Growing Up Digital:

How Screen Time Shapes Child Development
(and what to do about it!)

Connect with Dr. Carrie

January 9, 2026

Meet Dr. Carrie

Dr. Carrie Dittner is a licensed psychologist and the founder of Peak City Psychology, bringing over 20 years of experience supporting the mental health and well-being of children and families.

She earned her doctorates in Clinical and Developmental Psychology from the University of Maine, completed her internship at Duke University, and a postdoctoral fellowship at Mayo Clinic, where she later served as a faculty member.

Dr. Carrie specializes in parenting support, anxiety, ADHD, early childhood development, and chronic illness. She is trained in PCIT, CBT, ACT, and IFS. Known for her warmth, relatability, and ability to build strong connections, Dr. Carrie helps children and parents feel understood, supported, and empowered throughout their journey.
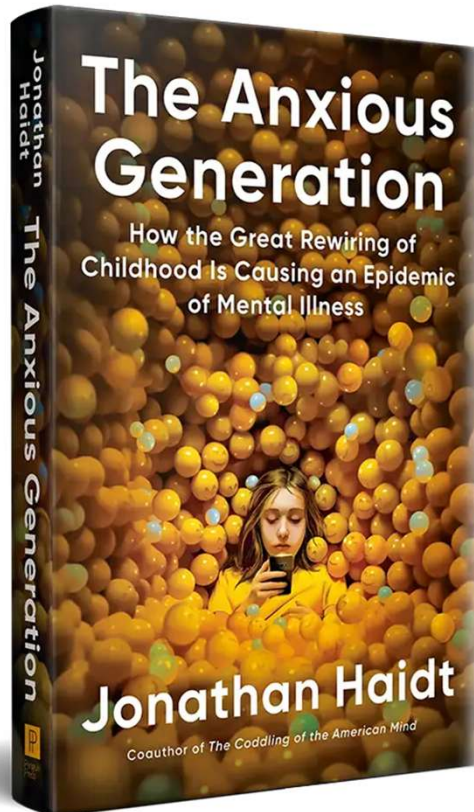
GOALS

- Understand why screens affect kids differently at different ages

- Feel less blamed and more supported

- Develop clear and doable parent strategies and general life skill

- How to live WITH technology, not eliminate

- Emphasize connection over perfection

KEY MESSAGES

- Parenting today is harder than ever – childhood itself has changed

- Anxiety IS rising

- Screens are PART of the story, not the WHOLE story

- How many of you feel screens are both helpful and stressful?

Core Ideas from The Anxious Generation

The Anxious Generation

How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness

Jonathan Haidt

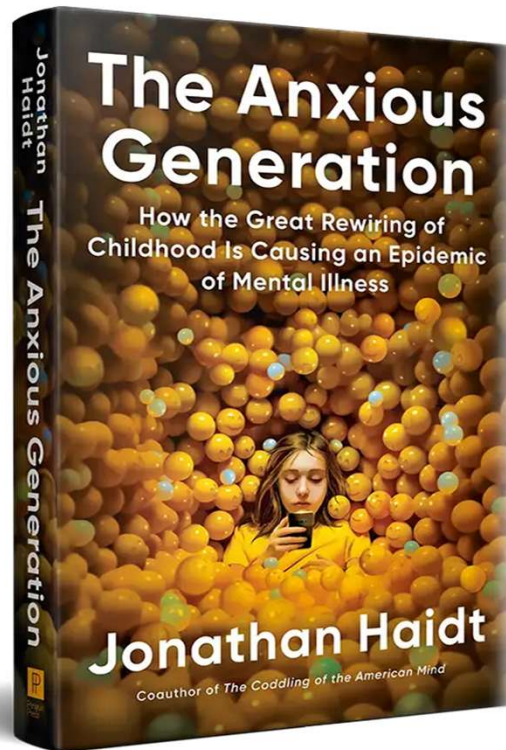Coauthor of The Coddling of the American Mind

Childhood has shifted
- Less play, more screens
- Less independence and more monitoring
- Less embodied experience

The developing brain is vulnerable
- Attention, sleep, emotion regulation, social skills
- Dopamine – "reward system"

Core Ideas from The Anxious Generation

Anxiety on the rise
- Less real world mastery
- Social comparison
- Emotional avoidance

MYTH: Screens <u>do not</u> CAUSE violence, ADHD, depression, etc.

Screens AMPLIFY vulnerability

How Screens Interact with Child Development (0-5 Years)

Here is what's happening: Sensory experience, language, attachment, regulation

Here's what goes wrong: Replaces back and forth interaction and over stimulates

Here's what to do: Minimal (if any) screen use, routines, real world play

How Screens Interact with Child Development (6–10 Years)

Here is what's happening: Attention stamina, peer skills, confidence

Here's what goes wrong: Shortened attention, difficulty with boredom, early comparison

Here's what to do: Clear limits, encourage boredom, effort over performance

How Screens Interact with Child Development (11–18 Years)

Here is what's happening: Identity formation, emotion regulation, peer belonging, independence

Here's what goes wrong: Social comparison (especially for girls), sleep disruption, avoidance of discomfort

Here's what to do: COLLABORATIVE boundaries, conversations over control, teaching coping

Harm and Gender Differences

- Social Deprivation

- Sleep Deprivation

- Attention Fragmentation

- Addiction

- Girls: Social Comparison

- Boys: "Safetyism"

PARENTING THE ANXIOUS GENERATION

What *actually helps*

Part 1: Life Skills

1. Critical Thinking – reflection, notice, assess

2. Problem Solving – what to do when I feel this way?

3. Decision Making – are screens helping me?

4. Communication: TALK ABOUT IT

PARENTING THE ANXIOUS GENERATION

What *actually helps*

Part 2: Coping Skills

1. Connection before Correction

2. Structure NOT Control
   - Bucket Analogy

3. Modeling
   - Stress & Phone Use

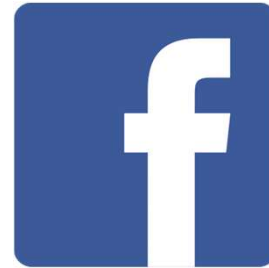4. Build REAL WORLD Confidence
   - Different ages and stages

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER AND Q&A

Connection and Skills **NOT PUNISHMENT**

"I know you want more time and this is hard, but let's figure out what is most important to do right now?"

- Keep childhood in mind!
- Teach NOT restrict
- You don't have to be perfect
- Small changes matter
- RELATIONSHIP is the strongest protective factor

FOLLOW US for MORE

@peakcitypsychology
@connectwithdrcarrie

www.peakcitypsychology.com