
Smartphones and Social Media: Tips for Parents

Ninety percent of children own a smartphone by the age of eleven, and most have a social media profile by thirteen. There are real benefits to technology, but it can be hard to know how to keep children safe online. Here are eight tips from experts on helping your child develop a healthy relationship with their phone and social media.

Tip 1 — Prepare before giving them a phone

Have a conversation with your child before they get a phone to set ground rules. Listen to their views and work together to explore the principles of online safety.

Tip 2 — Agree clear rules

Alongside safety rules, consider setting time limits on phone use and agreeing the circumstances under which you would take the phone away. Let them know upfront if you intend to monitor their online activity.

Tip 3 — Teach them how to stay safe online

As your child gets older it will become harder to control everything they see or do online. Teaching them how to keep themselves safe is important:

- Be respectful to everyone online, as you would be in person.
- Assume any message you send could become public.
- Don't respond to messages or accept friend requests from unknown contacts.
- Always answer the phone when a parent or carer is calling.
- Don't share private information online.
- Ask permission before taking a photo or video of someone, or sharing anything about them.
- Be aware of apps that use location sharing.
- Report concerning content to a trusted adult.
- Know what to do if you lose your phone.

Tip 4 — Model healthy phone habits

If you ask your child not to use their phone at mealtimes or before bed, try to follow the same rules yourself. If you are making an exception, explain why.

Tip 5 — Keep phones out of the bedroom

Screen-free time in the hour before bed helps children wind down and sleep better. A consistent bedtime routine — reading, listening to a podcast, or similar — can help replace the habit of reaching for a phone.

Tip 6 — Let them know they can talk to you

Encourage open and honest conversations. Make sure your child feels able to come to you if they have made a mistake or encountered something upsetting online, without fear of overreaction.

Tip 7 — Set up parental controls

Review privacy settings on apps and look out for anything that shares personal information or location data. Require your child to ask permission before installing anything new, giving you time to check it is safe.

Tip 8 — Stay strong and be kind

Children need our support online as much as in any other area of their lives. Be kind when they make mistakes, stay consistent with boundaries, and keep learning alongside them.