



Smartphone Free Childhood T&T: Safeguarding Childhood in a Digital Age

Across Trinidad and Tobago, parents, educators, healthcare professionals, and community leaders are increasingly asking the same question: **What impact are smartphones and social media having on our children?**

For many years, the conversation centered on “screen time.” Today, the evidence suggests that the issue is far broader. It is about childhood development, mental health, learning, sleep, social relationships, and child safeguarding. Increasingly, medical professionals and policymakers around the world are recognizing that unrestricted smartphone and social media access among children and young adolescents presents risks that deserve serious attention.

It is for this reason that we are launching **Smartphone Free Childhood Trinidad & Tobago (SFC T&T)**—a community-based initiative dedicated to helping families, schools, and policymakers establish healthy boundaries around smartphone and social media use for children under the age of 16.

Our goal is not to demonize technology. Technology has transformed education, communication, and access to information. Rather, our mission is to ensure that technology serves children, rather than allowing children to become captive to technologies that were never designed with their developmental needs in mind.

Around the world, a growing movement of parents is choosing to delay smartphones and social media, arguing that childhood should be shaped by families, schools, friendships, play, and community—not by algorithms optimized to maximize engagement.

Healthcare professionals across the globe are sounding the alarm! The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges in the United Kingdom has called for online harms to be treated as a child health issue, citing growing concerns about anxiety, sleep disruption, exposure to harmful content, body image

pressures, and other technology-related harms among young people. The organization has recommended that clinicians routinely discuss online activity as part of children's health assessments.

Educators are raising similar concerns. Across North America and Europe, schools are rethinking technology-heavy learning environments after reports of decreased attention spans, increased distractions, and concerns from parents about excessive screen exposure. Some school systems have begun reducing device use and reinstating more traditional classroom practices, while a growing number of jurisdictions are implementing school-day smartphone restrictions.

Parents, meanwhile, often feel trapped. Many recognize the risks but fear that if they delay smartphones or social media, their child will be left out socially. This is one of the most important reasons Smartphone Free Childhood movements have emerged internationally. When families act together, they create new social norms that remove the pressure on any single parent to "go it alone."

Smartphone Free Childhood T&T seeks to build that same collective support network here at home.

Our work will focus on three key audiences.

First, parents. We will provide education, resources, and practical strategies for delaying smartphones and social media, establishing healthy digital boundaries, and creating family cultures that prioritize real-world experiences, relationships, and wellbeing.

Second, educators. We will engage schools and educational leaders in discussions about the role of smartphones in learning environments, the impact of social media on student wellbeing, and strategies that support attention, engagement, and healthy development.

Third, policymakers. We will advocate for evidence-informed policies that prioritize children's health and safety. Around the world, governments are actively examining issues such as age verification, restrictions on addictive platform features, social media access for minors, and smartphone use in schools. Trinidad and Tobago should be part of that conversation.

Importantly, Smartphone Free Childhood T&T is not calling for children to be disconnected from the modern world. We recognize that digital literacy is essential. However, there is a meaningful difference between teaching children to use technology and granting unrestricted access to platforms that employ autoplay, infinite scroll, personalized content feeds, and other features specifically designed to keep users engaged for as long as possible. Many experts now argue that these design features are particularly problematic for developing minds.

Childhood is a brief and precious stage of life. It should include opportunities to build friendships face-to-face, engage in physical activity, develop resilience, explore creativity, and experience the natural world without constant digital interruption.

The question before us is not whether technology belongs in our children's lives. It is whether we are willing to establish thoughtful boundaries that allow children to develop first and connect digitally second.

Smartphone Free Childhood T&T believes the answer is yes.

By bringing together parents, educators, healthcare professionals, faith leaders, youth-serving organizations, and policymakers, we can create a national conversation focused on protecting childhood, strengthening families, and ensuring that the next generation grows up healthy, connected, and prepared for the future.

Because safeguarding children has always been a shared responsibility. In the digital age, that responsibility must extend to the devices and platforms that increasingly shape their world.

For more information contact sfctt@protonmail.com, phone 8683832674 and visit our website at <https://smartphonefreechildhoodtt.org> com to join the movement and sign the parent pact.