

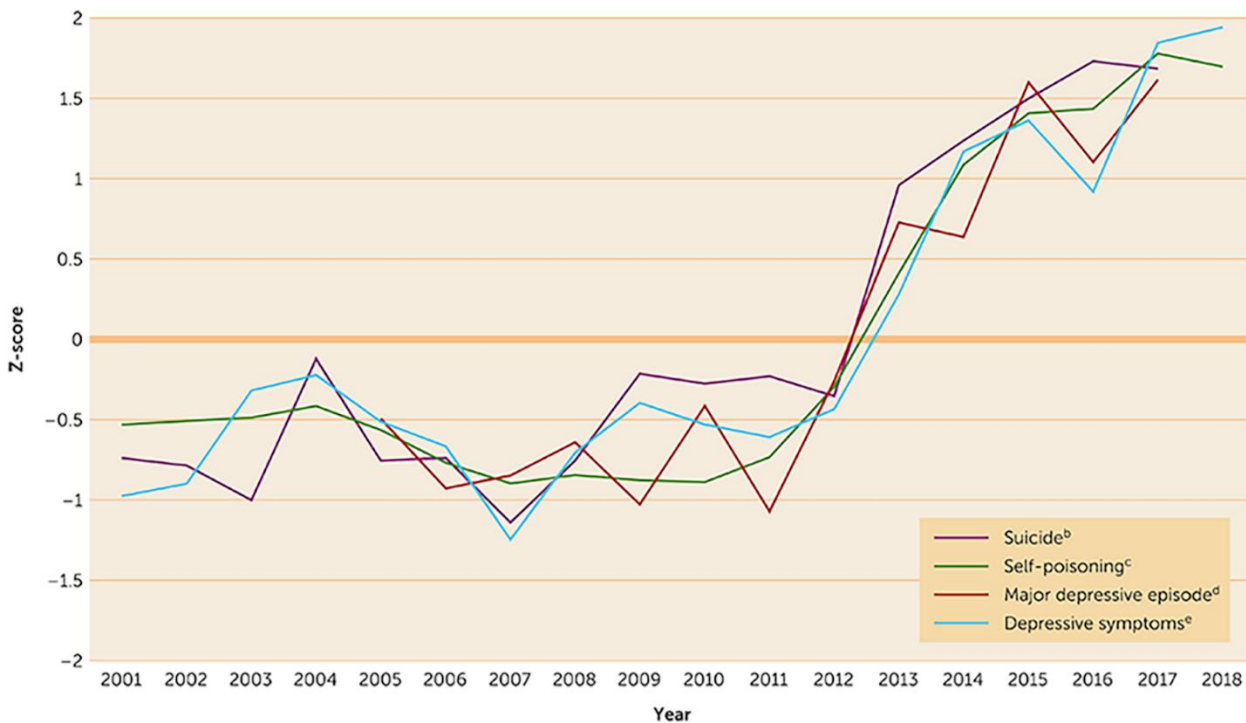
April 16, 2025

Thank you for the work you do to support our children – who by are measures are in an absolute crisis.

My name is Laura Derrendinger. I am a public health nurse and worked overseas in war zones with the independent medical organization, Doctors Without Borders before becoming a mother. My 4 children range in age from 9 to 15. There are no conflicts of interest financial or otherwise that would bias the information I share with you.

I volunteer on the leadership council of Smartphone Free Childhood USA. One of our activities is to support state lawmakers across the country to introduce the research informed model best practice phone free school legislation.

Briefly to put everyone on the same page, this graph is sourced from CDC data. When smartphones and social media product exposure became ubiquitous in the youth population, rates of youth suicide, intentional self-poisoning and major depressive episodes increased exponentially. This trend started around 2012 and predates covid.



<https://prcp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.prcp.20190015>

Independent peer reviewed literature describes social media as a **health harming product**. Leading researchers concur that there is no robust body of evidence describing health benefits to youth with exposure to these projects.

The NYC Health Commissioner in 2023 described social media as an environmental health toxin.

Hence in a public health context we can frame the best practice phone free school legislation which includes a bell-to-bell policy where the phone is locked away and not accessible as an upstream environmental prevention policy tool.

We know from the research that cyberbullying is an independent risk factor for youth suicidality.

When addressing the youth mental health crisis in a public health framework we use multiple tools to prevent harm. In this case we can include

- 1) Environmental changes such as ensuring that all schools are phone and social media free as described by the legislation you are considering.
- 2) Messaging - Most parents are completely in the dark about the harms of social media. When schools allow the use of these products parents take that as a cue that these are safe products.

The education curriculum, Kids Brains and Screens written by health providers at the non-profit, ScreenStrong.org belongs in every school.

This legislation represents a norm change as communities have gotten used to using these mobile phone and social media products for everything. But from the research and the data we know that this level of phone and social media exposure is unhealthy for our youth. It is expected that we will hear dissent. You will hear people suggest that this needs to be a local decision. One problem with this is that not all communities are at the same place in understanding the research.

With consequences this severe for the health of all children – it's our responsibility to act and implement research informed policies. We have this simple tool available now. –We can prioritize supporting our communities with education which will help move us all to a healthier norm. There are easy tools – this is being done successfully in lots of places.

