

It's okay to be off-grid, especially if you are a kid!

Dr Lisa Hutchinson

One of the most recent letters on the [Councils, Planning & ACHES Letters](#) part of the [ACHES](#) website is the one sent to head teachers and educators in schools about the dangers of smartphones and wireless technology. A group of concerned individuals and parents took the time to contact schools across the country to advocate for reduced use of digital devices by children and adolescents in schools. Concerns about 5G and wireless telecommunications are growing, as exemplified by an [open letter](#), which is still open for signatures, that was created by musician Tim Arnold and has now been signed by hundreds – spurred on by several [high-profile celebrities](#) who protested about '5G coming to the tube'.

Tim Arnold's open letter to Sadiq Khan about the recent advertising campaign promoting the use of 5G communications on the London Underground raises many concerns about the digital norms shaping our society. A testament to these concerns is the development of disturbing health effects, emphasised by studies in the [media](#) showing that children's academic performance and emotional health improved following a break from [smart devices](#). Dr [Rangan Chatterjee](#) reported on a study with [Year 8 students](#), showing they experienced improved sleep, reduced anxiety, and stronger social abilities after 3 weeks without screens.

An important aspect that many do not realise is that smart devices emit radiofrequency radiation (RFR), which can cause harmful biological effects. There are now many studies showing that RFRs are correlated with cancers. It is the non-thermal effects of wireless radiation that causes a plethora of unwanted biological effects, including the harmful effects on mental health, learning, cognition, and chronic illnesses – in both adults and children. Children are especially vulnerable to the deleterious effects of RFRs, as their bodies are still developing, and their [skulls are thinner](#) and so more exposed to manmade radiation.

The child advocate and author, [Nicholas Kardaras](#), was shocked to discover that "...brain imaging studies conclusively show that excessive screen exposure can neurologically damage a young person's developing brain in the same way that drug addiction can". Considering these concerns, it is alarming that RFR exposures in the UK are only limited by the thermal effects noted in ICNIRP (International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection) guidelines. ICNIRP only considers whether the heating effects of RFR cause cellular damage; however, they do not consider the substantial evidence of non-thermal effects well below the threshold levels in the ICNIRP guidelines.

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In other [countries](#), such as France, Germany, Cyprus, Israel, [Sweden](#) and Russia, official bodies have warned against the use of RFRs in nurseries and primary schools. Other best practices in schools include wired connections and switching off devices when not in use.

Importantly, research shows that [RFR can damage](#) DNA, affect brain function, and contribute to mental health issues like anxiety and depression. Also of great concern is the rise of Wi-Fi technology is strongly associated with anxiety, loneliness, and self-harm among teens. The psychologist, [Jean Twenge](#), states: “And it's not just symptoms that rose, but also behaviors...including emergency room visits for self-harm, for suicide attempts and completed suicides.”

There are strong links between diagnoses of ADHD and autism in children and the EMFs emitted by the increased use of wireless and smart technologies. A brilliant [poster](#) “**IT’S OK TO BE OFF-GRID IF YOU’RE A KID!**” states “protect first, debate later”. We support [initiatives](#) such as face-to-face interactions and screen-free interactions when possible. A recent BBC Panorama video warning about Wi-Fi is a must-see: [BBC Panorama - WiFi Warning Signal - FULL VERSION \(youtube.com\)](#). This 4-minute video illustrates a simple experiment conducted by a group of school children and their teacher <https://ehtrust.org/educational-materials-for-classrooms/>

As part of our wider collaborative associations, we are working with not-for-profit organizations that promote safe technology use. The [Environmental Health Trust](#) has also developed a useful [leaflet](#) that offers practical tips for safer technology use, such as using wired connections and switching off devices at night to improve sleep and health. We encourage people to share this widely, as it contains very useful information. ACHES also supports the **International Declaration on Human Rights of Children in the Digital Age**, which [advocates](#) for children’s rights to be: 1) free from addictive devices, platforms, and apps. 2), to be protected from excessive wireless radiation exposure, and 3) to be free from commercial exploitation.

We will continue to raise awareness of these critical issues. Dr Chatterjee best sums up the concerns as follows: “We’re failing our children at the moment...we’ve allowed modern technology to creep insidiously into children’s lives. We all need to come together...and to help children change their relationship with devices.” Further helpful information can be found in the ACHES letter that has been sent to all schools across the country. It is our hope our readers will help share this important information and resources within these letters. We thank the ACHES team for this magnificent effort, which has reached the inboxes of 40,000 people across the UK. We hope our readers will join and become active within our ever-growing community.

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