

Tips for Parents:

Navigating Phones & Social Media with Your Children

In the palm of your hand, an almost-infinite supply of knowledge is just a quick scroll away, thanks to the powerful minicomputer known as the smartphone. With the smartphone, we can call, text, surf the internet, play games, read the news, broadcast our lives via social media, take photos, and share those photos with thousands, sometimes millions, of people. That tiny, shiny rectangle holds a flashlight, calculator, news, calendar, and apps for just about everything.

It's important to understand that the smartphone and its apps were developed by some of the world's brightest minds to capture our time and attention. They've intentionally engineered platforms and apps to be highly addictive through what's called persuasive design.

Why is This Important?

If we're not mindful and intentional with how we use technology, then technology will quickly use us. Our lives will not be well spent. Instead of our days being filled with laughter, adventure, rich friendships, and precious family moments, it will be a blur of endless scrolls, auto plays, notifications, and likes. This will not fill us.

In fact, research shows overuse of screens and social media depletes us. It wears on us physically with eye strain, chronic neck and back strain,

sleep deprivation and even reduces hand strength and dexterity.

One surgery professor shared in a news article that students are arriving at medical school without the hand strength and skill to perform basic medical tasks. For mental health for children, the explosion of smartphone and social media use has come with an avalanche of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and even suicide. The overuse of screens is even altering our brains! The early results of a landmark study on brain development by the National Institute of Health show children who spent more than two hours a day looking at a screen got lower scores on thinking and language tests.

Additionally, the study showed with more screen time, the brain looked physically different on MRIs. What we know from all of the research is that overuse of technology impacts us physically, emotionally and cognitively.

Always Remember the Purpose of a phone

Phones can be useful, and they certainly have their place. Unfortunately, we can quickly develop a bad habit of turning to our phones when we are bored, mad, sad or uncomfortable. To guard against this, let's zero in on what we want our phone not to be.

The phone is not....

- a boredom eliminator
- a crutch
- a pain killer or a procrastination machine.

The phone is a tool to be used for deliberate reasons such as communicating with family and friends, managing our calendar, taking a picture, researching a quick question, or mapping our way to unknown location.



Excerpted from: *Wait Until 8th. Let's Talk About Purpose.* <https://www.waituntil8th.org>.



WHEN SHOULD I GET MY KID A SMARTPHONE?

In his book, *The Anxious Generation*, Jonathan Haidt says that parents should wait until 9th grade for a smartphone and age 16 for social media access.

The Wait Until 8th organization answers the question in the name of their group, urging parents to wait until 8th grade.

In one survey, a group of teens suggested that adolescents should get their first phone between the ages of 12 and 13, out of “necessity.”

The general public in the United States answers this question with their wallets when they buy their 11.6 year old their first phone, according to Consumer Affairs.

Phones are an astonishing tool—a tool that is complex, multi-faceted, and traverses many of the domains of the human experience including productivity, relationships, finance, leisure, travel, health, and in almost every way: connection.

False Assumption One

It assumes your kid has to go from having no phone to having full access to 100% of a phone. This assumes there will be a massive leap that happens on a Christmas morning or on a birthday when your kid gets a cellophane-wrapped box from the Apple Store with an iPhone in it instead of a gradual progression of gaining more responsibility over time.

The truth is there are many, many, many “training phones” that aren’t smartphones. And there are ways to slowly give your kid more rope, so to speak. They may start with only the ability to make a call and then gradually add texting, social media, an internet browser, etc. And for that “ramping up” process, we are here to help you to be confident, ahead, and equipped.

False Assumption Two

It assumes your kid doesn’t already have access to a phone... which is probably not true.

As a mom once said to us, “My kid is only as safe as their friends’ phones.”

Even if you hold out on your kid getting a phone until they are 18, they will be influenced by the content on their friends’ phones. They may even maintain a social profile on their friends’ phones.

Having a teenager in your home can be like having a live-in IT guy who is capable of hacking your entire system at any time. You can’t beat them. That’s why the most important thing you can do is not try to create a water-tight, sin-proof, phone decalogue.

The best set of laws, firewalls, and tech-savvy protections will never redeem your kid’s heart.

What will is a heart-level, Holy Spirit-led connection between you and your teen.

Okay, so given those two false assumptions, what is our actual answer? What age is the best age to get your kid their first phone?

The Answer

We think you could get your kid their “first phone” during the middle school years (think 12 or 13) that is not an iPhone but one of the many products on the market that are designed to be a kid’s first phone (like a flip phone that doesn’t have automatic access to the internet or apps).

But this will require several family conversations and clear parameters around use—including social media.



6 PARAMETERS FOR PHONE USE

The “Wait Until 8th” initiative (mentioned above) provides the following six parameters to consider when it comes to cellphone use and your children.

Parameter 1: You are not the owner of the phone. I am the owner of the phone. I am allowing you access to this device. If the phone is not used responsibly, access will be suspended.

