

Help Guide: Parenting In the Digital Age¹

Considerations for why, when, and how to introduce smart phones and other devices to your children

This document available at www.northridgeprep.org/technology

Articulate WHY

Why informs how. Articulating a "why" for your approach allows you to make good decisions and explain them to your children. For consideration:

1. **We act with intention:** we want to act based on thoughtful decisions rather than impulse.
2. **Social skills and empathy are crucial to our happiness:** they are developed through in-person conversation - not screens.
3. **We act with integrity:** rather than posture online for the sake of crafting an image which is often fake.
4. **Our devices are tools:** to be used as such, not as entertainment devices.
5. **Entertainment is good when healthy and limited:** seeking it constantly retards maturity and impulse control.
6. **We protect our heart:** so that we can truly love our spouse, children, friends, and God. Sexually explicit images and messages destroy our heart.
7. **I (the parent) decide because I love you, and I am responsible for you.**
8. **A thoughtful approach is important:** technology is addictive and often harmful, so we (parents too) follow a thoughtful approach.
9. **Helpful not controlling:** this approach does not imply a lack of trust or a desire to control, rather it acknowledges both the use and allure of technology and provides guidelines that help you (and us) develop.
10. **We maintain open lines of communication:** we explain our decisions and welcome our children to talk to us about anything – if they wish – without fearing our judgement.

¹ Compiled by Rob Dunikowski (lawyer and father) and Niall Fagan (Headmaster, Northridge Preparatory School) with help of many others.

Articulate WHEN

When is your child ready to handle a device?

This question is more important than when it would be convenient for them, or their parent.

1. When can a child get a smartphone? When he/she is ready.²

A smartphone is a tool. You (son / daughter) can have full access to one when you are ready to use it as a tool, and not an entertainment device.

Signs of this maturity are:

- a. Material order: in your room, bed, clothing, book-bag, etc.
- b. Manage schedule: Do you procrastinate or are you diligent in doing what you ought? (wake up on time, ability to focus, homework well done, test prep planned and done in advance)
- c. Moral toughness: Do you do what you want or what you should?

In our experience, few of us achieve this maturity before the end of high school.

2. When can a child have Social Media? When he/she is ready.

Social media, YouTube, etc. easily become addictive, anti-social, self-focused, and a medium for inappropriate content. Signs you have the self control to handle these applications are:

All items above, plus

- a. Desire for acceptance: What your peers want or think does not exert a strong influence on you.
- b. Emotional control: You handle anger and mood swings well. You don't exaggerate or retaliate – both at home and with friends.
- c. Control of your comments: You don't gossip or speak ill of others; you speak about others in a measured, respectful manner, regardless of their actions.

In our experience, very few of us achieve this maturity until college.

² Drawn from Alvaro de Vicente at The Heights School. See <https://heights.edu/essay/smart-phones/>

Access In Stages

*Consider giving access in stages.
As a child matures, he/she can handle progressively more functionality.*

Recommended progression for a reasonably mature child:

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 8th grade: | texting & calling |
| 9th grade: | texting & calling |
| 10th grade: | texting & calling |
| 11th Grade: | } add maps, browsing, ³ email if child is ready |
| 12th Grade: | |

Most students are not mature enough to handle regular access to Social Media (Instagram, Snapchat, etc.) or YouTube until college.

What Type Of Phone Should I Give My Child?

It depends on the stage.

1. Stage: only texting & calling

At this stage, typically a “dumb phone” works best.

Alternatively, you can “lock down” a smart phone into a device that can only make texts and calls.

There are risks with this approach: You need to be technically competent enough to perform the significant setup required (see below); it may prompt frequent requests for additional applications; the photos in text messages can become akin to social media. But, it can work.

2. Stage: added functionality (e.g. maps, email, perhaps browsing)

This functionality requires a smart phone. When provided, ensure parental controls are turned on, filtering installed, and set up as described below.

³ Allowing browsing of the internet is a significant step, to be carefully made.

