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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



Smart Parent'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.

Kim DeMarchi, M.Ed., Certified Parent Educator and Certified Family Coach, is a Tualatin resident, married with 13 year old boy/girl twins, and has been an educator for more than two decades. Kim is trained and certified through the International Network for Children and Families in a program called Redirecting Children's Behavior, as well as in Positive Discipline by Jane Nelsen. Kim is active in supporting her local parenting community by providing monthly workshops at the community center. Kim is a weekly radio show host of parenting podcasts at Passport To Parenting: Helping Parents Navigate their Parenting Journey.



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.

What Are Your Excuses for Not Investing?

Many people find excuses for not investing. Here are a few of them:

"I'll do it later." The longer you wait until you invest, the harder it may be to reach your goals. You can always find other ways to spend your money, so unless you make investing a priority now, you may be forced to play "catch up" later in life.

"I don't have enough money to invest." Start by putting away even a small amount each month. When your income goes up, increase your investments.

"I'll have Social Security." Typically, Social Security only pays about 40% of an individual's pre-retirement income, according to the Social Security Administration. You'll probably need to supplement Social Security with your own investments.

"I don't know where to begin." You can start where you work. If your employer offers a 401(k) or similar retirement plan, take full advantage of it.

Don't let excuses get in your way. With time and determination, you can overcome many of the obstacles you thought kept you from investing.



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