



Public Health

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To Tarrant County parents, teachers, and community members:

When I was growing up here in Ft. Worth, physicians focused their attention on safeguarding children from outbreaks of chickenpox and the flu.

Not anymore. With the digitization of everything, our concern is turning more often to their mental and emotional health. In particular, research has established that the rise of social media exposure has *caused* an increase in anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and suicide among our children. Furthermore, [sexual predators are interacting with our children](#) on social media platforms.

The evidence [has stood the test of academic challenges](#) and is now unavoidable: [the more time our children spend on social media, the more their mental health suffers](#).

While originally designed to facilitate connection, social media has often had the opposite effect. Not only that, we've all seen and heard about children experiencing disruption in their sleep and a drop in their grades.

That's why I am [joining with other leaders](#) in recommending that every school district in Tarrant County remove smartphones from classrooms. The research here is encouraging. Limiting smartphone use at school significantly [improves students' mental well-being](#).

Here I would like to applaud those districts that have already sequestered their students' smartphones, placing them in isolation until the end of the school day. I also want to recognize our legislature for passing [House Bill 18](#), which takes crucial steps to protect our children by limiting the data that social media companies can collect from them, setting curfews on usage, and empowering parents to monitor their children's online activity.

But more *must* be done.

For parents, I recommend delaying access to social media until at least the age of 16. This extra time allows for emotional and cognitive growth, helping to shield our children from social media's most harmful effects. If you want your child to have a communication device, consider getting them a flip phone, instead.

If we unite in this effort as communities - [as many youth are already doing](#) - we can ensure our children won't feel isolated or left behind.

Most importantly, make sure your children know you are a safe place to go if they find themselves in trouble due to their online activity. Sextortion and cyberbullying have caused [devastating consequences for families](#).

Finally, as adults, we have a responsibility to model healthy social media habits that our children can look up to. By setting an example, we can guide them toward more responsible use of these platforms. Joining the [No-So November challenge](#) would be a great way to start.

Together, we can strengthen our community, improve the mental health of our children, and build a better future for them.

As a parent, a doctor, and our Public Health Director,

I thank you,

W. Brian Byrd, MD

