Is your child phone ready?

How do I know if my child is phone ready?

Discuss with them:

- the purpose of the phone,
- how it will be used, and
- how it will be monitored.

This can be part of ongoing family digital media planning.

Readiness depends on your child's maturity, ability to follow rules, and how they handle everyday responsibilities.

Is there a "right" age for getting a phone?

There's no single age that's right for every child. Research has linked earlier smartphone access and heavier use with poorer mental health and well-being outcomes, but readiness also depends on your child's needs, maturity, and family circumstances.

TIP: Model setting limits and taking breaks.

This checklist is a discussion guide, not a *test* of phone readiness. Use it to explore when your child might be ready for a phone and how to introduce one safely.

1. Phone ready checklist

My child ...	NO	sometimes	YES
Follows a bedtime routine with some independence.			
Keeps devices out of the bedroom overnight.			
Follows rules about media, such as time limits.			
Keeps track of things like their backpack or money.			
Manages strong emotions without turning to a device.			
Handles disagreements respectfully.			
Seeks help if something makes them uncomfortable.			
Protects their privacy and looks out for others online.			
Recognizes scams or misinformation.			

I (caregiver) _____

Am ready to set rules, use parental controls, and talk about daily phone use?			

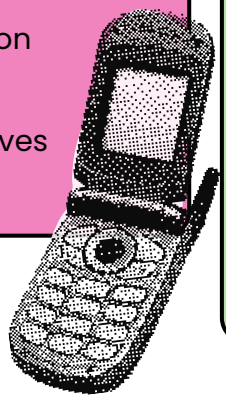
2. Review your responses

✖ More skills to build

If some responses raise concerns, focus on building those skills before introducing a phone.

Try these strategies:

- Discuss what skills your child can build before getting a phone.
- Provide goals to work on, such as completing homework regularly.
- Support building communication skills using shared devices.
- Consider smartphone alternatives like watches and flip phones.



Ready for next steps ✓

If your child demonstrates many of these skills, consider introducing a phone gradually, with family support and clear expectations.

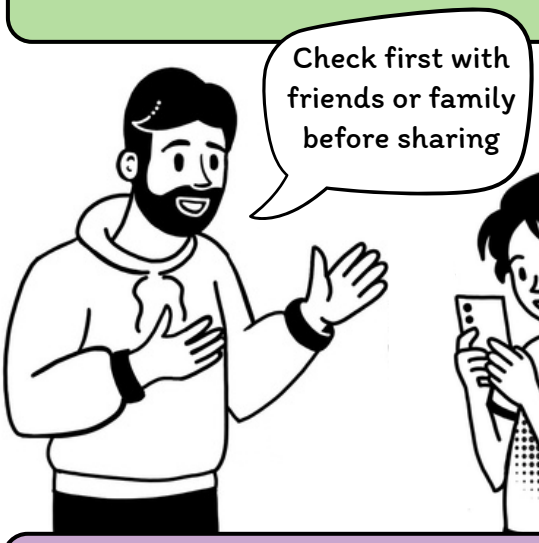
Steps to introduce a phone safely:

- **Communication:** Create a family media plan or contract.
- **Content:** Determine what type of device to get and how it will be used. Start with calls and messaging before adding apps.
- **Calm:** Discuss managing emotions and getting enough sleep.
- **Crowding out:** Discuss features that encourage continued use. Plan how to balance phone use with other activities.

3. Plan safety

Before giving a phone:

- Review privacy settings.
- Discuss location-sharing.
- Discuss monitoring of messages.
- Talk about the risks of sharing photos and personal information.
- Plan what to do if your child faces bullying, upsetting or inappropriate content, or distress online.



TIP: Talk often and openly about consent and privacy.

This guide was informed by evidence from the American Academy of Pediatrics' Digital Ecosystem, Children, and Adolescents: Policy Statement (2026).

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More digital media guidance