



♥ [Donate \(?form=HealthyChildren\)](#)

School Cell Phone Policies: Tips for Families

By: Jenny Radesky, MD, FAAP & Megan A Moreno, MD, FAAP

Does your child or teen's school have a new phone policy starting this year? Some schools now ask students to keep phones away "bell-to-bell," from the start of classes through dismissal. Others use locking bags like the Yondr pouch to store phones during the day. Some only allow phones at lunch.

Adapting to new cell phone rules at school

New school phone policies like these and more can mean some adjustments for both students and parents. Parents, especially, have said they feel worried (<https://nationalparentsunion.org/2024/09/06/in-case-of-emergency-new-survey-finds-why-parents-parents-say-children-should-have-their-cell-phone-at-school/>) about not being able to easily access their child at school if there's an emergency ([/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/actions-schools-are-taking-to-make-themselves-safer.aspx](https://www.aap.org/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/actions-schools-are-taking-to-make-themselves-safer.aspx)). These changes will take some getting used to for everyone. Here are some suggestions to set your family up for success.

Normalize time away from phones.

Without thinking about it, many of us have our phones in our hands or pockets most of the day. Try setting times at home when everyone puts their phones out of reach and does other things. These breaks from screens help kids of all ages adjust to being without their devices and focus more on what's happening around them.

Tip: Easy times to start going phone-free are during car rides, meals or time outside. At bedtime, swap the phone for a book, journaling or another bedtime routine. As a parent, you can role model putting away your devices, too!

Help your teen or tween see the benefits of phone-free time.

Talk about time away from phones as an experiment that everyone will learn from. How does it feel to not have their phone within reach? Do they like the uninterrupted time being alone with their thoughts, or is it uncomfortable at first? How much have they gotten in the habit of following a feed rather than their own creativity? Notice whether at-home conversations or homework become easier.

Use built-in phone settings.

Most phones and devices have tools to help manage screen time. Through digital wellbeing, screen time or family pairing settings, you can set downtime or do-not-disturb options. Instead of seeing it as a restriction on your family's screen time, treat it as protecting activities that matter to you, where you want to be fully present. Remind your kids that tech companies don't need (or deserve) to have access to us every waking minute of the day!

Tip: Check your phone settings together and view your screen time amount or number of pickups. Are you surprised at how many times you also pick up your phone?

Teach non-tech ways to calm down or reset their brains.

Middle and high school students often say they use their phones to relax or "reset" when school feels overwhelming. As a caregiver, validate the fact that it's normal to feel overwhelmed at school sometimes. But also emphasize the importance of problem-solving with other coping strategies. Examples include taking deep breaths/using grounding (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1GIgOtueWg>) exercises, asking to take a brief walk to get a drink of water and speaking with a school counselor.

Tip: Parents and educators can work together to support students who are feeling stressed or overwhelmed by brainstorming plans for when students need to reset.



Reduce how much you text your kids during the day.

[Back to Top](#)

A major source of phone notifications during kids' school days is—guess what? Parents! Although it's convenient, or you may want to provide emotional support to a stressed child, kids learn how to be independent more easily when they have some space away from their parents each day. Batch your notifications until after school is over, or write ideas down on a sticky note to talk about with your child later.

Tip: Did you know you can schedule texts to be delivered at specific times in the future? Type a text when convenient for you and select "Send Later" to deliver when convenient for them!

Make a plan for how to get in touch.

For unexpected issues like needing a pickup, illness or forgetting homework, use the school office phone line during the school day. Set an expectation that using the phone is fine before and after school.

Tip: If you're worried about communicating during emergencies, talk to the school and review their [emergency communication plan \(/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/actions-schools-are-taking-to-make-themselves-safer.aspx\)](#). All schools should have a plan in place.

Start simple with new phones.

If your child or teen is getting a new phone, you can do them a favor by making it boring to begin with. This means starting out without social media, YouTube or games. These are the biggest distractions during school hours. You can set up the phone to require your permission for new downloads. This way, the phone is mostly a communication device, not a source of fun, and they won't be as tempted to check it during the school day.

Expect missteps & pushback.

Change is hard, so treat mistakes as a growth opportunity. Take the time to review and discuss your school's phone policy with your child. Go over what the consequences will be if kids violate their school policy, and how you will work together to help your child succeed.

