

Debating Haidt: Evaluating the Arguments & Examining the Rhetoric



The U.S. Surgeon General recently called for warning labels on social media to alert parents and children of the dangers to adolescent mental health. Jonathan Haidt has done more than any other scholar to make the case that social media damages teen mental health and serious reforms are needed. His work, along with SDSU's Jean Twenge's, has been highly influential. But it has also been controversial, with many objections.

In groups, students will select a text(s) from the list below. Groups will give an account of a text, acting as either "prosecutors" or "defense lawyers" for the position. Rival groups will take opposing positions. All groups will have a turn defending their text and prosecuting rivals.

The Case for the Affirmative

1. Haidt, "[Get Phones Out of Schools Now](#)," *Atlantic*, June 6, 2023.
2. Haidt (2022). [Testimony to Senate Judiciary Committee](#). This 12-page document lays out his claims and evidence point by point. [Video of his testimony](#) (starts minute 50:24).
3. Twenge and Haidt, "[This Is Our Chance to Pull Teenagers Out of the Smartphone Trap](#)"
4. Haidt, "[Yes, Social Media Really Is a Cause of the Epidemic of Teenage Mental Illness: Two major problems with a review in Nature.](#)"
5. Vivek H. Murthy, Surgeon General: [Why I'm Calling for a Warning Label on Social Media Platforms](#)
6. Zach Rausch "[Responses to Three Challenges to the International Youth Mental Health Crisis](#)"

The Case for the Negative

1. Eric Levitz "[Did smartphones actually "destroy" a generation?](#)" VOX, Apr 12, 2024.
2. Mike Masnick, "[Social Media Actually Provides Value.](#)" *Techdirt*, Mar 29th 2023.
3. Candace Odgers, "[The great rewiring: is social media really behind an epidemic of teenage mental illness?](#)"(2 pages) *NATURE*, 29 March 2024
4. Matti Vuorre and Andrew K. Przybylski, "[Estimating the association between Facebook adoption and well-being in 72 countries.](#)"
5. Ferguson, "[Social Media: The Moral Panic](#)"
6. David Wallace-Wells, "[Are Smartphones Driving Our Teens to Depression?](#)"

Additional Resources

Much of the current debate around social media, mental health, and whether to restrict smartphone use, appears on Haidt and Raush's web site, <https://www.afterbabel.com/>. There they share their research, challenges to it, and their rebuttals. For example, here is a recent, controversial one "[Why the Mental Health of Liberal Girls Sank First and Fastest.](#)"

Video/Text Debate

The [video debate](#) between Jonathan Haidt and Robby Soave. Soave is a journalist. Sponsored by Reason, a libertarian organization/think tank.

Segments: *Opening:* 4.15 - 11.00, 14.00 - 16.11; *Debate:* 17 - 27; *Question each other:* 42-46; *debate closing* - 48.31 - 52.

Haidt at Reason talk/debate (informal debate with an academic towards end)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ssJbKE55rY>

Cadice Odgers Vs Jonathan Haidt (in-depth academic debate centered to a large extent on modelling and statistical methods) <https://tyde.virginia.edu/livestream-odgers-haidt/>

Stephanie M. Lee, "Jonathan Haidt Started a Social-Media War. Did He Win? How a fight about science and screens got messy, fast." *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

<https://www-chronicle-com.libproxy.sdsu.edu/article/jonathan-haidt-started-a-social-media-war-did-he-win>