Develop Family Rules

Establish age-appropriate rules for all screen use (laptops, TV, video games, etc.) in your family. For consideration:

1. Screen Time

- a. Only after homework, chores, and other responsibilities complete
- b. Not after a certain hour of the night (neither computers nor phones)

2. Place

- a. Common areas only - not in the bedroom
- b. Not at dinner table (parents too)
- c. At night and when not in use (e.g., before homework): all devices left in specific place (e.g., charging station by the door or parents' room)
- d. Car: have an approach

3. Duration

- a. No more than certain amount of time per day. Consider a 1 hour maximum for the total cumulative screen time allowed. Less? Even better.

4. Consider your consequences

- a. What happens if rules are broken (loss of screen time is a typical consequence)? How should you (parent) react when this happens?
- b. How does your child earn more screen time as he matures?

Obviously, we parents need to model the behaviors we want our children to live.

Should I use a contract? Our perspective: a contract can be a helpful crutch as a start or if you're feeling desperate. Find a possible template [here](#). The risk with a contract is that it focuses on the rules rather than the child making good decisions on his/her own. In addition, it puts power in the hands of your child and removes your flexibility in assigning the degree of consequence appropriate. If you don't need one, better to avoid it and just have good conversations with your child.

How to Set Up Your Home and Devices

General Guidelines

1. Home
 - a. Internet is filtered
 - b. Parental controls turned on for each home device (TV, Xbox, etc.)
 - c. Laptops: have accountability software installed
2. Smart Phones / Tablets - *if you give them to your child:*
 - a. Only parents know the ID & Password for the parental controls on the device
 - b. Screen time is limited
 - c. Parents approve all apps
 - d. Monitoring and filtering software installed
 - e. If you allow an internet browser: Accountability software installed

Best Tools

How-to guides: ProtectYoungEyes.com

www.protectyoungeyes.com

Excellent instructions on how to set up parental controls and screen time limits on iPhones, Androids, and most home devices. It also provides a great guide to vetting apps before you approve them.

Home internet filtering & device limits:

Netgear with Circle By Disney ([see here](#))

Also good: Gryphon ([see here](#))

Monitoring of text, social media, email: Bark

<https://www.bark.us/>

Monitors all social media, text messages, and email

Accountability (and filtering): Covenant Eyes or Qustodio

<https://www.covenanteyes.com/>; or www.qustodio.com

Sets safe-search filters on devices and monitors for porn. Reports are sent regularly to an accountability partner (parent, trusted adult, etc.). Why use? Much porn bypasses internet filters (Google images, YouTube), or can be accessed in other ways. Install app on computers, phones, and tablets.

How To Setup Your Home And Devices

Implementation Steps

A. Configure your home

1. Computers in common areas

- a. Move them where they are positioned so parents can see what is on the screen

2. Home internet: set up a filter

- a. Recommended: [Netgear with Circle By Disney](#)
- b. Set up a basic level for general use by everyone on the network.
 - i. Note: recommend a “white list” approach for the basic level, meaning block all sites and then unblock specific sites as needed.
- c. For teens: when they are ready, set up a specific profile for him/her with appropriate level of filtering, and assign their devices to this profile.
- d. For adults: set up a filter level for yourself, and assign your devices
- e. Make sure to limit access to search engines and to force safe search on accessible search engines.

B. Set up your home devices and computers

1. Make list of devices with internet access

See example below. Don't forget your smart TVs and xBox (a common porn delivery vehicle).

2. Configure the parental controls on each home device

- a. Use the steps in www.protectyoungeyes.com, see “Devices”⁴
- b. Set a Password/PIN that your child does not know
- c. Go through the individual settings within parental controls

3. Install accountability software on laptops

Recommended: [Covenant Eyes](#) or [Qustodio](#)

⁴ They omit the Amazon Fire TV Stick. Click [here](#), or google “Fire Stick Parental Controls.”