Remember

Parents and families play an incredibly important role in teaching screen media habits for children and teens. As your child adapts to a new school phone policy, use it as an opportunity to reboot your media expectations at home.

More information

- AAP Family Media Plan ([/English/fmp/Pages/MediaPlan.aspx](#))
- Kids & Screen Time: The 5 C's Questions for Young Teens ([/English/family-life/Media/Pages/kids-and-screens-the-5-cs-questions-for-young-teens.aspx](#))
- School Safety & Communication Plans During an Emergency ([/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/actions-schools-are-taking-to-make-themselves-safer.aspx](#))
- Does a No-Phones Policy at School Improve Learning? (https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/center-of-excellence-on-social-media-and-youth-mental-health/qa-portal/qa-portal-library/qa-portal-library-questions/school-phone-policies/?srsltid=AfmBOorNCNuVL17yWsnNdCBieIfDtedYX9WEYFAEy4Abp1GiEdC9aFDh&_gl=1%2a11eik57%2a_ga%2aMTM4ODE3NTcwMi4xNzI2MjM5MjYx%2a_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ%2aczE3NTYyMjEzNDUkbzgyMSRnMSROMTc1NjIyMTYzMCRqNSRsMCRoMA..) (American Academy of Pediatrics Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health)
- Effects of Screen Time on Academic Performance and Mental Health (https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/center-of-excellence-on-social-media-and-youth-mental-health/qa-portal/qa-portal-library/qa-portal-library-questions/effects-of-screen-time-on-academic-performance-and-mental-health/?_gl=1%2ac6846n%2a_ga%2aMTM4ODE3NTcwMi4xNzI2MjM5MjYx%2a_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ%2aczE3NTYyNDZyNDYkbzgyMyRnMSROMTc1NjI0NjQxMiRqMTQkbDAkDA..) (AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health)
- Reducing Distractions from Smartwatches in Elementary Schools (https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/center-of-excellence-on-social-media-and-youth-mental-health/qa-portal/qa-portal-library/qa-portal-library-questions/reducing-distractions-from-smartwatches-in-elementary-schools/?_gl=1%2a1qsy54x%2a_ga%2aMTM4ODE3NTcwMi4xNzI2MjM5MjYx%2a_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ%2aczE3NTYyNDZyNDYkbzgyMyRnMSROMTc1NjI0NjQxMiRqMTQkbDAkDA..) (AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health)
- Teachers Talk Tech: What Parents Need to Know This School Year (<https://fosi.org/program/teachers-talk-tech-what-parents-need-to-know-this-school-year/>) (Family Online Safety Institute)

About Dr. Radesky



Jenny Radesky, MD, FAAP, is Co-Medical Director of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Center of Excellence on G. Dickinson Collegiate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Michigan Medical School, where she directs the Division of Pediatric Media and Young Minds. She has authored the AAP policy statements Media and Young Minds (https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/5/e2016autologincheck=redirected&_gl=1%2a12zyqyg%2a_ga%2aMTA4MDkxODkzNi4xNzI5MTkxNjQy%2a_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ%2a_o2MCRsMCRoMA..) and Digital Advertising to Children (https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/146/1/e20201681/_gl=1%2a12zyqyg%2a_ga%2aMTA4MDkxODkzNi4xNzI5MTkxNjQy%2a_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ%2aczE3NTYyMTgwMTIkbzIzjG) and is the editor of the developmental behavioral pediatrics textbook *Encounters With Children*, 5th Edition, and sits on the Board of the American Academy of Science. You can follow her on Instagram @jennyradesky (<https://www.instagram.com/jennyradesky/>).

About Dr. Moreno



Megan Moreno, MD, MPH, MEd, FAAP, is Co-Medical Director of the AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth and is an Affiliate Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is the academic chief for the Department of Pediatrics and serves as Vice Chair of Academic Affairs for the Department of Pediatrics. Dr. Moreno is passionate about helping teens build healthy relationships, influences, and experiences, and to consider ways in which technology may provide new venues for education. You can follow her on Instagram @SMAHRTeam (<https://www.instagram.com/smahrteam/>).

Last Updated 8/26/2025

Source American Academy of Pediatrics (Copyright © 2025)

The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.