

Chapter 2

ONLINE SUPPLEMENT

WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO DO IN CHILDHOOD

In this chapter, I showed how human childhood is very different from that of any other species. Our “slow-growth childhoods” facilitate cultural learning, positioning childhood as an apprenticeship to acquire skills vital for cultural success. I emphasize the role of free play in cultivating and internalizing this cultural knowledge. But play-based childhoods were replaced by phone-based childhoods in the early 2010s as children and adolescents moved their social lives and free time onto internet-connected devices, stunting their development.

In this document, Zach and I provide the original, color graphs from the chapter, updated with the latest data. We’ll continue to update these figures. Additionally, you’ll find supplementary graphs that provide additional nuance and insight that were streamlined out of the book for brevity. This document also contains links to our data sources and specific data points for our graphs. Feel free to use these graphs in essays and articles. You do not need to ask for my permission; just be sure to attribute the source as: *Source: Jonathan Haidt, The Anxious Generation, Online Supplement.*

For Chapter 2, I drew on the following collaborative review documents:

- [Free play and mental health: A collaborative review.](#)
- [Adolescent mood disorders since 2010: A collaborative review.](#)

I also drew on the following Substack Post from *After Babel*:

- [Haidt & Gray \(2023\).](#) *Play Deprivation is a Major Cause of the Teen Mental Health Crisis.*

NOTES:

- Date created: May 25, 2023, Last Updated: May 27, 2026
- In the spirit of John Stuart Mill, we hope to engage with our skeptics with good faith. Please use any of the data below for your own analyses or to replicate our work. For all data, see:
 - [Slidedeck with all graphs from this chapter.](#)
 - [Spreadsheet with all data points used to make the graphs in this chapter.](#)
 - Many of the graphs in this book come from the Monitoring the Future database. You can download the dataset used for this book on [GitHub](#).

- Please cite this document as Haidt & Rausch (ongoing). *The Anxious Generation, Online Supplement*.

If you are a researcher and would like to notify us about other data or add comments or counterpoints to this document, please request commenting access to the Google Doc, or contact Haidt directly, and he will set your permissions to add comments to the Google doc, or will paste in your comments. This document is evolving based on feedback.]

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Slow Growth Childhood

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Free Play

Teens Who Meet Up With Their Friends 'Almost Every Day' (USA, 8th, 10th, and 12th Graders)

