shadow Secretary for Science, Innovation and Technology, Andrew Griffith

Liberal Democrats Spokesperson for Health and Social Care, Daisy Cooper

Liberal Democrats Spokesperson for Education, Munira Wilson

Liberal Democrats Spokesperson for Science, Innovation and Technology, Layla Moran

Reform Party leader, Nigel Farage

Dear Secretary of States,

Congratulations on your new roles. We look forward to you delivering policies that will put children at the very heart of important change to the benefit of their future life success and chances.

To this end it is critical that we address the urgent and current threat smartphones pose to our children. The evidence is clear and cannot be ignored. In their current form smartphones, social media and other addictive-by-design smartphone applications pose unacceptably serious risks of harm to children and the time has come for the Government to act. By failing to do so we are enabling significant risk for our children when one considers the harmful content, addictive nature of devices and ill-intended use of algorithms which create an intentionally addictive user experience and a growing epidemic of developmental and academic issues impacting children's speech, language, attention and mental and physical health.

I am sure you will be aware that in May 2024 the Education Select Committee conducted a comprehensive report on '[Screen Time: Impacts on Education and Wellbeing](#).' It is an excellent report that fully considers the implications of smartphone use on children. I assume you and your department have already read this report and will consider acting upon the recommendations.

If you have not had a chance to read it, I have included a summary of the most important elements.

1. The ESC recognises the seriousness of the situation regarding the harms of screen time and social media use for children

The overwhelming weight of evidence submitted to us suggests that the harms of screen time and social media use significantly outweigh the benefits for young children, whereas limited use of screens and genuinely educational uses of digital technology can have benefits for older children.

We are extremely concerned at the level of harmful content children and young people can be exposed to online, and how it can affect their mental health, physical health and educational outcomes. This is exacerbated for certain vulnerable groups who are more likely to be negatively affected and exposed to child criminal exploitation online.

2. The ESC acknowledges that smartphones are "designed to be addictive" and need to be designed to support our children rather than harm them

The next Government should work alongside Ofcom to consult on additional measures regarding smartphones for children under 16 years old within the first year of the new Parliament. Measures to consider should include the total ban of smartphones (internet-enabled phones) for children under 16, parental controls installed as default on phones for under 16s, additional guidance for parents at point of sale and controls at App Store level to prevent children from accessing or utilising age-inappropriate content as well as controls at system level to prevent children uploading nude images. The next Government should work with mobile phone companies and network operators to promote children's phones, a class of phone which can be used for contact and GPS location but not access to the internet or downloading apps

3. The ESC insists that the government swiftly address the harms of screens and devices for children

For children and adolescents alike the rapid rise of the use of screens and devices has come at a substantial cost and Government needs to do more across departments to protect them from addiction, online harms and the mental health impacts of extensive use of devices.

The next Government must work with Ofcom to ensure that there are no delays to implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023 and set out how it is working with Ofcom to ensure children are protected during the transition period.

4. The ESC is calling for a complete prohibition of smartphones in schools, coupled with the necessity for immediate monitoring.

The ESC welcomes the guidance to include no smartphones in schools including break times. It is clear that a ban can have a positive impact on the mental health and educational outcomes of children. The next Government should implement a formal monitoring mechanism to measure both the implementation and effects of the mobile phone ban. The results of this monitoring phase should be published and shared with schools. If results show that a non-statutory ban has been ineffective, the next Government must move swiftly to introduce a statutory ban.

5. The ESC recognizes that the critical nature of parental education, especially during the early years, is essential for the well-being and development of children.

Advice to parents of babies and young children should be revised to ensure it gives sufficient attention to face-to-face interaction and warns of the risks of screen time in reducing opportunities for this. Adults should be encouraged to minimise use of devices where possible when supervising young children at a formative age and the Department for Education should commission advice for parents through family hubs and children's centres on the healthy use of devices.

6. The ESC expresses serious concerns about Ofcom's ability to deliver robust age verification measures and increasing the digital age of consent

Although we welcome attempts by Ofcom to make platforms safer for children who use them, it is clear that the entire system surrounding the digital age of consent and how it is verified is not fit for purpose. Until there are robust age verification measures used on social media platforms, the digital age of consent will have little to no impact. Screen time: impacts on education and wellbeing on protecting the data of underage users. Now is also the time for a broader debate on the adequacy of the digital age of consent. The age of consent in the UK is 16, a child cannot drive until they are 17 and cannot vote in England until they are 18. We have heard no evidence to suggest that 13 is an appropriate age for children to understand the implications of allowing platforms access to their personal data online. Yet we know even with the digital age of consent currently formally set at the lowest possible level, it is widely ignored and not effectively enforced. This must change urgently.

The next Government must launch a consultation by the end of the year on whether 13 is a reasonable age of digital consent, or whether it should be raised. The next Government should recommend 16 as a more appropriate age.

7. The ESC expresses concerns regarding the lack of any benefit and risk assessment of the digitalisation of education

The UK's edtech sector is the largest in Europe, and more schools in England are using edtech and AI than ever before. Although edtech has some benefits, we are concerned about the implications of edtech and AI on children's data and privacy. The Online Safety Act 2023 is exempted in school settings, AI is not regulated, and digital technology can harvest huge amounts of data from its users. The next Government should produce a risk assessment on the use of edtech and AI in schools as soon as possible, and particularly on the extent to which it poses a risk to the security of children's data. The safety and reliability of edtech should also be assessed by Ofcom before it is introduced to schools, and periodically after it is brought into schools.

Within your respective briefs as Secretary of State you have the opportunity to protect our children from these dangers. Given that the cross party Education Select Committee has identified that – *“the overwhelming weight of evidence submitted to us suggests that the harms of screen time and social media use significantly outweigh the benefits for young children ... Government needs to do more across departments to protect them from addiction, online harms and the mental health impacts of extensive use of devices.”* – it is imperative that action must be taken.

Please let me know how you will act on the recommendations made by the Education Select Committee within your department, and if not, why not?

We sincerely hope you take this opportunity to make a real difference to our children's futures.

Sincerely,

[add your name], [State your town/city and postcode]