C. Set up your phones / tablets (if your child has one)

1. Configure the parental controls on each phone and tablet

- a. Use the steps in protectyoungeyes.com, see “Devices”
- b. Recommended settings: (*Protect Young Eyes tells you how to do these*)
 - i. **Set Screen Time limits** (with a Pin/Password your child doesn't know)
 - ii. **Turn off the ability for child to add or delete apps**
 - iii. **Limit texting to contacts**
 - iv. **iPhone: Limit Airdrop to Contacts Only**

2. Install accountability software on each device

Recommended: CovenantEyes.com or Qustodio

3. Consider removing browsers (like “Safari” or “Chrome”)

- a. Disable until your child is mature enough to handle
- b. When mature: allow along with accountability software

4. If you've allowed your child access to social media, use a service to monitor it

Recommended: bark.us

5. Turn on parental controls for various apps

These are typically off by default (e.g. for Netflix, Youtube, Google); go app by app.

See protectyoungeyes.com for step-by-step instructions

Resources for Parents

Of the many out there, we've found these the most helpful

Articulating the WHY of your family's approach

- "[Letter from the Headmaster – Smart Phones](#)," by Alvaro de Vicente.
- *Digital Minimalism*, book by Cal Newport, articulating an approach towards tech (Georgetown computer science professor)

Device Setup How-Tos

- protectyoungeyes.com (step by step instructions for set up)
- cmgparent.org (video course on internet safety)

App & Content Reviews

- protectyoungeyes.com ("how-tos" for parental controls, app safety, etc.)
- commonsensemedia.org (app, book, and movie reviews)

Guiding Children: General

- *Father-Son Accountability: Integrity through Community*, book by John and Lucas Fort (helping dads speak to their sons about these issues)
- *Screen Strong Solution*, book by Melanie Hempe (A step-by-step guide to reducing screen access)

Guiding Children: Pornography

- purityispossible.com (online training from Harvard psychiatrist on mastering cravings, anxiety, and distraction) and FightTheNewDrug.com (well done resources)
- *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures*, book by Kirsten Jenson and Gail Poyner (ages 7-12) (children's book explaining dangers of internet pornography)
- [Chastity Project](#) – guide to dating and moral topics related to dating & porn
- *Pandora's Box is Open*, book by Gail Poyner (for parents whose child has been exposed to pornography)
- *Integrity Restored*, book by Peter Kleponis (guide book for Catholic families dealing with pornography addiction)

Parents' General Knowledge

- *iGen*, book by Jean Twenge (research by San Diego State psychology professor)
- *Irresistable*, book by Adam Alter
- "[The Flight from Conversation](#)," article by Sherry Turkle. See also [this video](#) of her lecture.
- "[Worry Over Kids' Excessive Smartphone Use Is More Justified Than Ever Before](#)," article by Jean Twenge.

List of Devices with Internet Access – Example

Take an inventory of all of the devices in your house by filling out an inventory sheet as follows:

- 1) Device Name – List the type of device and who it belongs to;
- 2) Accessed By – List who uses the device;
- 3) Wi-Fi Filtering Devices – Wi-Fi filters like Circle often permit you to create profiles with customized levels of internet filtering. In this column, list the profile that the device is to;
- 4) Parental Control Configured – In this column, check off when the parental controls have been turned on and configured; and
- 5) Accountability Software Installed - In this column, check off when the accountability software has been turned on and configured.

Example

| Device Name | Accessed By | Wi-Fi Filtering Level | Parental Controls Configured | Accountability Software Installed |
|------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Home PC | Everyone | Pre-K | Unavailable | ✓ |
| Home Laptop | Everyone | Pre-K | Unavailable | ✓ |
| Amazon Fire - Home TV | Everyone | Pre-K | ✓ | Unavailable |
| Xbox | Everyone | Pre-K | ✓ | Unavailable |
| Paul's iPhone | Paul | Teen | ✓ | ✓ |
| Paul's Laptop | Paul | Teen | Unavailable | ✓ |
| Elizabeth's iPhone | Elizabeth | Teen | ✓ | ✓ |
| Elizabeth's iPad | Elizabeth | Teen | ✓ | ✓ |
| Elizabeth's Kindle | Elizabeth | Teen | ✓ | Unavailable |
| iPad for Digital Art Lessons | Everyone | Pre-K | ✓ | ✓ |
| Mary's iPhone (Parent) | Mary | Teen | ✓ | ✓ |
| Mary's Laptop (Parent) | Mary | Teen | Unavailable | ✓ |
| John's Work iPhone (Parent) | John | Teen | ✓ | Not Permitted |