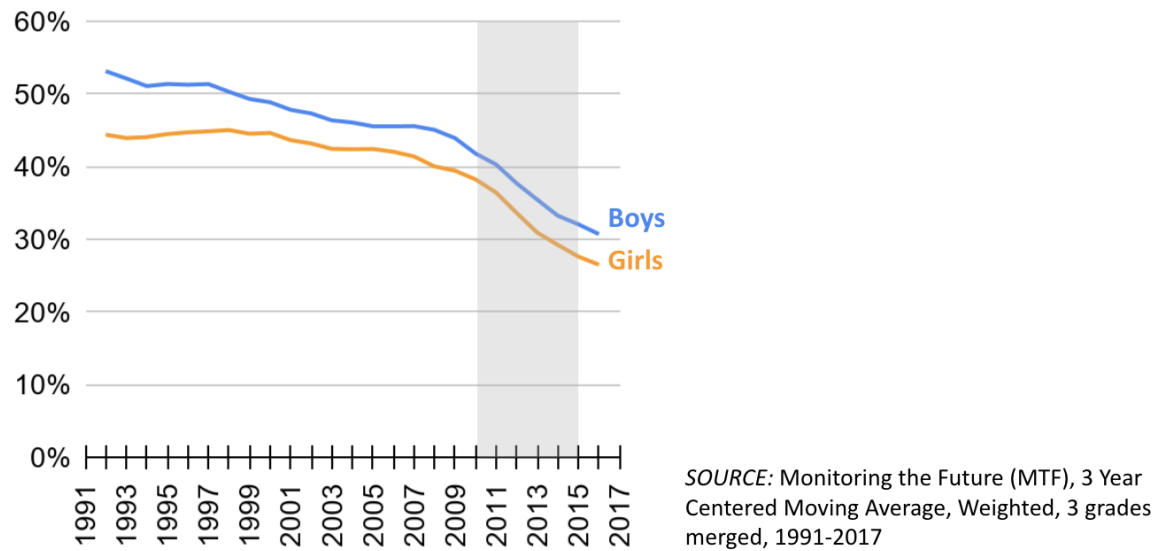


Figure S2.2.1. Percentage of high schoolers who say that they meet up with their friends “almost every day” outside of school. Three-year centered moving average (1991-2017). Source: Monitoring the Future.¹ [Weighted] [[TAG 2026 spreadsheet](#)]

¹ The wording of the item was changed in 2018 so later data is not available. The survey offered five response choices about how often students “get together with friends informally.” They ranged from “never” to “almost every day.” See further exploration in Twenge, Spitzberg, & Campbell (2019).

Teens Who Meet Up With Their Friends 'Almost Every Day' (USA, 12th Graders)

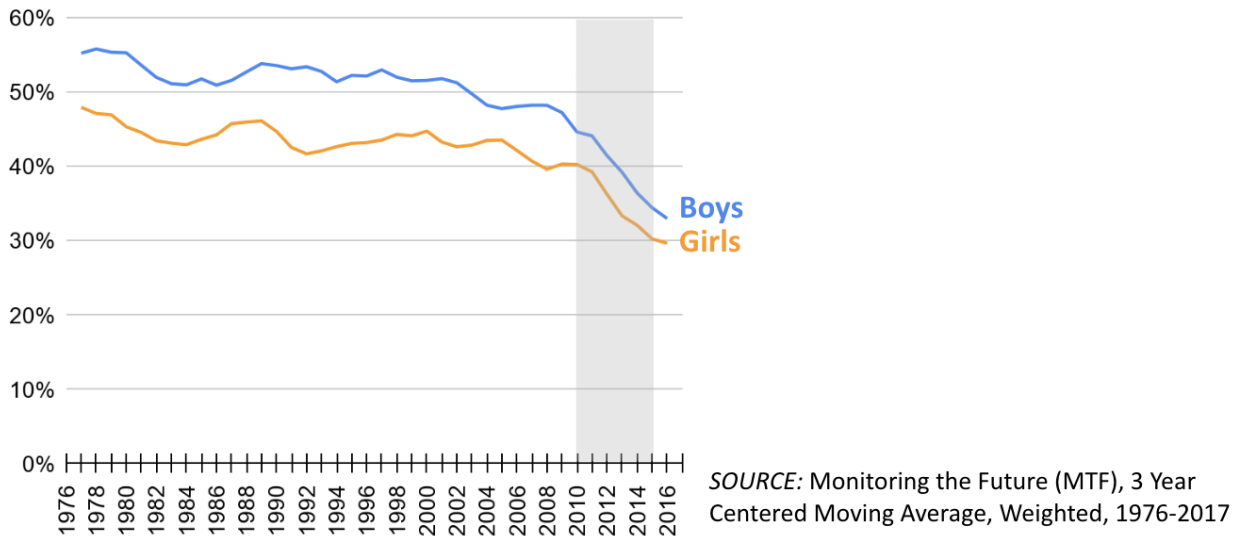
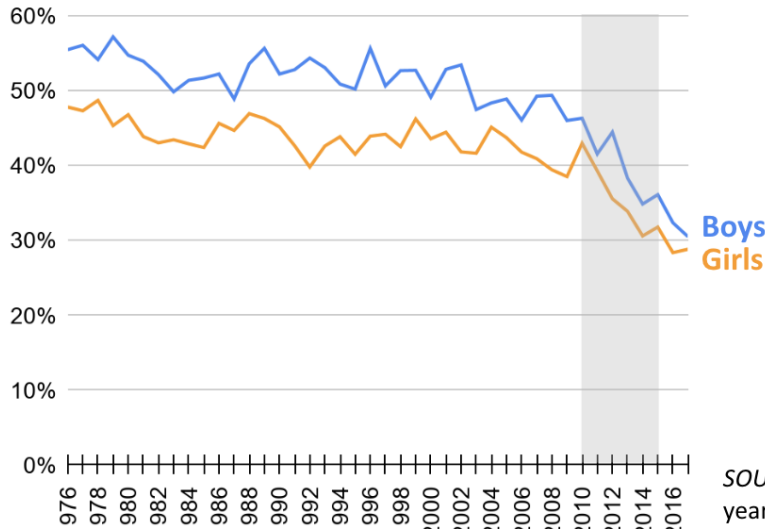


