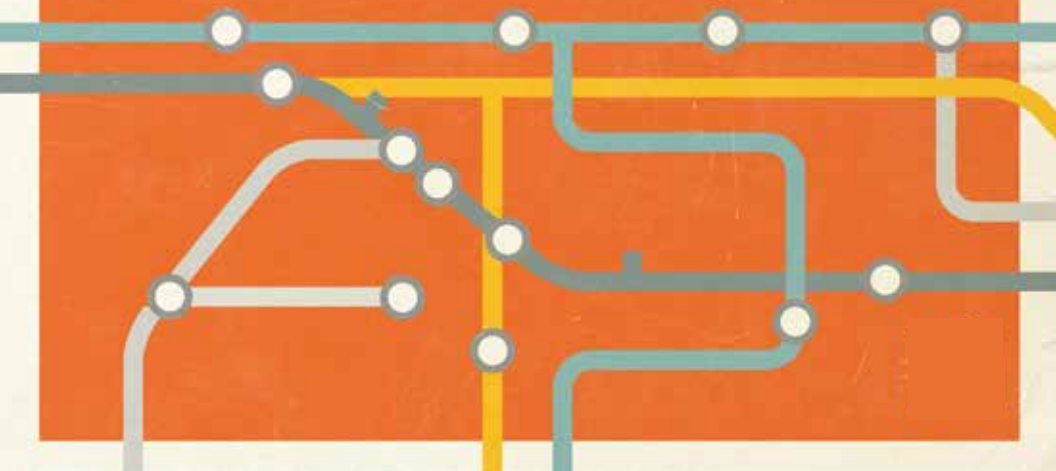


Cell Phone Discussion Guide



Dear Parents,

Your kids will live in a world where they will have to learn to live productive and quality lives in the midst of all the options (good and bad) that technology will offer them.

On top of that, you will be hypocritical! One minute we're telling our kids to get off a game site and focus on homework. Five minutes later, we're calling them over to watch a funny YouTube video we saw while "working."

We are the generation that has the stewardship of learning, on our own, how to handle this new world that our parents never could have imagined— and to pass it on to our kids. This is not new. Technology is just a new reality to add to the realities of growing up.

It's a lot like teaching a teenager to drive a car. We teach our kids to drive and, when we do, we tell them to do things we don't do very well ourselves, because we love them and want them to be safe drivers.

And just like learning to drive a car, it takes time. They'll make mistakes and we need to use those mistakes as teaching opportunities. When it comes to technology, the state doesn't issue learners' permits or require a written exam and field test. No, when it comes to technology, we're on our own. So, we've provided this Discussion Guide to help our students earn the "keys" to their technology.

Be a great example.

The best thing parents can do for their students is to be the adults you want them to become. What are some good general rules for you as a parent? Where should your phone sleep? Do you have screen time limits? What are your personal rules for the dinner table or with your spouse and/or children?

Remember your goals for your students.



Tips on how to have a great conversation about technology with your student

- A smartphone is powerful; it's not a toy. This is difficult because we keep games on our phones. "Powerful" is not good or bad, but "powerful" is capable of much good and much bad.
- Prepare them; don't protect them. This season will be marked by failures, successes, and a slow increase in the freedom and responsibility your student is trusted with.
- Cast vision for the future. Your goal is that one day they will have total freedom on their own phones. Why not talk about that?
- Prioritize an ongoing conversation above all else. Rules and punishments are important, but as a student grows in freedom, conversations become most important. If your student isn't talking about something because of rules or the threat of punishment, you may want to rethink your posture.
- Take the appropriate amount of time. A smartphone is an "everything." A student who gets a new smartphone isn't ready for everything. Think about adding privileges over time until a student can handle the full power of a smartphone.
- Start with the basics. Students can start with calling, texting, and some preselected apps. Parents should "lock down" the phone in the App Store, web browsing, and social media in the beginning.
- Simulate emergency situations. We all understand that learning to drive a car is about minimizing and/or avoiding emergencies and not about perfection. You should plan in the same way with technology. Spend some time discussing obvious issues with technology. Prepare them for the emergencies we know they will face.



Parent Technology Worksheet

Throughout the Discussion Guide, you will be prompted to share with your student how you as an adult have set up wise boundaries. Before those conversations start, take time to think through these questions and discuss them with your spouse or co-parent.

- Where do family phones “sleep”? Agree on a place that all phones can “sleep” for the night. This should be a central place away from the bedrooms where beeps, rings, and the rattling of vibrating phones won’t keep you awake.
- What are the “no technology” times for each member of the family? Apart from sleep times, there are other times when phones should not distract. Discuss mealtime expectations for everyone. Also, discuss driving whether students drive or not. Your example will be key during the years leading up to driving.
- Who knows my passwords? Spouses should have no need for secret passwords. This is also true for students and parents. Parents should have access to apps and histories on a cell phone until the students are adults. Discuss how students should communicate current and changing passwords.
- Is our home network helping or hurting? We should have something that protects our home network. We all should all feel safe at home from danger and temptation whether on home computers, iPads, iPods, gaming systems, or media devices that connect to the Internet. Research ways to filter and monitor all devices, including devices from friends who connect when they are visiting. Some suggested resources are at transitstudents.org.
- Send me a friend request? A member of the family should not be on any social media platform alone. One of the first “friends” you should have is a spouse or a parent. Whether the spouse or parent uses the platform regularly is not important. It’s important that he or she has access.