Parameter 2: Passwords are not secrets. It is your responsibility to share with me the password for your phone, apps, and any online platform that requires one.

Parameter 3: Nothing you do on your phone is private. Your phone will be monitored. Unfortunately, the internet does not give us the luxury of privacy. Every text message, “like,” shared photo, and social media post contributes to your digital footprint, which follows you from childhood into adulthood. The internet is forever. A careless mistake could have serious consequences for your reputation, relationships, college applications, and future job opportunities.

Parameter 4: Only parents will install or delete applications. There are more than two million apps. Many apps do amazing things. Others are problematic, inappropriate, or can lead to destructive behaviors. Some of your friends might even have a “vault” app to hide messages and photos from their parents. My job as your guide is to research any app and determine whether it adds value to your digital life or not. If you are interested in an app, let me know—we can research it and talk about it together. However, the final decision is mine. Through the parental controls on your phone, I have disabled your ability to install or delete apps on your own. If you discover any trick to install something without my permission, you will lose your phone.

Parameter 5: Internet access must be earned. The internet browser is a wonderful tool to have on your phone—eventually. Its easy access to constant entertainment (and much inappropriate content) makes it a privilege to be earned rather than a default feature. When I believe you are ready for this privilege, I will grant you internet browser access through parental controls.

Parameter 6: Parental controls are enabled on your phone. Healthy boundaries help us thrive. By setting strong parental controls, I am preparing you for success in the digital world. When parents give their children too much freedom and not enough guidance, they set them on a path toward failure. Through the parental controls on your phone, I've given you an ideal training ground to learn how to use your phone safely and in moderation. As we discussed earlier, at first, you will not have the ability to install apps, delete apps, or access the internet browser. When those privileges are eventually granted, content will still be restricted through parental controls.



8 CONVERSATION AREAS TO HAVE WITH YOUR KIDS



Axis is a Christian ministry that focuses on providing resources for parents in the digital world. You can subscribe for free to their email list and receive daily updates about the latest trends and developments in technology, along with tips on how to talk with and stay engaged with your children.

One of their resources, for example, is called “8 Conversation Areas to Have with Your Kids.” You can see a chart with these details at the end of this booklet. Visit www.axis.org for more information.

The first step is to make sure you are not rigid in enforcing these guidelines. It requires a series of ongoing conversations in the following areas:

- Non-negotiables
- Money
- Place (Location)
- Time
- Internet
- App Store
- Texting
- Social Media



QUESTIONS FOR A FAMILY CONVERSATION

Kids to Parents:

- What are your favorite parts about having a phone?
- How do you keep your phone use under control?
- Are there certain apps on your phone that are hard not to overuse?
- How do you feel when you know you're using your phone too much?

Parents to Kids:

- In what ways do you see kids using their phones for good?
- What are some examples of your friends who use their phones too much?
- In what ways do you think it will be difficult for you to use your phone in moderation?



- Our phones are a tool to be used for intentional purposes.
- Our phones are not a boredom killer, a crutch, a pain reliever, or a procrastination machine.
- People are more important than screens, and we show this with the “phone flip.”
- Because the apps on our phones are designed to be addictive, we must set boundaries to protect ourselves from getting hooked.

INTRODUCING THE PHONE STEP-BY-STEP

(Resource from [screensense.org](https://www.screensense.org))

	Home phone	Flip phone	Smart-watch for kids	Limited Access Phones	Apple Watch	Smartphone designed for kids	iPhone set up for talk & text ONLY	Then add a few non-social media apps	Delay social media apps
		 <i>A wide variety of options.</i> <i>Start here: dumbwireless</i>	 <i>Gabb</i> <i>Other brands: Gizmo Garmin Cosmo</i>	 <i>Pinwheel</i> <i>Other brands: Gabb Light WisePhone</i>	 <i>Apple Watch</i> <i>Parent or caregiver must have an iPhone</i>	 <i>Bark</i> <i>Other brand: Troomi</i>	 <i>Remove App Store, web browser, and distracting apps.</i>	 <i>Take it slowly! Carefully consider each app you allow, check in, and make adjustments. You can add the App Store with “ask to buy.”</i>	 <i>...until high school (ideally age 16), then take it slowly - ONE platform at a time.</i> <i>See our Social Media Basics for Parents here</i>
Features									
Talk	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Text		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
GPS Tracking		<i>Available on some brands</i>							
App Store				<i>Proprietary App Collection</i>					
Music									
Video Games									
Web Browser									
Social Media									

 Device can be set up for “talk and text only” - recommended until high school.

 Toggle buttons show available features that can be turned on or off.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Axis.org](https://axis.org)
- [Childrenandscreens.org](https://childrenandscreens.org)
- [Betterscreentime.com](https://betterscreentime.com)
- [Theanxiousgeneration.com](https://theanxiousgeneration.com)
- [Waituntil8th.com](https://waituntil8th.com)
- [Screensense.org](https://screensense.org)
- The Social Media Dilemma (Netflix Documentary)



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