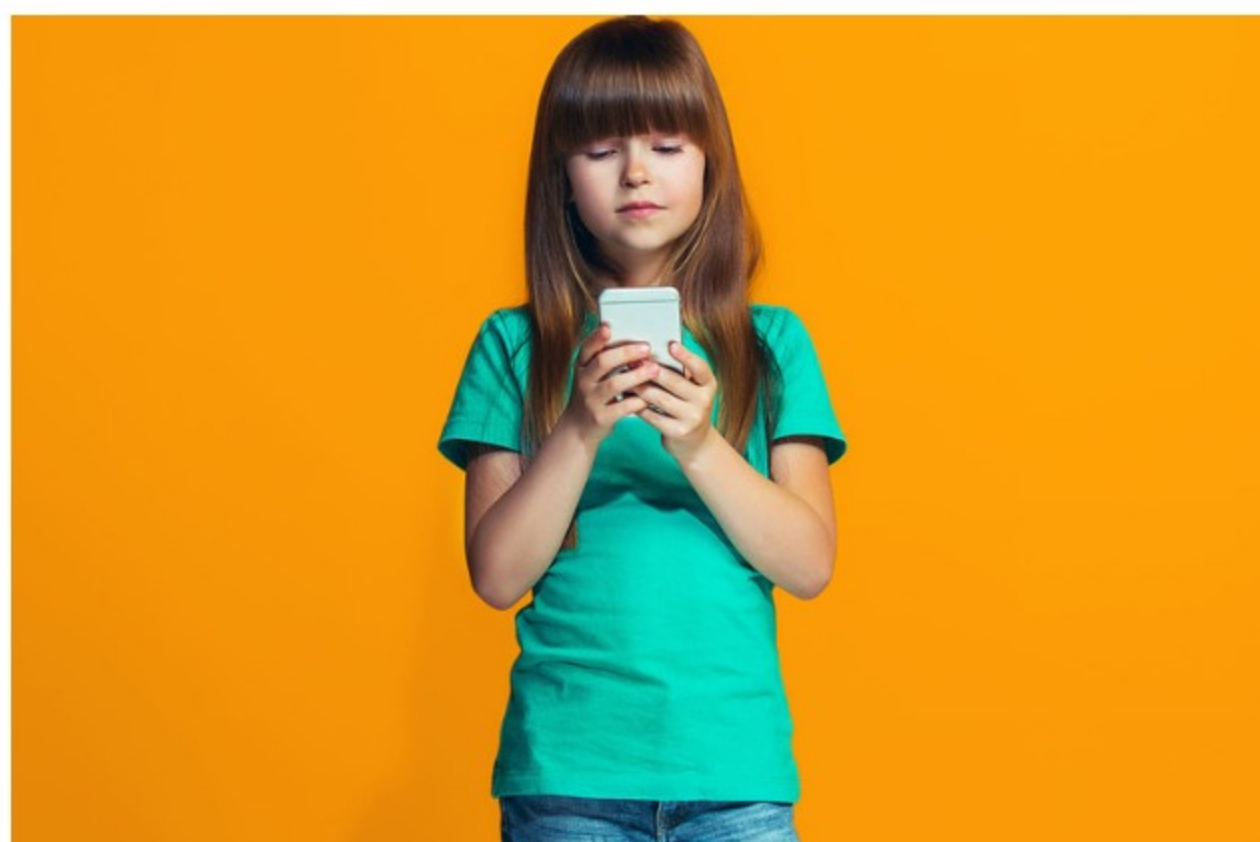


Tools and rules for cellphone use, for kids and adults



Here are some tools, high- and low-tech alike, to help everyone in the family manage their cellphone habits. It really helps if kids see that you are working to do better, too.

Tools for cellphone use

Google's Family Link: Free Android app for restricting overall time, time spent on particular apps and more.

Parental control apps: Some apps allow you to monitor your kids' cellphone activity keystroke by keystroke. Worley likes the Circle parental control dashboard. PCMag gives its highest overall ratings to Qustodio and Kaspersky Safe Kids.

Family media plan: The American Academy of Pediatrics has created this thought-provoking online form to fill out with your kids to set goals and limits around technology use.

Smart WiFi Routers: Some routers, like Aero and Google Home, have their own parental controls. Or you can just turn your existing WiFi off at night.

System preferences: Turn off audible chimes and beeps that alert you and your kids to text messages and social media posts to stop the constant stimuli. You can do the same for push messages.

Charging station: Buy a cute multi-device charging station, set it up far from your bedrooms, and announce that everybody — including parents — will be docking their devices there at night.

Alarm clocks: Old-fashioned, battery-powered ones sell for as little as \$8. Go retro! There is no reason to have a smartphone next to your bed.

Shoe box: A place for all family members to deposit their (silenced!) cellphones before meals. Wrap it in cute paper if it makes you feel better.

Rules for cellphone use

Here are some basic rules that have worked for other families to limit technology. I think the first two should be mandatory. Pick and choose from the rest to fit your parenting style or your child's life stage.

No cellphones at meals. Study after study says family mealtime is important. Parents should put their own phones away during meals, too.

No cellphones upstairs — or wherever the bedrooms are — at night. Start this “device curfew” an hour or more before bedtime.

No phones in the bedroom. Remember the old advice that computers should be in common areas of the house? Cellphones are little computers.

No phones in the bathroom. Yuck! This is unhygienic — and a huge time waster.

No phones until homework is done. Kids can turn phones in when they arrive home. If your child needs to text a friend about an assignment, they can do that, then stow it again.

No phones in the car. Ever notice how some of the most important conversations happen while you're playing chauffeur to your kids?

No social media before your child is of age. Platforms such as Instagram say kids under 13 are not allowed. Use this to your advantage, or wait even longer, like until eighth or ninth grade.

No digital negativity. Teach your kids that anger and criticism should be expressed in person — or at least in a voice conversation.

Private accounts only. Private accounts, which are visible only to people your child (or you) approve, are a good transition for kids new to social media.

Don't take the phone away. Worley makes the counterintuitive suggestion not to take tech away as a punishment because it just signals that it's incredibly valuable. Use other consequences for correcting undesirable behavior, instead.

Shared passcode or monitoring. Some parents require their child to tell them their passcode, or agree to monitoring, and allow them to spot check their phone if they want the privilege of having one. If you do this, consider lightening up over time to give responsible older teens some privacy.

Pay for overages. If your child goes over your data limits, they must pay the overage fee.

Pay for the plan. Older teens with jobs can pay their own cellphone bills.