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# CELL PHONE DISCUSSION GUIDE

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## Dear Parents,

I remember someone telling me once that the internet was a phase. No seriously...that really happened! Truth is, their version of the internet and technology really was a phase. For many adults, the way we understand technology and online usage is a passing phase because online trends and opportunities are constantly evolving and changing. Our kids live in a world where they will have to learn how to live productive and healthy lives in the midst of a plethora of options (positive and negative) that technology will offer them.



If grasping this wasn't already difficult enough, let's just be real...we will be hypocritical. One minute we'll tell our kids to turn off their gaming system and focus on homework. Five minutes later, we'll be calling them over to check out a hilarious meme or video that popped up on our social media page we found while we were "working."

Believe it or not, you as parents in this generation have been entrusted with the incredible responsibility of navigating these uncharted waters. Generations after you will observe your successes and failures. You are on the front lines of a challenge that our world has never before encountered.

Teaching teenagers how to navigate technology and make wise online decisions is a lot like teaching a teenager how to drive a car, it takes time, and intentionality. We don't just toss them the keys on their 16th birthday. We know from experience, that they'll make mistakes and we need to use those mistakes as teaching opportunities. When it comes to technology and the digital, the state doesn't issue learners' permits or require a written exam accompanied by a road test. When it comes to technology, we're on our own. So we've provided this Discussion Guide to help our students earn the "keys" to their technology.

**“...the best thing you can do for your students is to be the adults you want them to become.”**

If you don't read any further than this initial introduction to the Discussion Guide, here these words: Be a great example for your students. Without a doubt, the best thing you can do for your students is to be the adults you want them to become. So begin considering these questions: What are some good general rules for you as a parent? How will you handle technology usage at night, when you go to bed? Do you have screen time limits? What are your personal rules for the dinner table or with your spouse and/or children? Perhaps before you can sit down and begin discussion with your teens and/or tweens you need to be honest with yourself about your own usage.

# Tips on How to Have a Great Conversation about Technology with Your Student

- A smartphone is powerful; it's not a toy. We literally have a whole new world in our pocket! This is difficult because we keep games on our phones. "Powerful" is not good or bad, but "powerful" is capable of much good and much bad.
- **Prepare them; don't protect them.** This season will be marked by failures, successes, and a slow increase in the freedom and responsibility your student is trusted with. Just a reminder: Think about the learning to drive scenario. No responsible parent would ever just toss the keys to a teenager and let them figure out themselves. It's a slow process of teaching, guiding, warning, etc.
- Cast vision for the future. Your goal is that one day they will have total freedom on their own phones. Why not talk about that?
- **Prioritize an ongoing conversation *above all else*.** Rules and punishments are important ,but as a student grows in freedom, *conversations* become most important. If your student isn't talking about something because of rules or the threat of punishment, you may want to rethink your posture.
- Take the appropriate amount of time. *A smartphone is an "everything."* A student gets a new smartphone isn't ready for everything that comes with it. In a lot of ways, it's much more dangerous than even learning how to drive a car. Think about adding privileges over times until a student can handle the full power of a smartphone. Think "curfew" mentality. If your teenager can't demonstrate the responsibility & maturity to make it home for their 9:00 curfew, would you freely extend it to 10:00?
- Start with the basics. Students can start with calling (something incredibly foreign to them!), texting, and some preselected apps. Parents should "lock down" the phone in the App Store, web browsing, and social media in the beginning.
- Simulate emergency situations. We all understand that learning to drive a car is about minimizing and/or avoiding emergencies and not about perfection. You should plan in the same way with technology. Spend some time discussing obvious issues with technology. Prepare them for the emergencies we know they will face.

# Parent Technology Worksheet

Throughout the Discussion Guide, you will be prompted to share with your student how you as an adult have set up wise boundaries. Again, if you haven't taken the time to think through your own boundaries. Now is the time to do so. So be sure to take some time to think through these questions while you watch your favorite show on Netflix and discuss them with your spouse.

