

Taking Phones Slowly. Together.

An education presentation
for TK-5th parents and caregivers



Parent Packet

Keep the elementary school years mobile-phone-free!



Your north star:

Prioritize IRL (in-real-life) childhood essentials



IRL Social
Interaction



Being Active



Being
Outdoors



Reading &
Learning



Free Play &
hands-on activities



Sleep



Focused
Study



Meaningful Work
& Passion



Navigating
Feelings

More tech, more parenting.

If you absolutely need a mobile device in elementary school...

Smartwatches
like Gabb, Gizmo,
Garmin, Cosmo,
Bark & TickTalk



**Then, take phones slowly in
middle school & high school**

Keep it
SIMPLE.
Take it
SLOWLY.



Limited Access
Phones
(like Gabb Phone 4)



Smartphone
designed for
youth use



iPhone or Apple
Watch set up for
Talk & Text ONLY



Apple devices recommended in late middle school/high school only.
Intentional setup & **parental vigilance required.**
And ongoing fortitude!

Tin Can

Bring back
the landline!



Tin Can is the new-school way for kids to talk with their friends. It's a secure landline with parental controls and nothing more — no screens, no apps, no texting, just voice-to-voice connection. The company began in West Seattle with a handful of families and has since grown to serve families across more than 30 states. Tin Can gives kids a safe, screen-free way to stay in touch while encouraging real conversation and independence —
no smartphone required.

To learn more visit <https://tincan.kids/>

MY PHONE DIRECTORY



NAME

NUMBER

FIRST PHONE

What Parents Need to Know

Thinking about giving your child a phone? **Saying yes to a phone doesn't have to mean saying yes to a fully loaded smartphone.** In fact, it shouldn't. Here's how to pause, go slowly and intentionally, and keep things simple!

- 1 Take it slowly.** Delay smartphones until high school. Explore options and plan for a gradual progression.
- 2 Keep mobile tech simple.** Choose the minimum amount of tech to meet the needs of your family. For example, if the need is to communicate with parents and friends while on the go, a basic smartwatch with talk and text can be a good solution. More apps and features on a phone means MORE parenting for you plus more distraction and risk for your child. To simplify your parenting role, delay unnecessary features and apps (especially social media).
- 3 Proper setup & onboarding is key!** Remember to set up a phone for a young user before handing it over to your child. Most phones are set up by default for adults, not kids. Even products "made for children" need to be set up by an adult to remove unnecessary distractions. If you're considering an iPhone, watch our tutorial about how to set up a barebones iPhone.
- 4 Create community to slow down phones together.** Find inventive ways to take collective action so it's easier to meet basic communication needs while avoiding harm. For example, see if parents around you want to get the same landline or pick the same basic mobile phone or smartwatch - this takes the pressure off parents and kids!
- 5 Prioritize essential in-real-life activities** like sleep, play, and face-to-face connection. Coordinate efforts with other parents to amplify in-real-life fun!



REMEMBER:
Giving a phone means
more parenting, not less!

For more details on
**considering a first
phone**, visit our
website!



Simple Phone & Watch Options



Keep phones and watches simple until high school!

Take it slowly - roll out a simple solution with talk and text only.

More apps (especially social media) means more parenting + distraction + risk.

Change local norms as a community to reduce pressure on kids & parents and support a healthy childhood.

Get support:
info@screensense.org



ScreenSense

	Home phone	Flip phone	Smartwatch for kids	Limited Access Phone	Apple Watch	Smartphone designed for kids	iPhone set up for talk & text ONLY
Features	 Ooma Tin Can	 A wide variety of options. More info: dumbphones dumbwireless	 Gabb Gizmo Garmin Cosmo Bark Tick Talk	 Pinwheel Gabb Light Phone Wisephone Zalpa	 Apple Watch Parent must have an iPhone. Remove App Store, web browser, and distracting apps. Set up School Mode.	 Bark Monitored social media available Troomi Social media unavailable	 Remove App Store, web browser, and distracting apps. Watch video tutorial 
Talk	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Text		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
GPS Tracking		Available on some brands	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒
App Store				Proprietary App Collection	☐	☐	☐
Music				☐	☐	☐	☐
Video Games					☐	☐	☐
Web Browser					☐	☐	☐
Social Media					☐	☐	☐

SMARTPHONES

We recommend **delaying smartphones until high school and taking them slowly**. When the time comes, you can use these suggested safeguards to reduce harm. And keep in mind: **More features and apps = more parenting!**



Carefully set up device and coach use. Helpful mantra: **"It's a tool, not a TV!"**



Take it slowly - start with minimal content, then try **ONE** new feature or app at a time.



