

# Advice for Parents and Carers on the Use of Mobile Phones

Helping you make the decision



## The rise of the mobile phone

Starting, or being at, secondary school can be a natural point for parents to feel the need to buy their child a phone. But with 20% having seen hate messages online and only 47% knowing how to protect their privacy, understanding if they are ready and how to put boundaries in place is a growing concern for parents.

When most of us were children, mobile phones were not readily available, so it can feel alien when our children feel the need to have one. We know the arguments and that an open internet connection brings with it risks - not just your child's use of it, but the way other people use it that may directly affect them. This guide will help you to:

1

### KNOW IF...

...your child is ready.

2

### KNOW HOW...

...to set appropriate boundaries.

3

### KNOW WHERE ...

...to find help, including national and local agencies.



### Family Lives

For free, confidential parenting advice.

**0808 800 2222**

### Internet Matters



Advice to parents, including a guide on which phones are suitable for your child.

**internetmatters.org**



### Talk to us:

For advice on boundary setting or what we do to protect your child.

## Know If:

“Everyone else has one!” may not always be an exaggeration. But is it the right reason?

- It is best to think of the right time as not about an age. It is about your child’s individual maturity, need and responsibility.
- If it is about safety, a phone does not have to be a smartphone - if for safety, a simple phone without apps is fine. This may not be popular, but it is about your child proving they are responsible and respecting boundaries. You can think of it like pocket money - we train our child to respect and handle money appropriately first, before giving them more free-reign access to an account and a card. Smartphones can be more like giving the keys to the whole bank in one jump.
- You may feel confident your child could be responsible with a phone, but less confident with an internet connection. If you have an unused phone to pass down - don’t add data to their plan (but be aware they may still be able to access WiFi).
- There is no research evidence to say that smartphones have any educational benefit to children. Apps such as ShowMyHomework, can be accessed through a normal desktop or laptop computer.

- Consider a Pay as You Go plan which gives you more control of how much is spent, and on what.

## Know How:

- General rule-of-thumb is: if you’re paying for it, you should have access to it. Set the rule early that you will check the phone to see if they are meeting your expectations.
- Set time limits: you may ban phones from upstairs - only for use at certain times and never at bedtime.
- Use a step-wise approach: your child only gets a little more responsibility with a phone once they have complied with your rules over time.
- Form an allegiance: by agreeing as a group of parents on the rules you will have together - a united front will give you confidence and show your child that they are being treated equally to their peers.
- Consider apps that can help you to easily limit functionality on a smartphone (see below for a spotlight).
- For advice on social media and apps, see other recent parent briefings on the OSA website.

### SPOTLIGHT ON: OURPACT

OurPact is a parental control phone app, with free and paid features, that allow you to set boundaries and filters to the way that your child uses their phone, but also to make sure that the phone does not interfere with your family routines.

It has features such as: app blocking, internet and functionality blocks built around a schedule that you create (e.g. homework time, family dinner time, bedtime), text message blocking, web filter and family locator. If you think your child is ready for a smartphone but not that free-reign, this may be a good way for you to manage the transition.