

Help Guide: Parenting In the Digital Age¹

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

Build a family that understands the role of technology

From an early age, create a family culture and expectations for technology.

Articulate the “why.” As your children grow, take opportune moments and situations to point out “why” we act a certain way, and that technology is a tool, a tool that can be used both well and poorly. This way they’ll better understand your decisions about smart phones and technology as they mature.

Recommended: Inform your children early on that you believe smartphones are a tool requiring a high level of maturity to be used well – similar to driving a car – maturity that most don’t obtain until late in high school, if ever.

Points for consideration:

1. **Act with intention:** we want to act based on thoughtful decisions rather than impulse.
2. **Act with integrity:** posting online is often done to craft an image, usually a fake one.
3. **How we develop social skills and empathy.** They’re crucial to happiness, and are developed through in-person conversation - not screens.
4. **The heart needs protecting** so that we can truly love our spouse, children, friends, and God. Sexually explicit images and messages destroy our heart.
5. **Our devices are tools:** to be used as such, not as entertainment devices.
6. **Entertainment is good, when healthy and limited:** seeking it constantly retards maturity and impulse control.
7. **Technology can be addictive and harmful:** examples to point this out will easily present themselves. Also point out the good devices can do.
8. **Why I (the parent) decide.** Because I love and am responsible for you.
9. **We set an example.** As parents, we model the appropriate (and limited) use of devices.
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 many others. Download this at: <https://northridgeprep.org/parent-university/>. Last updated: Jan 20, 2022

Develop Family Guidelines for Behavior

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

1. When

- 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.
- b. Video games: research suggests a max 40 mins / weekday; 1 hr / per weekend-day.² 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 need to model the behaviors we want our children to live.

Should I use a contract?

Our recommendation: better to avoid it and just have good conversations with your child. The risk with a contract is that it focuses on the rules rather than the child making good decisions on his/her own. Also, it puts power in the hands of your child and removes your flexibility in assigning the degree of consequence appropriate.

If you're feeling desperate, a contract may help. Find a possible template [here](#).

² *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men*, by Leonard Sax, Basic Books, 2016, p. 90.

Phone Access: Articulate WHEN³

Distinguish the types of needs: legitimate, subjective and whims.

A tool should be owned when the needs are legitimate. Calling, texting, GPS seem legitimate needs at some point in high school. Social media is usually not a legitimate need, although it may be subjectively felt to be. Online videos are whims.

When is your child ready to handle a device?

Similar to giving your child a car, not only should your child have a legitimate need for the tool, he/she also needs to demonstrate the maturity required to properly use this powerful and addictive tool.

When can a child get a smartphone?

Recommended answer: When he/she is ready.

Signs of this maturity are when you can...

- a. Manage your materials: in your room, bed, clothing, book-bag, etc.
- b. Manage your time. 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. Manage your urges. To talk, to eat, to seek entertainment, to have a phone.

In our experience, few of us achieve this maturity before later in high school.

When can a child have Social Media?

Recommended answer: When he/she is ready.

Social media, YouTube, Tiktok 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 the items above, plus:

- d. Desire for acceptance: What your peers want or think does not exert a strong influence on you.
- e. Emotional control: You handle anger and mood swings well. You don't exaggerate or retaliate – both at home and with friends.
- f. 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 – or later.

³ Drawn from Alvaro de Vicente at The Heights School. See <https://heights.edu/essay/smart-phones/>

Phone Access: In Stages

A son/daughter will have legitimate needs for tools in stages.

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

Typical recommended progression for a reasonably mature son/daughter:

8th grade:	}	texting & calling	}	<u>Pinwheel</u> , or, <u>Gabb phone</u>
9th grade:				
10th grade:				
11th Grade:	}	maps, browsing ⁴ , email <i>if ready</i>	}	Smart Phone, with controls
12th Grade:				
<i>(or Pinwheel / Gabb phone)</i>				

Can I give my child a smartphone earlier and just lock it down?

Maybe.

It is theoretically possible to “lock down” a smart phone into a device that can only make texts and calls – and whatever else you decide.

There are risks with this approach:

- It will prompt frequent requests and discussions (arguments) about access to additional applications.
- You need to be technically competent enough to perform the significant setup required (see pages below).
- You need to commit to regularly researching updates and reconfigurations as the technology evolves. Realistic?
- It is nearly impossible ensure you don't leave any “bypass” channels open.

In our experience, the lockdown approach frequently starts well but ends with largely open access. We don't recommend it till later in high school. If you choose this route, see below for resources to help.

⁴ Access to a browser is a significant step, not to be taken lightly.

Resources for Parents

Articulating the WHY of your family's approach

- “[Letter from the Headmaster – Smart Phones](#),” by Alvaro de Vicente (Headmaster, The Heights School), or, listen to his podcast [here](#).
- [Digital Minimalism](#), book by Cal Newport, for parents to articulate & develop their own approach towards tech (Georgetown computer science professor)

Setup How-Tos for the home, devices and apps

- [ProtectYoungEyes.com](#), website. By far the best guide for setting up your home & devices. Intuitive step by step instructions. Updated regularly.

Guiding Children: General

- [Father-Son Accountability: Integrity through Relationship](#), book by John and Lucas Fort (helping dads speak to their sons about these issues)
- [Tips for Talking to Your Kids about Sex](#), pamphlet by Canavox (practical; covers “what to say” and do by age group)

Guiding Children: Pornography

- [Good Pictures, Bad Pictures](#), book by Kirsten Jenson and Gail Poyner (ages 7-12) (children's book explaining dangers of internet pornography)
- [FightTheNewDrug.com](#), website (excellent, well done resources)
- [Purityispossible.com](#), website (online training from Harvard psychiatrist on mastering cravings, anxiety, and distraction)
- [Chastity Project](#), website (guide to dating and moral topics related to porn & dating)
- [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 (San Diego State psychology professor), or [this article](#) by her
- “[The Flight from Conversation](#),” article by Sherry Turkle (great on how empathy develops) or see this [video lecture](#) by her

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 for home

The following is as-of January 2022. Check ProtectYoungEyes.com for updates.

Home internet filtering & device limits: [Gryphon Router](#)

Setup & how-to guides: ProtectYoungEyes.com

Laptops porn filtering: mobicip.com or covenanteyes.com

Sets safe-search filters on devices, blocking and monitoring for porn. Reports are sent regularly. Why use? Much porn bypasses internet filters (Google images, YouTube), or can be accessed in other ways. Install app on computers, phones, and tablets.

Smartphones & Tools

Smart “Dumbphones”: [Pinwheel phone](#) or [Gabb phone](#)

These look and operate like smartphones, but are limited to calling, contacts, texting, music and (in Pinwheel) other safe but useful apps. No setup needed.

Smartphone monitoring of text, social media, email & browsers: Bark.us

Sets time & app limits. Monitors all social media, browsers, text messages, and email.

Some Detailed Suggestions

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: [Gryphon](#)
- 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”
- b. Set a Password/PIN that your child does not know

3. Install accountability software on laptops

Recommended: [Covenant Eyes](#)

C. If you give to your child: Set up their smartphones / tablets

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: bark.us

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. 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

Make a List of Devices with Internet Access

You may be surprised how many you have

Note: Bark-o-matic.com has a good resource for doing all this

Take an inventory of all of the devices in your house, it helps:

- 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 Level – Wi-Fi filters like Gryphon 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.

An 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