

# Cell Phone Discussion Guide

# Dearest Parents,

Our kids will have to learn to live productive and quality lives in the midst of all the options (good and bad) that technology will offer them. On top of that, we have to work to not be hypocritical. We are all still on a learning curve of understanding how to allow tech to help us thrive and honor the boundaries we know with fully developed brains are beneficial for us.

Our generation has the responsibility of learning, on our own, how to handle this new world that our parents never could have imagined- and how to pass it on to our kids. This is not new. Technology is just a new reality to add to the realities of growing up. We love them and we want them to grow up to flourish, even more than we have.

Engaging a cell phone in your child's story is a journey. It's important we set our expectations to just that. We will learn, we will make mistakes, and we can course correct. These mistakes can become great teaching opportunities. This guide has been created to help you set expectations, engage in conversation, and set a road map for course correction.

So let's be a great example, and live the tech lives we want for our children. May our home be a safety net for them to succeed and to fail, and figure out how to move forward.

# CONVERSATION TIPS

1. A smartphone is powerful, it is not a toy. This is difficult because there are games on our phones. “Powerful” is not good or bad, but powerful is capable and a gateway to both good and bad.
2. Prepare your student, don’t disconnect them. This season will be marked by failures, successes, and a slow increase in the freedom and responsibility your student is trusted with.
3. Cast vision for the future. Your goal is that one day they will have total freedom on their phone. You want to help them work towards that.
4. Prioritize an ongoing, open conversation above all else. Rules and punishments are important, but as a student grows in freedom, conversations become more important. If your student isn’t talking about something because of rules or the threat of punishment, you may want to rethink your posture and tone.
5. Take the appropriate amount of time. A smartphone is an “everything”. A student who gets a cell phone isn’t ready for everything. Think about adding privileges over time until a student can handle the full power.
6. Start with the basics. Your student can start with calling, texting, and some preselected apps. You should “lock down” the phone in the App Store, Web browsing, and social media in the beginning.
7. Simulate ER situations. We all understand that learning to drive a car is about minimizing and/ or avoiding emergencies but not to perfection. You should approach technology the same way. Spend some time discussing the obvious challenges with technology. Prepare your student for the emergencies you know they could face.
8. ER Ex: Someone sends you inappropriate content. What do you do first? Someone is being inappropriate on a text thread, what do they do?

# PARENT TECHNOLOGY WORKSHEET

Throughout this discussion guide, you will be prompted to share with your child how you have set wise boundaries as an adult. Before those conversations start, take time to think through these questions and discuss them with your spouse or co-parent.

- **Where does our technology sleep at night?** Agree on a place that your technology can be stored for the night. This could be a central place away from bedrooms. Children's phones should not live in their rooms, but rather a common open space.
- **Where can technology go and not go?** Set boundaries for where technology can be used. We believe technology should not be kept or used behind closed doors or in disconnected spaces without permission. Can your student walk around the house on facetime?
- **What are no technology times for each member of the family?** Apart from sleep times, there are other times when phones should not distract (meal times, driving, when there is company over). Give your permission to remind you, just like you will be reminding them.
- **Who knows our passwords?** Parents should have access and control to passwords, apps, and browsing history until their children are adults.
- **How do we handle technology that is owned by other people?** We are committed to engaging in other people's devices with the same guidelines as we have in our home.
  - Additionally, while learning the ropes of technology, we encourage you to set a boundary with your student to stay off of other's personal technology. As time goes on and wisdom is cultivated this is something students can engage in progressively. However, until we have direct conversations with our students' friend's parents we do not know what kind of boundaries or lack thereof may expose our children.

- **Who is your accountability?** What does that look like? Share with your child who has access to your passwords, apps, and browsing history. Share how you have employed settings on your device to protect yourself.
- **Are we set up to win?** Research ways to filter and monitor all devices, including those that could affect friends who are visiting.
  - Visit our Technology milestones webpage for further resources
- **Will you send me a friend request?** A member of the family should have no private social media platform. One of the "first" friends you will have is a spouse or a parent. It's important family has access to every platform in your life.

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

- It's a bad idea to give a student their own phone. It is a much better idea to let your student use a phone that you bought for their use while they live in your home. Therefore, you buy it and you pay the bill. If they offer to pay the bill, we invite you to consider keeping the reins.
- Set expectations before you give your student a device. Your best bargaining position is before you give the phone. Discuss everything you can before the student has the smartphone.
- It's okay to delay this milestone. If your student has met this milestone in age but not maturity, it's okay to delay this privilege until you have established a base of trust.

## **Dear Village student,**


So, you're about to get a phone. That's an incredible thing and a huge step toward adulthood. At Village we are very excited for you. We are also a bit nervous. A smartphone is a serious and powerful piece of machinery. It can do a lot of good, bring beauty into your moments, and connect you to others. If not respected, it can also do a lot of bad, damage, and disconnect you from the people. Think of its power compared to a car. If your parents just handed you the keys, with no experience or instruction that would probably be a hot mess. However, your community and your parents provide you with education, training, experiences, and feedback. The same is here too. This powerful tool needs this same preparation.