Delay access to social media apps until 16+. Roll out one at a time with app time limits (Try 20 min at start).



Turn off most notifications to minimize disruption. Mute noisy group texts.



Set Daily Time Limits
Aim for 30-45 min max per day.



Remove phone from bedroom overnight to **protect sleep** and reduce harm.



Know your teen's password. Let them know you need to be able to have access.



Create clear boundaries and phone-free zones like meals, car rides, school/study time.



Have regular conversations with your teen - encourage reflection & know what they are doing online!

TEXTING

Just like any form of communication, how to text needs to be learned (and practiced).

First texters often get easily overwhelmed with group chats that go off the rails - with memes, GIFs, endless emojis, spamming and shared links. Texting can be a wonderful way to stay connected with friends. And it can be a harmful tool that can cause lasting results. Making this distinction and teaching kids how to respond when texting goes awry is a crucial part of allowing texting - whether on a personal device or shared family device.

4 STEPS TO TEACHING TEXTING



1. **Delay as long as possible** - until it's a social necessity.
2. **Teach the basics** when you roll it out. Print the [Let's Talk about Texting Guide](#) from Wait Until 8th and talk through it with your child.
3. **Set clear limits** around when/where/how long texting is allowed per day.
4. **Check in regularly & coach your child** on tricky situations without judgment.

4 STEPS FOR REELING IN TEXTING

1. **Check in with other parents** - do they want to reel things in together? This will make it easier!
2. **Go back to the basics.** Download and print out the [Let's Talk about Texting Guide](#) from Wait Until 8th and talk through it with your child.
3. **Set clear limits** around when/where/how long texting is allowed per day.
4. **Check in regularly & coach child** on tricky situations. Make sure they know you're on their team!



LINKS FROM PRESENTATION

Let the Line out Slowly!

https://www.screensense.org/introduce-tech-slowly_

Wait Until 8th

<https://www.waituntil8th.org/>

Giving a First Phone

<https://www.screensense.org/giving-phone>

Flip Phone Finder

<https://josebriones.org/dumbphone-finder>

Lisa Damour

<https://drlisadamour.com/>

The Anxious Generation (2024)

<https://www.anxiousgeneration.com>

Here are three videos you can co-watch with your child to help explain why it's a good idea to delay smartphones until they're older:

[1 min video for younger kids,](#)

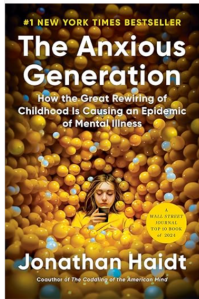
[10 min video for ages 10-13,](#)

[1-min phone impact montage](#)

Subscribe to our monthly newsletter, "One Step," for continued support

<https://www.screensense.org/subscribe>

WANT TO LEARN MORE?



Recommended Reading!

We **highly recommend** reading [The Anxious Generation](#) - with a friend, as a class, or as a school. It can help to start conversations about tech use with your community. **Short of time?** Listen to the audiobook in the car! Or read our [blog post](#) and check out our [Anxious Generation YouTube Playlist](#) for the best videos & interviews with Social Psychologist and author, Jonathan Haidt.

More great resources...

Watch: [Kids, Smartphones & Social Media: The Risks and the Solutions](#) (2024, 1 hour + 13 min)
Health and science journalist Catherine Price presents to parents at her child's K-8 school. She summarizes all the most recent research and news on this topic that directly relates to parenting in today's digital age.

Read: [Surgeon General's Advisory](#) (2023, 19 pages)
The public health advisory by former U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, summarizes research showing how important it is to get our young people beyond the exciting yet vulnerable phase of early adolescence before introducing social media. For more, check out [13 is too young for social media!](#) and his [Op-ed in the NYT](#) which calls for a warning label on social media.

WHAT IS SCREENSENSE?

ScreenSense is a nonprofit organization based in Mill Valley that helps parents and schools teach healthy tech use to children. Our [Parent Education events and consulting services](#) support introducing tech slowly, in age appropriate ways - with guardrails & limits - so tech doesn't crowd out essential childhood activities. It's not about NO TECH, it's about SLOW TECH. [Kids IRL](#) is our hyper local collective action initiative in Marin County to help parent and school communities commit to doing this important work together. Click on the icons below to connect with us!



info@screensense.org



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