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IS IT TIME FOR OUR KIDS TO HAVE A CELL PHONE?

BY DANNY HUERTA, MSW, LCSW, LSSW  JUNE 26, 2020



The purpose for having a phone contract is to make sure everyone in the family

is on the same page and in agreement with cell phone expectations. The goals are to encourage relationship, conversation, and responsibility with and without devices. "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." - Psalm 4:23

At some point, every family will face the question, "[Is it time for my kid to have a cell phone?](#)" Some better questions might be, "Is my child ready for the onslaught of temptations and opportunities for connection? Are we, as parents, ready for some "techno-ference," intentional conversations, and essential boundaries?" My kids both have phones now and we have had ongoing conversations about limits, responsibilities, and freedoms that first began with a phone contract. While it may sound restrictive, a phone contract is really an opportunity to pursue true freedoms together.

Getting [a phone for your teenager](#) is a good way to affirm the fact that your child is growing up and it's a big step in the dynamics of your family. Your child may be gaining more responsibilities and freedoms, but also more influences and temptations. It is important for us as parents to help them successfully handle these responsibilities and freedoms in healthy ways. My wife and I sat down with our family to talk about our values and how they relate to having, owning, and using phones. We created a contract to help begin the conversation and dialogue regarding the phone and its various freedoms, temptations, and necessary limits. A phone is a tool for relationship and certainly requires guidance and openness along the way.

Goals of a Phone Contract

The goal of the phone contract is to increase:

- Awareness
- Responsibility
- Openness/Conversation
- Ownership

Increasing these four areas is key on the road to true freedom.

We let our kids know from the beginning that devices are a privilege. They knew that we would check their phones to maintain trust and establish true freedoms in their mind and relationships. Privacy is about trust and is not a right. If a child is defensive about having their phone checked, they either

have gotten the false idea that privacy means you are grown up or they are trying to hide something. Ultimately, all of the limits and guidance come down to guarding and guiding the soul and heart.

Cell Phone Awareness

Phone responsibility starts with awareness. Parents want to encourage confidence in how their kids manage their attention, emotions, relationships, and relationship with God. Having a cell phone can have a major impact on all of those things. Therefore, everything starts with awareness. Awareness of temptations, weaknesses, challenges, triggers, benefits, and tools.

Cell phones can foster conversation and allow people to stay more connected. However, they can also be destructive to relationships, perceptions, beliefs, attention, and well-being. Clear and consistent [boundaries, limits, and balance](#) are key to becoming contributors in the world and developing healthy habits. [Proverbs 4:23](#) tells us to “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”

The content that our kids access on their devices needs to be of Godly value, neutral (not morally wrong), useful for building up and genuinely connecting with others, helpful in completing school assignments, and respectful of others. Discuss with your family how a cell phone can help or hinder relationships.

Questions for Discussion:

- What will the phone be used for? Some examples might be: to call home, to check in, to use for homework, to connect with friends, to shop, or to play games. Talk through each of these ways that the phone could be used. See if you come up with anything additional.
- What are proper ways to communicate with people in calls, texts, and social media posts? How have your kids seen this misused by other people? What is the best way to avoid those temptations or that mistake?
- How can your family determine if an app, game, etc. meets the right criteria before it is downloaded?
- What do you need to learn more about as you guide your children? You can use Plugged In, NetLingo, Common Sense Media, Axis, and Enough Is Enough as great resources to help you be “in the know”.



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Responsibility

Having a phone is a big responsibility. Your teens and tweens will learn how to respect limits, earn trust, and practice obedience by managing their time and limits well on the phone. In order to help with time management, talk through the following scenarios as a family to set up appropriate boundaries.

Questions for Discussion:

- When should the kids put the phone away? Think about family gatherings, the dinner table, church, and school.
- Should there be a daytime routine? Should the routine be different on school days versus on weekends? When are appropriate times for your kids to access the phone? When should the phone be on its charger? Where will the phone be charged?
- How does everyone in your family feel about these limits? Is there anything Biblically that you can think of that would support these limits?

