

# 6 Tips For Parents Before Giving Your Child A Smartphone

Huffington Post

[Jennifer C. Walton, MA, LPC, LCPC](#), Contributor

05/31/2017 05:07 pm ET Updated May 31, 2017



Children are extremely savvy when it comes to the use of electronic devices. At the youngest of ages, they appear to know how to maneuver the use of electronics better than some adults. In fact, watching a child who can barely talk turn on their favorite you tube channel can seem a tad bit scary at times. In today's society it appears that children are exposed to technology through tablets and computerized learning toys from infancy. Smart phones and tablets have become the go to devices to keep infants and toddlers occupied to avoid public tantrums due to idle time. Therefore, it only becomes a matter of time before your child will want his or her own smart phone. As a parent how do you respond to the constant daily nagging for a cell phone? And more importantly, how do you really know when your child is ready for a smartphone?

Allowing your child to have a smart phone can be a great thing for you and your child. You can instantly contact your child when you are running late for pick up, you can be contacted immediately if there is a problem at school, and you can use it as your own personal tracking device to keep tabs on your child's location. However, before allowing children to dive head first into the smart phone world, be sure to have a conversation with them about appropriate use and responsibility.

Follow these simple steps to make sure you and your children are ready for the responsibility that comes with having their own smartphone.

## 1. Set up rules and expectations

Have a conversation to inform children of the rules and expectations of cell phone use. Create a cell phone contract with clear expectations for use of the phone and, clear consequences if the contract is broken. It is extremely important that the contract is meaningful and enforceable at all times. If you treat it as just another piece of paper, children will respond to it as just an empty rule and wasted paper.

Set up time limits for phone use, and set a rule around data usage.

***Make all rules clear! Do not assume that children "should have known" something.***

Have your children turn in the phone to you at night to ensure they are getting proper sleep and not getting messaged by friends through out the night.

## **2. Warn about inappropriate texts and pictures**

You may not be prepared to have a conversation about sexual messages and pictures with your children, however if they are old enough to have a smart phone then you are trusting them enough to have a smart conversation about sexually inappropriate behaviors.

Sexting is real, it happens every day in the school environment.

Make sure your child knows what to do if they get a sexually inappropriate text or picture. Inform you child not to forward messages to friends, but to immediately tell you or a teacher.

Inform your children of the very real legal implications of sending nude pictures of themselves to someone, or forwarding a sexually suggestive picture that they may have received from a classmate.

## **3. Teach your child about cyberbullying and how NOT to be a cyberbully**

A cell phone means 24/7 access to everyone. In a pre-cell phone and pre social media era, bullies stayed at school and, what happened at school most likely stayed at school. With 24/7 electronic access a bully is now hard to escape. Inform children on steps to take if they are bullied. Know your child passwords for their phone, Instagram, Facebook, twitter, Snapchat, Kik, and any other social media app they are using.

***Know who is sending your children direct messages and the type of messages they are sending to others.***

Social media platforms, games, and group chats make it easy for kids to be bullied. Talk to them about the signs of cyberbullying, and have open conversations with them on what you and the school will do about bullying when it is reported.

#### **4. Use it as an opportunity to teach responsibility**

When children have a smart phone, they now have a major responsibility. Smart phones are an expensive item. No matter if you child has the first version of an iPhone or the Samsung galaxy 8 plus, there are a costs associated with having a smart phone.

*If you child earns an allowance have them contribute a small portion to the cost of their cell phone plan.*

As a household, brainstorm ways that you can use having a cell phone as a teaching tool to increase personal responsibility.

#### **5. Always remember it is YOUR phone**

If you buy a phone for your child, then you are allowing your child to use **your** phone. No matter what your child tells you, the phone is your property, you own it.

You do have a right to take it back, you have a right to turn off the data, and even turn off the service if you feel your child can not be responsible for your phone. Since it is your phone, it is important that you make sure you know how to use it.

*Children are smart and have amazing skills with using electronic devices, and this can be dangerous for them. Don't let your child outsmart you.*

When you give your child a cell phone make sure you know what apps they download and how to use them. Be aware of where they save pictures, texts, emails, and messages so when you conduct daily searches of the phone you know exactly what you are looking for.

Always know passwords to unlock the phone. Be aware of the phones parental controls and safety measures.

Smartphones are your child's lifeline to the world, as a parent you need to know what is going on in their world to protect them from themselves and everyone else.

## **6. Teach and model putting the phone down**

Have a set time each day to for the family to unplug from electronic devices.

*Unplugging is an important habit that we all need to practice daily.*

For many of us electronic devices are ringing, buzzing, and pinging from the time we wake up in the morning, to the time we go to bed at night. Set family time that is phone free time. Create a phone box to put everyone's phone in, then for at least 30 min to 1 hour each night try to make your home a cell phone free zone.

The use of electronic devices can quickly turn into an addictive behavior for some individuals, allow children the ability to unplug from the electronic world so they can feel re-energized and refreshed the next day.

Remember you know your child best. You are aware of child's maturity level, their friends, and their daily habits. When handing them a device that requires a great level of responsibility be sure to trust your instinct. A smart phone allows quick, instant access to everything in the real world. As a parent do your best to monitor, protect, and prepare your children so they can use their smart phone in a manner that is both safe and responsible.

