



HOW TO KNOW —
if your child is ready for a

PHONE



So many people ask if there is a specific age at which a tween or teen can handle an iPhone. While I don't think that there many positives for a young child having a phone, I don't believe there is one set age that works for every kid and family. It is about developmental readiness and really, the first question is whether the parents are ready for the child to have a phone. This is important because giving a child a phone is more than just a way to facilitate planning and busy lives. Tweens and teens tell me that when their parents given them their first phones they are given some vague warnings like "don't mess it up" or "don't write anything you wouldn't say to someone's face." That's all true, but not terribly helpful. Indeed, we often wait until children have encountered challenging things in the digital space before we address specifics with them. In my work with schools and families, I encourage adults to talk about these challenging interactions early and often to help the kids develop strategies to manage these hard moments. While not a strict checklist per se, below I have listed several topics that parents should be willing and able to address with their children in advance of giving them a device. If parents don't feel comfortable having these conversations, no one is ready for the phone, because unfortunately these are real and encountered often!

TOPIC 1 | SEXTING

UNFORTUNATELY, YES THIS IS A REALITY. I HAVE TALKED TO 7TH GRADERS WHO HAVE RECEIVED REQUESTS FOR EXPLICIT PICTURES AND HAVE READ STUDIES INDICATING THE BEHAVIOR CAN BE SEEN IN PRETEENS AS YOUNG AS 5TH/6TH GRADE.

It is incredibly important to talk about this before your child is faced with a request or image in a peer encounter. Ideally they should have a plan for how to deal with this in place so that they are prepared and are not trying to manage this alone. It is important to note that boys and girls send the same number of sexts, however girls images are more often passed along to others (giving the impression that there are more girls' images created).



TOPIC 2 | BULLYING [OVERT & SUBTLE]

From screenshots of images that kids use as social weapons against their peers to kids being muted or blocked from video games, **BULLYING HAPPENS ON SOCIAL MEDIA (JUST LIKE IT DOES OFFLINE).**

We need to help our kids recognize the ways bullying can play out in the digital space and give them strategies to manage this whether they are the victim or a bystander in the exchange.





it is very hard for tweens/teens to know what language/comments are appropriate in parts of the digital world because apps like Snapchat and Facebook Messenger provide the illusion of privacy. They believe that because images disappear they are free to speak or send images they would not share with everyone.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMIND YOUR CHILD THAT THEIR PEERS' ABILITY TO SCREENSHOT AND SAVE IMAGES/TEXT MEANS THAT NOTHING IS EVER PRIVATE (OR REALLY AS I ALWAYS SAY TO TEENS, PRIVACY IS ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR PEER GROUP).



IF ANY (OR ALL) OF THESE CONVERSATIONS FEEL TOO OVERWHELMING, OR YOU COULDN'T POSSIBLY IMAGINE TALKING ABOUT THIS WITH YOUR CHILD, THEN YOU (AND YOUR CHILD) ARE NOT READY FOR AN IPHONE. AND IF YOUR CHILD HAS A PHONE AND YOU HAVEN'T TALKED ABOUT THESE THINGS WITH THEM YET, MAKE IT A PRIORITY FOR YOUR NEXT FAMILY DISCUSSION.