# THE ANXIOUS GENERATION
## (PART 4: COLLECTIVE ACTION)

**Haidt's Ladder of Collective Action:**

Change happens on multiple levels:

1. **Individual Rules** – e.g. a parent waits to give their child a smartphone
2. **Family Norms** – shared boundaries like tech-free dinners
3. **Peer Group Agreements** – "no phones at sleepovers"
4. **School Policies** – locked phones during the school day
5. **Community Movements** – parent pledges or tech-free groups
6. **National Policy** – e.g. age verification for social media

## For young children (ages 0-5)

- Focus on a healthy environment, good nutrition, and loving adults
- Time to play, time to interact with others and with the world is critical
- Free play with children of mixed ages
- Not every second needs to be optimized, but what you do matters more than what you say (*in other words, be a good role model!*)
- Provide them with responsibility
- Delay screen use, which impacts learning abilities (video calls, in moderation, can be okay)
- Avoid using screens either before bed, as a way to keep them busy, or to soothe difficult emotions

## For elementary- or middle school-aged children (ages 6-13)

- Get experience by doing things together (e.g. play) or with adults in their real-word community
- Practice letting them out of your sight without having a way to reach you
- Encourage sleepovers without micromanaging or phones present
- Encourage walking to school in a group
- Free play after school
- Go on camping trips
- Find a sleepaway camp with no devices or safetyism – instead, it embraces independence and responsibility
- Form child-friendly neighbourhoods by banding together with neighbours
- Use parental controls and content filters
- Focus on maximizing in-person activity and sleep
- Clearly structure the day or week (e.g. a regular digital Sabbath every week)
- Look for signs of addiction or problematic use
  - If needed, consider a digital detox or dopamine reset

## For teens in high school (ages 13-18)

- Increase their mobility (i.e. by mastering the modes of transportation)
- Rely more on them at home through errands, chores, and responsibilities
- Encourage them to find a part-time job
- Find ways for them to nurture and lead (e.g. helping younger kids builds empathy)
- Consider exchange programs in high school
- Allow them to seek bigger thrills in nature (e.g. rock-climbing, hiking, etc.)
- Take a gap year after high school
- Find non-parental role models

## For adults (ages 19 and up)

- Allow yourself to have times of silence, stillness, and even boredom
  - Let yourself do nothing (no podcasts, music, scrolling, etc.)
- Create phone-free areas or times
- Interrupt the reward pathway in your brain
  - Use grayscale or app limits to make scrolling less rewarding
- "Audit" the apps that you use
  - Which ones give you energy or value? Which ones leave you feeling anxious, depleted, or numb? How much time do you spend on each app?
- Replace, don't just remove – fill your time with more meaning and value in place of old habits
  - Pick up a new hobby or revisit an old one
- Curate your digital feeds by choosing what to follow and unfollow
- Focus on a single task at a time, rather than multi-tasking
- If you play video games, game with intention
  - Set time limits before you start
  - Choose games that challenge or connect you with others, rather than numb your emotions

**Consider the following commitments, or create your own:**

- Screen Sabbath
- No screens for the hour after waking up and before bedtime
- Go out for fresh air or spend time in nature regularly – e.g. take an "awe walk"
- Tech-free meals

## Foundational reforms

1. No smartphones before high school
2. No social media before 16
3. Phone-free schools
4. More unsupervised play and childhood independence
5. Encourage open conversations about the risks of smartphones and social media
   - Listen to their thoughts
   - Have an honest conversation about addictive/problematic use

## Family

1. What kinds of changes have worked in your family?
2. What challenges have you (or families you know) faced when trying to limit screen time or delay phone access?
3. Haidt suggests delaying smartphones until high school and social media until age 16.
   - *Is this realistic in today's culture? What might make it more achievable?*

## School

4. Do you support schools banning phones during school hours?
   - *What benefits or pushbacks do you foresee?*

## Community

5. What are small, practical ways that our community can encourage outdoor play, social interaction, and tech-free time for kids?
6. How do we balance real safety concerns (e.g., kids needing phones to check in) with the need for independence and free play?

## Broader reflection

7. What's one realistic action you could take in your family, school, or community this month based on what you've read?
8. Now that you've finished the book, what are your biggest takeaways?
   - *What have you learned?*
   - *What stood out to you?*
   - *What do you disagree with?*

## Pledge Form: Reclaiming Real Life

This is a commitment to reduce the harm of excessive screen time and digital distraction – for ourselves, our children, or our families. By signing this, I'm choosing to be more intentional with my time, energy, and attention.

**Name:** _____ **Date:** _____

**Why I'm taking this step:**

**I pledge to:** **Instead of screen time, I will try:**

**I'll commit to these changes for:**

3 weeks 3 months 6 months Other: _____

**Accountability Partners** – having people to check in with makes change more sustainable.

| Name | Phone number/email |
|---|---|
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**What I'm hoping to gain:**

# Family Agreement

We, as a family, recognize the impact of screens, smartphones, and social media on our attention, relationships, sleep, and mental well-being. Together, we agree to build healthier habits and support each other in protecting what matters most.

We are making this pledge to protect what we care about. We value (check all that apply or write your own):

- [ ] Presence
- [ ] Connection
- [ ] Play
- [ ] Learning
- [ ] Rest
- [ ] Health
- [ ] Creativity
- [ ] Faith
- [ ] Kindness

- [ ] Responsibility
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]
- [ ]

As a family, we agree to make the following changes:

Fun replacements for screen time – let's list activities we'll try instead of defaulting to screens:

By signing, we agree to support each other with commitment and care.

**Parent/Guardian(s):**

**Date:** _____

**Child(ren):**