

# THE SMARTPHONE DILEMMA



## WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME FOR YOUR TWEEN?

As your child enters the tween years, the question of whether they should have their own smartphone is bound to come up. While some parents choose to wait until their child is older, this is a personal decision that only you can make for your child. You know them best. It's important not to be pressured by the common refrain, "Everyone else has one!" The truth is, once you give your child a phone, it's hard to go back. So, take the time to make sure you're making the right decision now for your tween and your family.

When deciding whether or not to give your tween a smartphone, think carefully about why they need one. For many tweens, the reason they want a phone is to stay connected with friends or be part of social networks. But for parents, the reason may be more about safety, such as having a way to contact them when they're away from home, for instance. These different priorities matter, and they should be carefully weighed as part of the decision. You may decide that they are ready for a phone but not yet for one which connects to the internet – these are available!

Another key consideration is whether you, as a parent, are ready for the responsibility of guiding your child through this new experience. Simply handing over a phone and assuming they'll be able to immediately manage its use safely on their own isn't realistic - they'll need your ongoing support and guidance. From setting boundaries to helping them navigate online safety, you'll need to be their coach in this exciting new digital world. Make sure you have the time and the patience to help them develop healthy habits from the beginning.

It's also worth noting that while smartphones present potential new risks for tweens, such as exposure to inappropriate content or online bullying, they also offer new opportunities. Smartphones can be a tool for learning, creativity, and staying connected with family. With proper guidance, they can enhance your child's growth and development. In the end, the decision is yours, and it's important to make it based on what's right for your child and your family. Don't rush into it because of peer pressure or the fear of your child feeling left out. This is a big step that deserves careful thought and planning.

# 1

## IS YOUR TWEEN READY?

Before handing over that phone, it's essential to consider your child's maturity level. Can they follow rules, manage time effectively, and handle responsibility? Not every tween is the same, and readiness depends on more than just age. Remember you know your tween best and you are in charge of the decision.

Here are some signs your child might be ready:

- They respect boundaries and follow family rules.
- They can handle schoolwork and other responsibilities without constant reminders.
- They generally show good judgment in friendships and social settings.

# 3

## DISCUSS ONLINE SAFETY

One of the biggest concerns for parents is how to keep their kids safe online. A smartphone gives access to the internet, social media, and apps that might not be age appropriate. Here's how you can help protect your child:

- Install parental controls: Most smartphones have built-in settings that allow you to monitor and control app downloads, screen time, and internet usage.
- Talk about privacy: Teach your tween the importance of keeping personal information private and not sharing passwords, location, or other details online.
- Be mindful of social media: Discuss which platforms are appropriate and ensure they know about privacy settings and the risks of oversharing.

# 2

## SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

The excitement of getting a first smartphone can quickly lead to overuse if clear boundaries aren't in place. Sit down with your tween to discuss expectations around:

- Screen time limits: Decide how much time is reasonable for them to be on their phone each day.
- Where and when to use it: Establish phone-free times, like family meals or before bedtime.
- Respectful communication: Explain the importance of kindness in online communication, as well as the consequences of negative behaviour, like cyberbullying.

# 4

## ENCOURAGE RESPONSIBLE USE

A smartphone is more than just a device for fun - it can also be a powerful tool for learning and growth.

Encourage your tween to:

- Use educational apps that align with their schoolwork or personal interests.
- Engage in creative activities like photography, video editing, or even coding apps.
- Communicate with family and friends in positive and healthy ways, reinforcing real-life social skills.

## 5

## MODEL GOOD BEHAVIOUR

Your tween is always watching how you use your phone. Set a good example by showing them how to balance technology with other responsibilities and hobbies.

This includes:

- Limiting your own screen time during family times.
- Showing respect in your online interactions.
- Keeping a healthy balance between work, socialising, and downtime.

## 6

## STAY INVOLVED

After your tween gets their first smartphone, keep the lines of communication open. Ask them about what they're doing on their phone, the apps they're using, and who they're talking to. If any issues arise, like bullying or inappropriate content, they'll feel comfortable coming to you for help. Aim as much as possible to walk alongside them in their use of their smartphone and show curiosity.

## CONCLUSION

Giving your tween their first smartphone is a significant step, but with clear expectations, open communication, and a focus on safety and responsibility, it can be a positive and empowering experience. By staying involved and modelling good digital habits, you'll help them develop the skills to navigate the digital world with confidence.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION WITH YOUR TWEEN



Understanding their motivation will help you see if they want it for practical reasons (like staying in touch) or mainly for entertainment and social media.



This question encourages them to think about the daily use of the phone beyond just playing games or using apps.



Involving them in the rule-making process gives them ownership and helps you understand their expectations.



This opens up a conversation about online safety and understanding digital boundaries.



This checks their understanding of digital etiquette, bullying, and the importance of kindness online.



This ensures they understand that with their first smartphone comes some parental oversight for safety.