So let's get started.

A smartphone is much more than just a phone. In many ways, it's an "everything". So it's not necessarily a good idea to have full access to it right away. We know that's a bummer, but there is good news. At some point in the near future, you will continue to gain more and more access and opportunities with your phone. Your parents are excited for you to gain independence and grow in wisdom. As you do this, we will discuss each aspect of your smartphone in three phases: "now", "later" and "not wise".

This just means that you will need to show responsibility and good judgment in some of the "now" things in order to get access to additional features.

First, let's talk about technology in general. Your parents, in preparing for this, have worked out some rules and boundaries for your technology. These are true no matter what device is being used. These rules and boundaries also apply to anyone who comes to your house. 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 is just it actually. It’s not really yours. It is yours to use and steward. Your parents love you and want to prepare you for the future, so they are letting you use this. But they maintain ownership and ultimate responsibility for how it is used.

Here are a few different aspects about the responsibility of a phone. We hope you will engage with them, ask any questions, and allow your heart to feel the protection and purpose your parents are gifting you.

**We are on your team,  
Village Church Next Gen Team**

# CALLING

## Parents

- Where does my phone “sleep” at night?
- What are the “no technology times’ in our house?
- How should I respond when I’m asked who I am talking to?

## Now

- When can I accept and make calls?
- What is good etiquette for answering a call?
- Who can see my call log?
- Do we need code words to help communicate that I am in trouble or need help?
- When is it not appropriate to use speaker phone?



# TEXTING

## Parents

- Who can read my text messages?
- Who am I accountable to?
- How should I respond when I am asked about the context of my messages?
- How do I know when to text, when to call, or when to facetime?
- Is what I am saying God honoring?
- Would I be embarrassed if my parents saw or read this? Would they be sad?
- Would myself 5 minutes, 5 days, 5 months, or 5 years from now regret posting or texting this?

## Now

- When can I delete texts?
- What does privacy mean?
- Will I get in trouble for what others send to me?
- Discuss how emergency situations may happen and what you expect from your child.
- What do I do when I find out when one of my friends is in danger?
- What do I do if someone sends you inappropriate or illegal pictures?

## Later

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

# INTERNET ACCESS

## Parents

- Who is my accountability partner(S)?
- Who can see my histories?
- How can our house be made safer for internet searches?

## Now

- Which browser is best?
- What are the options of safe browsers?
- What should I do if I end up seeing something or pulling up a webpage that is inappropriate?

## Later

- After a season of good choices with technology, Safari can be enabled with some discussions and limitations.
- Internet histories should only be deleted together. Remember we all make mistakes and can be tempted to visit wrong places. Our goal is not to eliminate mistakes but to keep conversations open.
- It's always a good idea to give a friend or mentor access to internet histories in addition to parents.

# SOCIAL MEDIA

## Parents

Things we need to understand about social media:

- It's supposed to connect you, be a place of celebration and authenticity, and help you to flourish. If at any time it is not doing any of these things, its use will need to be revisited.
- It's permanent. Once it's out there, it's out of your control. You may be held responsible for something you post at age 12 when you are 25. It's not fair, but it's true and should be considered.
- Content is unpredictable. No social media platform can guarantee safe context. 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 look for it. Your goal is to shut down things that pop up.
- It impacts the way you think about yourself. The act of "liking" someone's post or being "liked" is exciting. While it's fun and often positive, it can quickly affect you negatively.
- Social media is a platform that really reveals the heart. It needs to be seen from the beginning as an opportunity for checking in and giving feedback.

## Now

- It's important that students focus on being responsible with calls, texts, and the Internet before starting to build their social media platforms.
- We believe that social media best enters into a student's life around the time they are gaining the responsibility to drive. We do not believe that platforms like Snapchat which are created for hiding things have any place in student's lives. No platform is perfect, but it needs to be considered why and how something is created.

## Later

- After demonstrating wise choices in the other areas, it may be time for your student to start learning to live in a world with social media.
- When they do, we recommend one platform at a time and you should be "friends" with full opportunity to observe your students' social media posts and interactions.

## **Some things to discuss:**

- There should be no secret social media accounts. You should know and at least initially, check all accounts and messages housed in apps.
- You should always have family as friends on social media.
- Discuss how many friends a student should have. Social media settings should require approval before someone can follow you. No strangers allowed. Any person you have not met in real life can not be your friend on the internet.
- Discuss what to do when you come across inappropriate content.
  - Immediately move on
  - Stop following the person right away
  - Do not interact with it
  - If you consider this person a close friend, have a conversation with them or tell a safe adult.
- Discuss what bullying and abuse might look like on each of these sites.

# **APPS**

## **Parents**

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

## **Now**

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

## **Later**

- Discuss when your child will be able to switch to a personal account from a family account in the distant future.

# SHARING INFORMATION

## Parents

- Who can I share my locations with?
- Who and what kind of pictures can I share?

## Now

- Never give your name or personal information out to anyone on the internet.



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