- **How will our family deal with technology at bedtime?** Remember, phones are an “everything.” If you're son or daughter's unlocked phone or other gizmo is in their bedroom, so is the opposite gender. It may be wise to designate a central place away from bedrooms where beeps, rings, and the rattling invitations & notifications won't keep you awake or tempt your kids.
- What are the “no technology” times for each member of the family? Apart from sleep times, there are other times when phones should not distract. Discuss mealtime expectations for everyone. Also, regardless of whether your teen(s) drive or not, discuss drive-time expectations. Your example will be key during the years leading up to driving.
- Who knows my passwords? Spouses should have no need for secret passwords. This is also true for students and parents. Parents should have access to apps and histories on a cell phone until the students are adults. Discuss how students should communicate current and changing passwords.
- Findings consistently reveal that most kids are exposed to pornography for the first time at home while doing homework. Is our home network helping or hurting our family? We should have something that protects our home network. We should all feel safe at home from danger and temptation whether on home computers, iPads, iPods, gaming systems, or any other media device that connects to the Internet. Research some ways to filter and monitor all devices, including devices from friends who connect when they are visiting. One of our favorite devices is a filter called: **Circle**. Visit: [www.meetcircle.com](http://www.meetcircle.com) for more information.
- Send me a friend request? A member of the family should not be on any social media platform alone. Mom & dad that goes for you too! One of the first “friends” you should have is a spouse or parent. Whether the spouse or parent uses the platform regularly is not important. It's important that he or she has access.
- Take time for constant App Chat. Ask questions like: (1.)Why do you want it? (What does it do? Which of your friends are using it?) (2.)What kind of privacy will you have? How much personal information will you be sharing with others and with the app? (3.)Will you be using this app as yourself, as an avatar, or as an anonymous user, and why? (4.) What kind of interaction or sharing are you hoping to do? (5.) What do you think would be considered to appropriate or inappropriate use of this app?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Read lots more on this subject in Kara Powell's book *Right Click: Parenting Your Teenager in a Digital Media World*.



## **Before you give your student a phone, remember:**

- It's a bad idea to give a student his or her own phone. It's a much better idea to let your students use a phone that you bought for their use. Therefore, you bought it and you pay the bill. Until he or she can pay the bill, be clear that you are happy to provide it, but it's actually your phone.
- Set expectations *before* you give your student a device. Your best bargaining position is *before* you have given your phone. Discuss all you can before the student has the smartphone.

## Dear Ignite/Launch Student,

Congratulations! You're about to get a phone! This is an exciting time and a huge step toward adulthood. In reality, this is a big milestone! We at Ignite/Launch are excited for you. Yet, we are also a little nervous. A smartphone is a *serious* piece of machinery. It's a very powerful tool. It can do so much good, and if it's not respected, can cause so much destruction—to you, your friends, your family, and ultimately even your future. Think of it like a car. Your parents wouldn't just hand you the keys and wish you luck. They're good parents. The same is true here. You have great parents that want to prepare you well for the future.

So let's get started.

A smartphone is much more than just a phone. The title "phone" is kind of outdated and super misleading. In many ways, it's an "everything." That being said, though you are about to get a new device, it doesn't necessarily mean it's a good idea to have full access to it right away. I know that's a bummer, but there is good news. At some point in the very near future, you will have full access to this device. That's great news for you. That is also great news for your parents. They dream of a day when you can take care of this on your own. Just not yet. So, from here on, we will discuss each aspect of your smartphone in two phases: "NOW" and "LATER."

That just means that you will have to show some responsibility and good judgment in some of the "NOW" things in order to get access to those features "LATER."

First, let's talk about technology in general. Your parents, in preparing for this, have worked out some home rules for technology. These are true whether you have a cell phone, a tablet, a computer, a gaming system, or any other device. These are also true for everyone (guests included) in the home. Technology is a reality *we all need to learn to use for good.*

We want to cover one thing before you get into the details of "your" phone. And that's just it. Did you notice the quotation marks around the word "your." That's because, for a while, it's really not yours. Your parents love you and want to prepare you for the future, so they are going to let you use their phone. In fact, they're even going to let you call it "your" phone for now! Awesome, right!?!? I hope that makes sense.

(\*Note: Just a reminder this section begins the questions that we referred to on page 4 that you'll want to be sure you've given some thought to personally, as well as discussed with your spouse or significant other)

# Calling



## PARENTS

- Where does my phone “sleep” at night?
- What are the “no technology” times in the house?
- I can always be asked, “Who are you talking to?”

### NOW

### LATER



When can I accept and make calls?

As the student matures and demonstrates responsibility in this area, the parent may discontinue monitoring service with the provider.

Who can see my call log? We would recommend that, for a while, parents monitor phone use through the phone service provider. This service also allows you to block certain callers, which may be helpful for both of you in the future.

