

Dear Parents,

I mentioned at Back to School Night that I would be referencing Jonathan Haidt's book, *Anxious Generation*. I strongly encourage you to read it yourself, but I will also be summarizing each Chapter and pointing out how it relates to our precious students. Hopefully, you find this worthwhile and relevant.

This book tells the story of what happened to the generation born after 1995, popularly known as Gen Z. " Gen Z became the first generation in history to go through puberty with a portal in their pocket that took them away from people nearby and into an alternative universe that was exciting, addictive, unstable and unsuitable for children and adolescents." (pg.6)

### **Chapter 1 (Summary as stated by Jonathan Haidt on pg. 44 and 45)**

Between 2010 and 2015, the social lives of American teens moved largely onto smartphones with continuous access to social media, online video games, and other Internet– base activities. This (as referenced in his book) is called The Great Rewiring of Childhood, and is the single largest reason for the title wave of adolescent mental illness that began in the early 2010s.

The first generation of Americans who went through puberty with smartphones, (and the entire Internet) in their hands became more anxious, depressed, self harming, and suicidal. We now call that generation Gen Z, in contrast to the millennial generation, which had largely finished puberty when the Great Rewiring began in 2010.

The Title wave of anxiety, depression, and self harm hit girls harder than boys, and it hit preteen girls hardest of all. **(This is where Jonathan Haidt's data becomes relevant to me as a Principal of preteen girls. Unfortunately, I am seeing evidence of the increase of these very things in our students)**

The mental health crisis has also hit boys. Their rates of depression and anxiety have also increased a lot, although usually not by as much as girls. Boys' technology use and mental health difficulties are somewhat different from those of girls. (This will be addressed in Ch. 7) **( I have also become aware of many more boys exhibiting signs of depression and anxiety - not related to the learning at hand and not just as a one time "bad day")**

Suicide rates in the United States began rising around 2008 for adolescent boys and girls: they rose much higher in the 2010s.

The increase in suffering was not limited to the United States. The same pattern is seen at roughly the same time among teens in the UK, Canada, and other major Anglosphere countries, and also in the five Nordic nations. Feelings of alienation in school rose after 2012 across the Western world. Data is less abundant in non-Western nations, and the patterns there are less clear.

No other theory has been able to explain why rates of anxiety and depression surged among adolescents in so many countries at the same time and in the same way. Other factors, of course, contribute to poor mental health, for the unprecedented rise between 2010 and 2015 cannot be explained by the global financial crisis, nor by any set of events that happened in the United States or in any other particular country.

How, exactly, does a phone -based childhood interfere with child development and produce or exacerbate mental illness? To answer that question, we must first consider what childhood is and what children need to do in order to develop into healthy adults. That is my (Michael Haidt's) goal in part two of this book. I'll tell the backstory to the Great Rewiring, which is the gradual loss– beginning in 1980s – of the play- based childhood.

**CH 2 Summary Coming Soon**