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Why are young children getting phones?

It's becoming a rising problem in the UK that children under the age of 10 are receiving smartphones from their parents. This leads to many complicated problems later on in their teenage years, including some signs of depression, which is really worrying.

Oops, I shouldn't have seen that!

The truth is, you can't unsee something horrible that you've watched. Quite a lot of children are plugged into devices like TVs, game consoles, tablets, and smartphones at quite an alarming young age. Statistics from the website 'KidsHealth' state that the average British child will see at least 200,000 inappropriate acts on TV by age 18. Letting a child watch something inappropriate is like letting them drive a car. Parents sometimes don't take an active role in taking care of their child and they need to know how to do parenting properly which leads to disasters in the end. Children who view violence on screen are more likely to show aggressive behaviour, and to fear that the world is scary and that something bad will happen to them.

Young children are easily frightened by violent images because they don't yet understand what is real and what is made believe, simply telling them that violence isn't real won't help. Behaviour problems, nightmares, and trouble sleeping may happen after children watch violence on screen. Characters on TV and in video games often show risky behaviours — like drinking alcohol, using drugs, and smoking cigarettes — as cool, fun, and exciting. When

these things seem acceptable, children and teens might be tempted to try them. That might lead to substance abuse problems.

"Here lemme take a photo of you..."

Cyber bullying is another rising problem in the UK and other parts of the world. Any type of bullying can have physical and psychological effects on a child. Anxiety, fear, behavioural issues, and academic struggles are just some of the few challenges children may experience if they are targets. Cyberbullying, however, may be particularly damaging. There are several possible reasons for this. For example, unlike traditional bullying—which is often limited to school and known bullies—cyberbullying can occur at any time, day or night, and can happen to anyone. This makes it more relentless and, often, more cruel. Online chat rooms are also another reason for cyber-bullying. Let's say that your daughter and her group of friends are in a group chat and then her so-called 'friends' plan to go to a party, and don't invite her. That would be heart-breaking for you as the parent and you would definitely want to take action to help your daughter, right? This causes children to become depressed, and they are hiding their feelings from their parents. Another problem

here is that some children are sending 'nudes' for fun to show their friends and sometimes that ends up going horribly wrong. The government has issued guidance to schools on Keeping Children Safe in Education 2016 and the school should have a formal procedure for dealing with sexting, which is often referred to as sending 'nudes' or 'naked pics'. According to a recent report published in JAMA Paediatrics, 1 in 4 children will admit to 'sexting' 24/7 access to devices, along with surging hormones and intense peer pressure, have all contributed to the rise of sexting with today's generation of teens and tweens.

"Mum, someone stole my phone"

Phone theft is common in the UK. Unsurprisingly, criminals like 'easy targets' – and young people often fall into this category. A recent study found that most parents believed 11 was the ideal age to be given a phone, and a quarter of children under six years old already had one. However, this has had a knock-on effect, and the number of young people affected by mobile phone theft is also increasing. There are many reasons why children are an appealing option for criminals. For starters, they are less likely to be aware of the risks. Many devices have been snatched from an easy-to-access school blazer pocket, or taken when the device was left on a café table and the young owner was distracted. Another one of the main reasons for rising phone theft among children – the value of the device itself. Nowadays, children usually want the latest Samsung or Apple phone, and these are worth

a lot of money. Thieves see this as a great opportunity, as it's far easier to resell high-value items.

Just be patient parents, and don't let your kid control your decision...

When I began to write this article, I was hoping to reach out to the parents of the UK about the alarming stories I'd read and heard about children and smartphones. However, the research really does paint a clear picture. Study after study confirms that smartphones—and the apps children access on them—are highly addictive. Here is one important tip parents need to know before getting children a phone:

Facilitate a real-world connection. Young people feel an intense need to spend unstructured time together. If they can't connect in person, they'll want to do it online. Create opportunities for children to gather in real life. Even if you're overscheduled. Even if you're the only parent who ever offers to drive. Sometimes cell phones actually make your children safer. Some phones can be tracked by GPS with phone tracking apps, so you always know where your child is. This can come in handy if they ever get lost. Plus, phones have some extra safety features built-in as well.

"Just wait for your children to come of a reasonable age, then you can give them a phone if you decide to. It's just an easier way to keep your child safe from the outside world and internet until they are ready to understand what's going on"- Nzilani Haynes.