Do we need code words? Students can use them to communicate information when surrounded by their friends (e.g. “Can I spend the night? versus “May I spend the night?”)

# Texting



## PARENTS

- Who can read your text messages?
- Who are you accountable to?

### NOW

### LATER

Should I delete it? Discuss deleting texts together.

- As a student approaches driving age, model and discuss how to manage technology behind the wheel.

What does privacy mean? For a season, parents will have access to text-message content.

- As the student matures and demonstrates responsibility in this area, the parent may discontinue monitoring service with the provider.

Will I get in trouble? Students should not be held responsible for what other people send them, but they are responsible for what they do with it once it's on their phones.

Discuss "emergency" situations that may happen.

What about when another student is in danger?

What do you do if someone sends you an inappropriate or illegal picture?

- Delete it right away.
- Do not show anybody.
- Call a parent right away to discuss.

# Internet Access



## PARENTS

- Who is my accountability partner?
- Who can see my history?
- How can our house be made safer for Internet searches?

## NOW

Which browser is best? For now, Safari should be disabled and replaced with a safe browser.

What are the options? Explore the options in your browser to find ways to filter results.

## LATER

• After a season of good choices with technology Safari can be enabled with some discussions and limitations.

• Internet histories should be deleted *together*.  
• Remember, we all make mistakes or can be tempted to visit the wrong places. Our goal is not to eliminate mistakes as much as to keep the conversation open.

• There are some apps and computer programs that monitor phone usage that can be of help here. (Phone Sheriff, TeenSafe, and CircleGo)

• Students should give access to their Internet histories to an accountability partner in addition to their parents. This could be an older friend, a small group leader, or someone the family trusts.

# Face Time/Video Call



## PARENTS

- Never be alone in a room with someone of the opposite gender.
- Allow the questions: Who was on the call?

## NOW

FaceTime isn't a tool to use right away. Focus on making good choices and developing wise habits with the rest of the phone and it won't be long.

## LATER

- After demonstrating wise choices with the rest of the phone, FaceTime is a good option for increasing responsibility. Remember, when you FaceTime with someone, you are literally inviting that person into your home. The same rules apply to FaceTime as would apply to someone in the house. If a person isn't allowed in your bedroom, then you shouldn't FaceTime there either.

# Social Media



## PARENTS

We need to understand that social media is our:

- **Platform:** Once it's out there, it's out of your control. You may be held responsible for something you post at age 13 when you're 25. It's not fair, but it's true and should be considered.
- **Content:** No social media site can guarantee safe content. The content of these sites is created by the crowd. Though there are rules and filters, inappropriate content will often "pop up" and is available to curious participants who will look for it.
- **Self-esteem issues.** The act of "liking" someone's post or being "liked" is exciting. While it's fun and positive, it can quickly become a self-esteem issue.

## NOW

Social media is here to stay. Students are going to live with social media for the rest of their lives and have to learn how to handle it. However, it's necessary for students to focus on being responsible with calls, texting, and the Internet before starting to build their social media platform.

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## LATER

After demonstrating wise choices in the other area, it may be time to start learning to live in a world with social media.

When they do, we should recommend *one platform at a time* and parents should be "friends" with full opportunity to observe their students' social media posts and interactions.

**Some things to discuss:**

Passwords: There should be no secret social media accounts.

“Friends”: You should always have family as “friends” on social media. (Parents should have an account on any social media platform their students are on.)

Discuss how many friends a student should have. Social media settings should require approval before someone can follow you. No strangers allowed!

Discuss what to do when (not if) you come across inappropriate content.

- Immediately move on.
- Stop following that person right away.
- Do not comment on it. Remember: “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.”

Discuss what bullying and abuse might look like on each of the sites.

# Apps



## PARENTS

- Who can see the apps I download?
- Who is allowed to know my passwords?

## NOW

## LATER

Who gives the thumbs-up? Discuss general rules for downloading apps. Discuss the family account and how it works.

As the student demonstrates wise choices the monitoring and the monthly budget can change.

Is there a budget? Discuss the cost of apps and how much a student can spend on apps & within apps each month.

## MUCH LATER

As the student approaches maturity and is allowed to have his or her own phone, discuss the transition from a family account to a personal account.

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[www.northsideonline.org/students](http://www.northsideonline.org/students)