Before you give your student a phone, remember:

- It's a bad idea to give a student his or her own phone. It's a much better idea to let your students use a phone that you bought for their use. Therefore, you bought it and you pay the bill. Until he or she can pay the bill, be clear that you are happy to provide it, but it's actually your phone.
- Set expectations before you give your student a device. Your best bargaining position is before you have given the phone. Discuss all you can before the student has the smartphone.

Calling



PARENTS

- Where does my phone “sleep” at night?
- What are the “no technology” times in the house?
- I can always be asked, “Who are you talking to?”

NOW

When can I accept and make calls?

Who can see my call log? We would recommend that, for a while, parents monitor phone use through the phone service provider. This service also allows you to block certain callers, which may be helpful for both of you in the future.

Do we need code words? Students can use them to communicate information when surrounded by their friends (e.g., “Can I spend the night?” versus “May I spend the night?”).

LATER

As the student matures and demonstrates responsibility in this area, the parent may discontinue monitoring service with the provider.

Texting



PARENTS

- Who can read your text messages?
- Who are you accountable to?

NOW

Should I delete it? Discuss deleting texts together.

What does privacy means? For a season, parents will have access to text-message content.

Will I get in trouble? Students should not be held responsible for what other people send them, but they are responsible for what they do with it once it is on their phones.

Discuss “emergency” situations that may happen.

What about when another student is in danger?

What do you do if someone sends you an inappropriate or illegal picture?

- Delete it right away.
- Do not show anybody.
- Call a parent right away to discuss.

LATER

As a student approaches driving age, model and discuss how to manage technology behind the wheel.

As the student matures and demonstrates responsibility in this area, the parent may discontinue monitoring service with the provider.



Internet Access



PARENTS

- Who is my accountability partner?
- Who can see my history?
- How can our house be made safer for Internet searches?

NOW

Which browser is best? For now, Safari should be disabled and replaced with a safe browser.

What are the options? Explore the options in your browser to find ways to filter results.

LATER

After a season of good choices with technology Safari can be enabled with some discussions and limitations.

Internet histories should be deleted together. Remember, we all make mistakes or can be tempted to visit the wrong places. Our goal is not to eliminate mistakes as much as to keep the conversation open.

There are some apps and computer programs that monitor phone usage that can be of help here. (Phone Sheriff, TeenSafe, and CircleGo)

Students should give access to their Internet histories to an accountability partner in addition to their parents. This could be an older friend, a small group leader, or someone the family trusts.



Face Time



PARENTS

- Never be alone in a room with someone of the opposite sex.
- Allow the question: Who was on the call?

NOW

FaceTime isn't a tool to use right away. Focus on making good choices with the rest of it and it won't be long.

LATER

After demonstrating wise choices with the rest of the phone, FaceTime is a good option for increasing responsibility. Remember, when you FaceTime with someone, you are literally inviting him or her into your home. The same rules apply to FaceTime as would apply to someone in the house. If a person isn't allowed in your bedroom, then you shouldn't FaceTime there either.



Social Media



PARENTS

We need to understand that social media is our:

- **Platform:** Once it's out there, it's out of your control. You may be held responsible for something you post at age 13 when you're 25. It's not fair, but it's true and should be considered.
- **Content:** No social media site can guarantee safe content. The content of these sites is created by the crowd. Though there are rules and filters, inappropriate content will often "pop up" and is available to curious participants who will look for it.
- **Self-esteem issues:** The act of "liking" someone's post or being "liked" is exciting. While it's fun and often positive, it can quickly become a self-esteem issue.

NOW

Social media is here to stay. Students are going to live with social media for the rest of their lives and have to learn how to handle it. However, it's necessary for students to focus on being responsible with calls, texting, and the Internet before starting to build their social media platform.



LATER

After demonstrating wise choices in the other area, it may be time to start learning to live in a world with social media.

When they do, we would recommend one platform at a time and parents should be “friends” with full opportunity to observe their students’ social media posts and interactions.

Some things to discuss:

Passwords. There should be no secret social media accounts.

“Friends.” You should always have family as “friends” on social media. (Parents should have an account on any social media platform their students are on.)

Discuss how many “friends” a student should have. Social media settings should require approval before someone can follow you. No strangers allowed!

Discuss what to do when (not if) you come across inappropriate content.

- Immediately move on.
- Stop following that person right away.
- Do not comment on it.

Discuss what bullying and abuse might look like on each of the sites.

Apps



PARENTS

- Who can see the apps I download?
- Who is allowed to know my passwords?

NOW

Who gives the thumbs-up? Discuss general rules for downloading apps. Discuss the family account and how it works.

Is there a budget? Discuss the cost of apps and how much a student can spend on apps in a month.

LATER

As the student demonstrates wise choices the monitoring and the monthly budget can change.

MUCH LATER

As the student approaches maturity and is allowed to have his or her own phone, discuss the transition from a family account to a personal account.



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