

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting



BY KIM DeMARCHI

Have you had “the talk” with your kids yet? You know the one that’s usually difficult for any parent to have... the Smartphone talk. Technology is changing so fast and we have to keep up with it and our kids.

Look around...is all you see and hear how other parents are giving their kids smartphones at younger and younger ages. Is that the proper way to handle this? Smartphones can be convenient tools, but for parents they often raise more questions than they answer. “How old should my child be to get a phone?” “What kind of phone?” “What rules or guidelines should we have?” “How do we set appropriate limits for our children?” No single answer will be right for everyone. What is most important is to discover what works best for your family, and to find the balance of embracing technology and embracing each other. This might be the toughest talk you ever have with your kids, and certainly one that is on-going. Now that it’s summer time, it’s even more important that children have some established guidelines for cell phone use and to prevent abuse.

What is the most frequently asked question regarding cell phones?

Most parents ask, “At what age should our child get their own phone?” It’s the most frequently asked question, but NOT the most important question.

What are the most important questions?

What is the purpose of getting a phone?

Are there circumstances of true need such as having two households or both parents working and trying to figure out carpool?

Is my child responsible with things? (Not going to lose it or leave it or drop it into the toilet)

What are our family values and how does giving our child a phone impact them?

Is this a NEED or a WANT? (There is a big difference!)

What kind of phone will we get? Emergency with only 3 #'s, Call and text only, or a Smartphone?

Should parents place limits on cell phone use for their children?

Absolutely! Some are negotiable such as taking them on long car rides. Some are non-negotiable such as not having phones at the dinner table, as well as docking them downstairs before bedtime.

Should parents utilize parental controls on cell phones?

Yes! But, I will also say that the best parental control is to be an active, engaged parent! As a parent, my best line of defense is myself. Talking with my kids and communicating about everything related to cell phones is most important. But because this is uncharted territory for both parents and children, in most cases, there are Parental Controls on phones that can be set up on the phones. Then, you can enable the restrictions you want, such as: restricting the use of Safari, or iTunes, or installing apps. You can also prevent access to specific content areas, such as: R rated movies, music with foul language, etc...You can also buy apps for child safety, apps that email parents if child visits any questionable sights. There are apps to help with these things such as: Phone Sheriff, My Mobile Watchdog, Screen Retriever, Mobile Spy, Teen Safe and so many others.

Should parents know their child’s password for cell phones and isn’t that an invasion of privacy?

Yes, my children got their cell phones when they started middle school and they needed to give me their passwords on their phones every time they changed them. Morals are developing and it’s okay if a child knows their parents know their passwords. A child thinking, “I wonder what my parents will think of this post?” isn’t such a bad thing. Knowing the passwords let the child know that you will be checking periodically. This isn’t about invading your child’s privacy, it’s about teaching them how to navigate this new tool they’ve been given. I’ve heard it been called, The



s Guide to Smart Phones

Trust But Verify System --- meaning, “I trust you at the age you are, and will make sure you are using the technology in an appropriate way for your age.” It’s not spying; it’s participating and dialoguing in perhaps some of the most important conversations you’ll ever have with your children.

Should parents monitor and control their own use?

Of course! We are our child’s best teacher. It’s not what we say, it’s what we do. If I don’t want my child to text while driving, then I must not text while driving. If I don’t want my child to answer to phone or text during dinner, then I better not bring my phone to the dinner table. If I don’t want them to have their ringer on at the movie theater, then I better have mine on silent. Kids emulate everything we do!



Should we have an agreement about cell phones in our house with our children?

We actually have 15 points to our agreement, and it has evolved and will continue to do so over time. It’s valuable to create the agreement together so you get more buy in from your children. An example of some of our points: We will pay for the phone and monthly charges. You will pay for any apps and music that you buy, and repairs if needed. When we call you, please answer the phone. We aren’t calling to chit chat and we don’t want to be screened. Use the same respectful manners on your phone that you use in person: say hello, please, thank you. Be kind and understanding. If you wouldn’t say it to someone in person, refrain from saying it via text. Be aware of the photos you post of yourself on social media. Limit the number of “selfies” posted. There will be times that we insist you leave your phone at home. Family time is important.

Are there any clever ideas to help with usage and over usage?

No Phone Zone (NEVER at the dining table during ANY meals!)

Tech Time Outs (“No Tech Tuesdays”) OR (“Be with the friends you’re with”)

Establish Unplugged Times for whole family (family vacations, Sunday night movie rental, family day excursions)

Homework and chores first, then screen time

Dock at the docking station at a certain time each evening (downstairs in kitchen by 10pm)

Be “friends” with children on social media sites (ie: Instagram so you can see everything that gets posted)

What is the analogy of driving a car and using a cell phone?

When a child turns 16, we don’t just buy them a car, hand over the keys, and say, “Good luck, I hope you don’t have any big accidents or injure yourself or anyone else. I hope you can figure it out.” NO! We get them private driver’s lessons. They take Driver’s Education in school. We take them out and teach them. We give them practice. They study the rules of the road. Ultimately, they take a test. And if they pass both the written and driving test, then they are given access to being a driver, and even still there are restrictions on who they can drive, how many they can drive, and what hours they can drive. NEVER should we give our child a smartphone and say, “Good luck, you’ve never had one, you don’t really know how to navigate it, you haven’t been taught social media etiquette, but hey, go for it! I hope too many people don’t get hurt along the way.” Parents, be proactive. Have “the talk”, give them on the job training, and keep dialoguing with your children. It’s a fast paced technological world and it’s our job to help them navigate it with as few collisions as possible.

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Kim’s goal for you is to help reduce conflict, foster mutual respect, and create deeper communication and connections with your loved ones. She can be reached through www.EmpoweredParenting.com or www.PassportToParenting.com.