Figure S2.2.2. Percentage of high school seniors who say that they meet up with their friends “almost every day” outside of school. Three-year centered moving average (1991-2017). Source: Monitoring the Future.² [Weighted] [[TAG 2026 spreadsheet](#)]

² The wording of the item was changed in 2018 so later data is not available. The survey offered five response choices about how often students “get together with friends informally.” They ranged from “never” to “almost every day.” See further exploration in Twenge, Spitzberg, & Campbell (2019).

Teens Who Meet Up With Their Friends 'Almost Every Day' (USA, 12th Graders)



SOURCE: Monitoring the Future (MTF), 1 year buckets, Weighted, 1976-2017

Figure S2.2.3. Percentage of high school seniors who say that they meet up with their friends “almost every day” outside of school. One-year buckets (1976-2017). Source: Monitoring the Future. [Weighted] [[TAG 2026 spreadsheet](#)]

More Than 1 Evening Out for Fun Per Week (USA, 12th Graders)

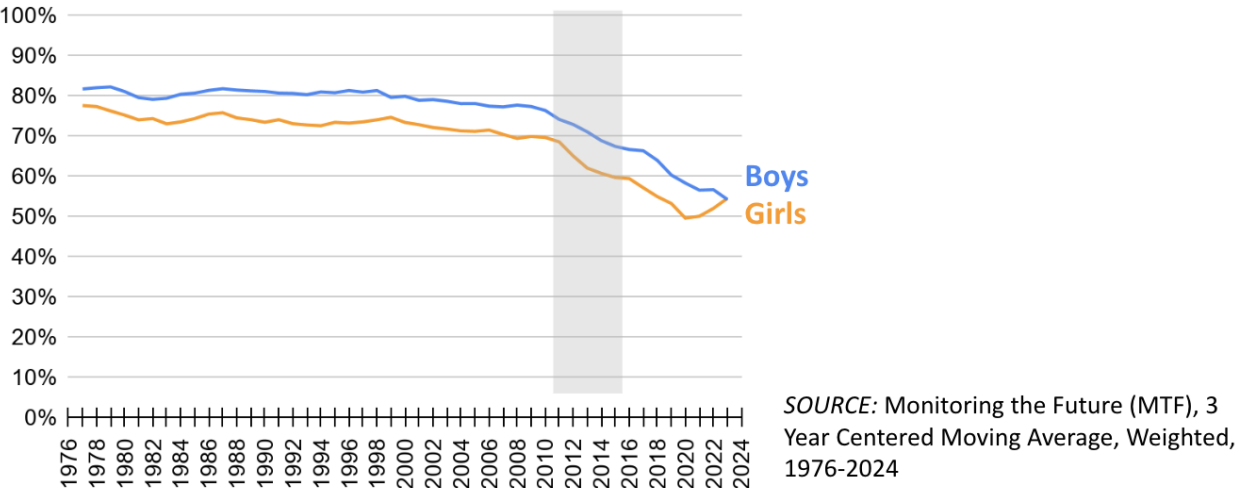


Figure S2.2.4, Percent of twelfth-graders who say they go out for fun or recreation more than once per week (Discounting things done with parents or other adult relatives). Three-year centered moving average (1976-2024). Source: Monitoring the Future. [Weighted] [\[TAG 2026 spreadsheet\]](#)

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Attunement

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Social Learning

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Expectant Brains and Sensitive Periods

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Appendices: Post-Publication Additions