Openness Encourages Responsibility

It's a good idea to have [parental controls](#), filters, and blockers on each phone in your household. Remind your kids not to change or remove these controls. They are in place to help them be successful at guarding their mind and protecting them from potential threats, as well as establishing trust.

Cell Phones and Temptation

Everyone faces temptation. Talk with your tweens and teens about what [temptations](#) might come their way. Encourage them to come to you when they are feeling tempted. Explain that if they get help from you upfront, it will be far better than facing the guilt later. Temptation is a reality. We want our children to have true freedom from temptations and the shame that comes from giving in to them. Remember: we are all on the same team.

Questions for Discussion:

- Have your kids name some things that might be a temptation to them.
- What is your action plan for not acting on that temptation?
- Talk to your children about predators and how they are increasingly using apps, games, social media, and other online venues to take advantage of or harm young people. Be sure that they know to get a parent involved immediately if someone asks for their contact information or pictures of them.
- Discuss cell phones and driving. What are the laws about using the phone while driving? What are best practices where the two are involved?

Healthy Ownership Builds Healthy Responsibility

As a family, take some time to discuss how the ownership of the phone affects others. Ownership also means owning mistakes, consequences, successes using the phone, and eventually the bill.

Questions for Discussion:

Phone Contract

Child: _____ Phone #: _____
Date: _____ Cost of phone and service: _____
Phone Password: _____

We want true freedom for you based off of Proverbs 4:23.
The phone can be checked by us at any time and is left out on the _____ during _____.

This contract exists to clarify and discuss ways to keep us connected and on track toward the goal of freedom, trust and connectedness.

NEGOTIABLE LIMITS (i.e., time I can spend on the smartphone, what apps to load on the phone, when the phone needs to be off)
How will these be negotiated?

NON-NEGOTIABLE LIMITS (i.e., no texting while driving, no loading of apps without permission, bullying others through social media, sending nude or semi-nude photos of yourself to others)

CONTENT (Biblical and family worldview) – Opportunity for open discussion, but come to agreement for limits and accountability during check-ins.

Music: _____
Video: _____
Games: _____
Phone: _____
Social media: _____
Pictures: _____

CONSEQUENCES
• 1st offense: _____
• 2nd offense: _____
• 3rd offense: _____

FREQUENCY OF CHECK-INS Openness and honesty are the tickets to freedom, trust, connectedness, and 100% ownership.

Child Signature _____ Parent Signature(s) _____

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HERE ARE POSSIBLE WAYS WE CAN CELEBRATE WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WELL.

Click on the image to dow.

- When other people are sharing the same space, for instance a living room, how can your kids be thoughtful of those around them when using their phone? For instance, how can they judge the volume or tastes of others when playing music or videos? How will you gauge this?
- What is considered [cell phone etiquette](#)?
- How should respect be shown to others while they are using their devices?
- How much do you think it costs monthly to use the phone? Go through the phone bill together. How much would it be worth if the money were invested? Talk through the investment of time and money when owning a phone.

Cell Phone Costs

The costs associated with having a cell phone are another aspect of phone ownership. Here are some things that you will want to make clear from the start.

Questions for Discussion:

- How is the phone being paid for from the beginning?
- Who will pay for repairs if the phone is damaged? Or will the phone be used without repairs if it is damaged?
- Will the phone be replaced if it is lost? Who will pay for the replacement?

Consequences of Misused Responsibility

Next, you'll want to decide what consequences your child will face if they do not adhere to the guidelines outlined on the phone contract. Will they lose privileges? Decide as a family what will happen for each violation of the rules.

- **1st Time**
- **2nd Time**
- **3rd Time**

Create a Phone Contract

We are living in an increasingly digital world with technology intertwining more and more with our everyday lives. It's important that we as parents help our kids navigate it since it is the world they will be living in. While it might not seem like a big deal, it is worth creating and going through a phone contract with your kids to help develop awareness, responsibility, openness, and ownership. Use this contract not as a way to box your children in, but as a way to foster a deeper connection as a family and deeper awareness and responsibility toward responsible and true freedom. It will be worth the investment as you raise contributors in God's kingdom instead of consumers.

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