



Raising Tech-Healthy Kids:

A Parent's Guide to Screens, Smart Phones & Social Media

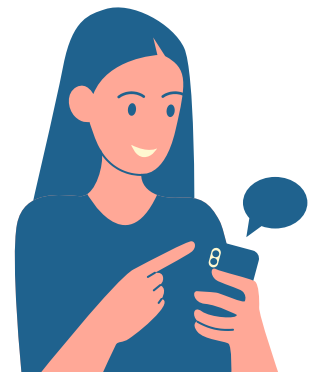
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Why it Matters:

Parenting has always been hard—and today’s digital world brings new and unfamiliar challenges. You’re navigating a fast-changing landscape without a clear roadmap, all while trying to do what’s best for your child. If it feels overwhelming, you’re not alone. The good news is: with care and intention, you can create a healthier path forward.

Research shows that the shift from a play-based childhood to a phone-based childhood is linked to rising rates of anxiety, depression, attention issues, and motivation struggles in kids and teens.

This guide gives you clear, practical steps to delay smartphone use in younger children and set healthy boundaries for teens—without constant battles or power struggles.



Short on Time? Start Here



For younger kids:

Delay smartphones & encourage real-world play.



For teens: Set phone-free zones & help them understand social media algorithms.



For yourself: Model healthy phone habits & find like-minded parents for support.

Part 1: How to Delay Smartphone & Social Media Use

"What is normal is not always healthy."

It may feel challenging to delay and set firm limits when many of your child's peers have smartphones, but research consistently shows that early exposure increases risks more than benefits.

Expect more noise, movement, and boredom.

That's a sign of a healthy childhood! Kids don't need screens to be entertained—they need space to explore, play, and create.

Focus on what you're adding, not what you're taking away.

The more kids play, move, and socialize, the less they miss screens. Encourage free play, especially outdoors.

Find like-minded families.

So you and your child feel supported. Building a community that values a play-based childhood makes this journey easier for everyone.

Model healthy tech use at home.

Kids copy what they see. If they see you constantly on your phone, they'll want the same. Be mindful about putting your phone away during family time.

Ground your child in strong family values.

Help them invest in curiosity, connection, and real-world experiences like outdoor adventures, books, arts, and sports.

Reality Check

Delaying smartphones reduces family conflict and stress. Temporary protests are easier to manage than the long-term consequences of early exposure.

Part 2: Healthy Smartphone & Social Media Use for Teens

✓ Use open, transparent discussions.

Listen to your teen's perspective while holding firm boundaries.

Example: "I know you want to keep your phone in your room at night because your friends are online late. That makes sense! But I also know that good sleep keeps you healthy, so we're keeping this rule for now."

✓ Set up parental controls

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✓ Create phone-free zones:

- No phones at family meals
- Phones stay in the car during sports games or outings
- Parents model by setting their own phones aside during key moments

✓ Build phone-free routines:

- First hour after waking up: No phone = better focus & organization.
- Last hour before bed: No phone = deeper sleep & better wind-down habits.

✓ Support real-world experiences that naturally limit screen time:

- Sports and outdoor activities
- In-person hangouts with friends
- Part-time jobs that build independence
- Community involvement and leadership opportunities

✓ Blame the algorithms, not your teen.

Social media is designed to be addictive. Talking about this helps remove shame and opens healthier discussions about boundaries.

✓ Reality Check:

The more engaged teens are in real-world activities, the less they rely on screens for entertainment and validation.

Addressing Common Concerns



“But my child will feel left out!”

Most parents who delay smartphones never regret waiting. Kids may feel temporary frustration, but with support, they can handle disappointment and grow stronger.

“What if I’ve already given my child a phone?”

It’s never too late! Start with small changes, like tech-free meals or setting bedtime limits, and build from there.

Jonathan Haidt’s 4 Key Norms for Healthier Tech Use

(See: *The Anxious Generation*)

- 1** No smartphones before high school. Kids who wait have less anxiety, stronger friendships, and healthier development.
- 2** No social media before 16. The later, the better. Early exposure increases risks for anxiety, depression, and social comparison.
- 3** Phone-free schools. Schools that enforce this see better focus, behaviour, and learning.
- 4** More in-person play & socializing. Real-world connection, movement, and independence are the best antidotes to screen time.

Final Thoughts



What will your child thank you for in 10 years?

More screen time—or more real-world memories?

Take the first step today:

- Choose one new boundary to implement this week.
- Find one like-minded parent to connect with.
- Set up a tech-free zone or time in your home today.

Parenting today isn't easy—but neither is raising the first generation to reclaim childhood from screens. You are part of a movement that puts connection, creativity, and resilience first. Your child will thank you for it.

To create collective action with other parents, please check out:

<https://www.waituntil8th.org> (U.S.)

<https://unpluggedcanada.com> (Canada)

Follow my newsletters for more tips and guidance for parents!

I can also be found on Instagram:
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