

PHONE READINESS ASSESSMENT

Why We Started With Development, *Not Age*

Most parents ask: "What age is right for a first phone?" We asked a different question. Here's how Dr. Evie Trevino helped us build a tool that actually answers it.

**Dr. Evie Trevino — Lead Researcher**

Quantitative psychologist whose work sits at the intersection of psychology, human flourishing, and survey research. Her career has focused on how people grow, what helps them thrive, and how research becomes practical tools for real life.

Associate Professor, ORU

President, Hope Wired

17 Years, University of Oklahoma

Hope Science

A phone doesn't test whether a child can operate a device. Most kids can do that quickly. It tests whether they can handle freedom, pressure, boredom, comparison, temptation, privacy, conflict, and responsibility — often all at once. That is a very different question.

When we asked Dr. Trevino to help us build the Headlamp Phone Readiness Assessment, she didn't start with age. She started with development. The result is a research-informed tool designed to help parents see their child more clearly — and guide them more wisely.

We didn't want a fear-based tech quiz. We wanted something that could help parents see their child more clearly and guide them more wisely.

The assessment draws on principles from psychology and neuroscience — especially the gradual development of executive function, moral reasoning, identity formation, and social awareness. These are the capacities kids need not just to use technology, but to carry it wisely.

Parents rate how true each statement is for their child across normal daily situations. The goal is not to diagnose or label. It's to surface a clearer picture of the capacities already present — and the areas that still need support.

The Seven Readiness Areas

Each area captures a dimension of development that shapes how a child handles a phone in real life.

1

Self-Regulation and Impulse Control

Can your child manage emotions and behavior when frustrated, bored, disappointed, or told no? Can they accept limits and stop using screens when asked?

A phone is an impulse machine. Without self-regulation, it becomes the place a child goes to avoid discomfort — turning boredom, anxiety, and loneliness into moments to escape rather than moments to grow.

MODEL IT

"I want to check my phone right now, but I'm going to finish this conversation first."

TRY SAYING

"Being able to stop is part of being ready. That's why we practice."

2

Responsibility

Does your child follow household rules without constant reminders? Do they keep commitments? A phone adds responsibility — it doesn't create it.

If a child already needs reminders for daily tasks, a phone can quickly become another thing parents have to police — turning the relationship into a daily argument about limits and consequences.

MODEL IT

"I told you I would do that, and I forgot. I'm sorry. I'm going to take care of it now."

TRY ASKING

"What's one responsibility you want to take over this week without me reminding you?"

3

Executive Function Skills

Can your child plan, manage time, balance priorities, and switch from technology to another activity without delay?

Executive function is the brain's management system — and phones put pressure on it all day. A child may intend to watch one video and lose forty minutes. They may know homework matters, but the device keeps pulling them back.

MODEL IT

"I need to answer this message, but I'm setting a timer so I don't lose track."

TRY SAYING

"Readiness isn't just wanting the freedom. It's being able to manage it."

4

Peer Influence and Social Comparison

Can your child handle social pressure and disappointment? Do they rely heavily on peer approval? Do they change behavior just to fit in?

Group chats, streaks, likes, and exclusion can all become immediate and visible inside a phone. A child dependent on approval may share things they shouldn't, or stay in unhealthy dynamics because inclusion feels more important than wisdom.

MODEL IT

"Some people may not understand this decision, but it lines up with what matters to our family."

TRY ASKING

"What kind of person do you want to be in a group chat when someone is being left out?"

5

Sense of Identity

Does your child feel confident being themselves online and offline? Can they make choices that reflect their beliefs — not just what's popular?

Without a grounded sense of self, the digital world can become a mirror that distorts more than it reflects. Kids begin shaping themselves around what gets approval instead of what's true.

MODEL IT

Share stories about choices you made because they aligned with your values, even when they weren't popular.

TRY ASKING

"What's something you like or believe, even if other people don't totally get it?"

6

Moral Reasoning and Understanding of Rules

Does your child show concern for others' feelings? Do they understand that online actions have real-world impact? Are they aware of how their words affect people?

Digital spaces make consequences feel distant. A cruel comment feels like words on a screen, not a wound in a person. Kids can misuse power quickly online — join cruelty, forward private information, or minimize harm because "everyone was doing it."

MODEL IT

Apologize when you get it wrong. Speak respectfully about others when they're not in the

TRY ASKING

"Before you send something, how can you remember there's a real person involved?"

room.

7

Digital Literacy

Does your child understand online safety, privacy, misinformation, and what to do when something upsetting appears?

Digital literacy isn't knowing how to use a device — it's knowing how the digital world works. Without it, kids are easier to manipulate. They may overshare, believe false information, or assume whatever appears online must be normal.

MODEL IT

"I'm not clicking that link because I don't know where it came from. That headline is trying to get a reaction — I'm going to slow down."

TRY SAYING

"You will never be in trouble for coming to me with something scary or confusing. I want to be the first place you go."

What to Do With the Results

The assessment is not a verdict. It is a map. Lower-scoring areas are not failures — they are next steps.

HIGH SCORE

May be ready for more responsibility — with support, clear boundaries, and open communication.

EMERGING SCORE

Foundation is forming. Ready for gradual exposure, shared-device practice, and clear structure.

NOT YET READY

Not bad news — simply means your child needs more real-life practice before independent access.

"This is not about proving whether you are good or bad. It is about helping you get ready for something powerful. Let's look at the areas together and choose one or two to work on first."

That shifts the conversation from judgment to growth. From pressure to preparation. From "because I said so" to "here is the path."