



CATCH

HOW-TO GUIDE:

4 Actionable Ideas for
Freeing the Anxious Generation

Dr. Lisa Novak, Psy.D.



Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 1
1 How to Disengage from Technology	Page 2
2 How to Promote Independence	Page 3
3 How to Engage Community	Page 4
4 How to Take Action	Page 5
Conclusion & Resources	Page 6

Introduction

Based on insights from *Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt, this guide offers practical strategies for parents, teachers, and caregivers to reduce technology dependence, foster independence, and cultivate healthier habits in kids and teens. Together, we can empower the next generation to live with less anxiety and greater resilience.

1 How to Disengage from Technology

Helping kids and teens step back from constant screen time starts with intentional changes at home and in the community. This section provides strategies to create healthy boundaries with technology and foster real-world connections.

Explain the “Why”

Start age-appropriate, regular conversations about the potential harms of smart phones/social media use.

- Discuss how activities (like scrolling social media) affect emotions.
- Ask reflective questions such as: “How did you feel after that hour on Instagram compared to playing outside or reading?”

Model Good Habits

Lead by example to set and maintain a family standard.

- Establish phone-free zones (e.g., mealtimes, bedrooms) for everyone in the family.
- Use centralized charging stations to encourage phone breaks. (like the kitchen vs. the bedroom)
- Avoid giving phones as birthday or holiday gifts—so that children know the phone is yours, not theirs.

Promote Real-Life Experiences

Encourage activities that build connection and creativity.

- Plan hands-on projects like a family game night.
- Host phone-free playdates and sleepovers.
- Keep a list of ‘thought-provoking questions’ and games on hand for down time. (e.g., waiting for food at a restaurant, sitting in traffic, etc.)
- Practice interpersonal skills by encouraging phone calls instead of texts.

HOW-TO GUIDE:

4 Actionable Ideas for Freeing the Anxious Generation



Maintain Oversight

Take proactive steps to balance access and responsibility.

- Set parental controls and screentime limits on devices.
- Use tools like timers or curfews to limit screentime.
- Mirror devices to a shared screen, like a TV, to maintain visibility.

Organize and Spread the Word

Collaboration amplifies impact.

- Talk to other parents about shared technology rules.
- Review and advocate for school-wide technology policies.



What is one small change can you make this week to reduce technology reliance in your family?

2 How to Promote Independence

Building independence is key to developing resilience and confidence in our kids. Encouraging free play, reducing dependence on technology, and embracing challenges help young people navigate life with greater self-assurance. These ideas focus on empowering kids to take ownership of their decisions and actions.

Minimize Tech Reliance

Foster autonomy and responsibility.

- Opt for low-tech tools like walkie-talkies or flip phones to stay connected with kids.
- Trust kids to report grades and manage schedules without constant tracking and monitoring.

Encourage Free Play

Unstructured time fuels creativity and confidence.

- Refrain from overscheduling.
- Allow for regular periods of downtime or boredom.
- Provide materials for play without giving instructions or dictating the outcome.
- Network to find other parents interested in more 'free range' parenting policies.

HOW-TO GUIDE:

4 Actionable Ideas for Freeing the Anxious Generation



Adopt a Growth Mindset

Empower kids to navigate challenges.

- Normalize making mistakes, having minor accidents, getting in a 'jam' and resolving it on their own, and working through conflicts with friends on their own.
- Praise effort and persistence, not just outcomes.



What is one task you could hand over to your child to help them build confidence?

3 How to Involve Your Community

Whether it's implementing small adjustments at home, working with schools, or building community support, every effort matters. This section highlights ways to grow your comfort with these practices and involve others in creating a positive impact for the next generation.

Expand Your Comfort Zone

Start small and build toward lasting change.

- Reflect on your own level of comfort with new practices.
- Seek out methods for coping with your kids' distress.
- Take small steps rather than making sweeping changes.

Engage with the Neighbors

Change grows through collective effort.

- Connect with like-minded families.
- Host or join discussions, documentary screenings (e.g., Chasing Childhood or Screenagers), or workshops.

Partner with Schools

Collaborate with educators to embed these practices in academic settings.

- Engage with school, district, and PTO leaders.
- Support curriculum that prioritizes emotional well-being.



Who is one person you could collaborate with to make these ideas more impactful?

4

How to Take Action

Taking even one step from this guide can make a difference and you're helping to equip the next generation with the skills to thrive. Start small, stay consistent, and celebrate progress—together, we can create a brighter, more balanced future for our kids.



Disengage from Technology

1. **Create a phone-free zone:** Start with one area in your home, like the dining table, that is phone-free.
2. **Set a charging station:** Designate a communal spot (e.g., the kitchen) for overnight device charging to reduce bedroom screen use.
3. **Plan one tech-free activity:** Schedule a family board game night or outdoor play this weekend.



Promote Independence

1. **Assign a responsibility:** Choose one manageable task, like packing lunch, for your child to own.
2. **Let kids solve small problems:** Resist the urge to intervene immediately; guide them to think of solutions on their own.
3. **Praise effort, not outcome:** Compliment kids on their persistence when tackling challenges rather than focusing solely on results.



Involve Community

1. **Start with one change:** Pick a single strategy from the guide (e.g., setting a timer for screen time) and commit to it for a week.
2. **Share your goal:** Discuss the change with your family or friends to build accountability and shared understanding.
3. **Connect with others:** Talk to other parent about their approach and consider aligning strategies for consistency.

HOW-TO GUIDE:

4 Actionable Ideas for Freeing the Anxious Generation



*What change would make the biggest difference in your family?
How will you celebrate progress, no matter how small?*

Conclusion & Resources

Share this guide, start conversations, and take meaningful steps to create a world where our kids grow up with less anxiety and more joy. Here are references designed to support families in fostering resilience and reducing anxiety in youth. Explore these materials to deepen your understanding and take meaningful steps toward positive change.

The Anxious Generation

by Jonathan Haidt

Offers research-based insights and solutions about the youth mental health crisis.

Let Grow Project

Promotes independence and resilience in kids through practical tools and activities.

Screenagers Documentary

Offers resources for parents, schools, and communities to facilitate discussions and create healthier tech habits.

Wait Til 8th

Encourages parents to delay giving their children smartphones until at least 8th grade with resources and tools.

Chasing Childhood Documentary

Encourages a return to free play and autonomy to promote mental health and well-being.

CATCH How to Reverse the Youth Mental Health Crisis Event Summary

Highlights key takeaways, tools, and insights to support families from the September 30th program.

Common Sense Media

Provides advice on screen time, social media, and age-appropriate content.

CATCH, Community Action Together for Children's Health, is a 501(c)3 that provides support and education for families around mental health topics. Original content and materials from CATCH and its collaborators are for informational purposes only. They are provided as a general resource and are not specific to any person or circumstance.