

# NAVIGATING THE SEA OF SMART PHONES, DEVICES, SOCIAL MEDIA + APPS



By Christian Bonham

Phones, texting, smart phones, iPods, apps, tablets, iPads, Apple Watch, Google Glass, Kindles and let's not forget computers and internet. It's an ocean of technology out there. So many questions cross a parent's mind when it comes to this vast ocean: *Does my kid/teen need a phone? Which apps are good/not good? How do I set rules for their phone?*

## So to begin, it is best to tackle some myths presently floating about:

1. **Myth: *Technology is bad. OR The internet is evil.*** **Truth:** Neither technology nor the internet are evil, but can be used for evil.
2. **Myth: *Predators are dangerous adults.*** **Truth:** Predators are dangerous *people* and can even be other teens. Predators go to great lengths to build trust with their victims leading them to think they are valuable and giving them a false sense of security; even offering a relationship together (to include a secret relationship that only they know about). However, in reality, they simply want to use their victim for their own gratification and will bounce from person to person until they are able to find one able to be "groomed"\*. Younger predators (other teens and even young adults > 25 years old) rarely view their behavior as predatory. Instead they see their victim or relationship with the victim as a challenge or game to be won. In many cases Predators tend to be patient in grooming their victim, often working multiple victims at the same time.
3. **Myth: *My kid needs a smart phone for school and life in general.*** **Truth:** No, your kid does not *need* a smart phone – even for school. *Wanting* and *needing* are two totally different things. No school can/would require you to get your child a phone/device (because that is a parent's decision and the school cannot – SHOULD NOT – regulate how parents raise their children).

*Does a smart phone/tablet make life a little more convenient? Yes. Is it a tool that can help them keep in touch with others via texting, social media or apps? Yes. But a smart phone is not needed.*

**Whether a child should have a smart phone or not depends on two things: (1) how responsible the young man/woman is, (2) how much parenting you as the parent are willing and able to do.** If your child struggles in school, has questionable behavior, or struggles with lust or integrity, for example, getting a smart phone for them may not be a good idea. If you are unaware of the struggles of your child, a smart phone may not be a good idea. If you, as a parent, are unwilling or unable to check their apps, phone activities or phone practices daily then be honest about this and do not get them a phone/device.

*Why would you need to check on them?* Think about their device like a computer (because it is). Back in the day experts, school leaders and church leaders all said home computers and laptops should be placed and used only in high traffic areas of the home (living room, dining room, etc.). Because of their mobility, however, we no longer consider this rule of thumb for these mobile devices. So kids are free to look at them in the privacy of their rooms, bathroom or wherever, and at all hours – night or day. While it is their responsibility to use their devices appropriately, it is your responsibility to monitor their usage. Ground rules, consistency with those rules daily and parenting are the necessary ingredients for a kid or teen to have a smart phone.

**Another consideration:** Most kids think they need a smart phone and social media to function in life and culture. Again, while helpful, the world functioned quite well without social media before so to say it is needed is a myth. This is a lot easier to demonstrate to your child/teen if they do not see your life as a parent revolving around your phone and social media, either. If they see you always posting things to Facebook or Instagram or checking those accounts they are going to have a hard time believing they do not *need* the same access to social media because by all appearances, you cannot live without it either.

4. **Myth: *My kid needs to use their phone as an alarm.*** **Truth:** No they do not. Cheap alarm clocks can be purchased for \$5-10 and work just as well as they used to before the advent of phone alarms. This only gives them excuse to bring their phone/device in their room and have it available to them at all hours of the night.

### **Dangerous Apps Parents Ought to Block/Disallow** (UPDATED September 2014)

The following apps are extremely dangerous because of the privacy settings on them and the great deal of freedom users have using them. Each allows for a great deal of anonymity by the users and some are even difficult for law enforcement to track. Investigations Departments of several local law enforcement agencies have warned against teens using many of these apps due to the frequent reports or dangerous interactions that are birthed using them. Here are the apps:

- **Facetime** and **Skype**  
*Most teens use Face Time, especially iPhone users, while a few use Skype. Both apps allow for real time video chat. Both have been used frequently by teens to dare or ask other teens to undress in front of each other or use them for sexually-charged conversation or activities.*
  
- **Kik**  
*A virtually anonymous and a nearly impossible-to-trace texting app. A high percentage of teens use this app over regular texting methods due to the privacy it allows and inability for people to find them on it without their direct username (especially parents or adults). This app is especially dangerous because it does not need a phone number for teens to text each other as it is an app-based texting service. This is a popular app used for sexting and sending sexually explicit messages and sharing pics of drug use (in particular, pics of teens puffing and getting high).*
  
- **Ask.Fm** (www.askfm.com)  
*An anonymous question-asking app/site that allows people to ask any question they want without having to reveal themselves. While a lot of questions tend to be general inquires, many predators and hormonal teens use the app to ask highly personal, sexual and even fetish-driven questions or requests (such as requests for pictures of them in various states of undress, asking them to meet and perform certain acts, asking them to take a pic doing something in particular, complimenting them sexually or asking them to take pics of feet or other things for their fetishes). The app/site is also dangerous for the amount of abuse that can be issued anonymously. Frequently people “asking” questions use the forum to embarrass, lie or humiliate the one answering questions by calling them names, sharing private information anonymously or starting rumors about the teen.*
  
- **Snapchat**  
*A picture-based chat app where people take random pics or video and send them to friends with a half sentence or less. The problem with this app is the sender sets a time length for the pic to be viewed (usually 5-20 seconds). Once it expires the pic is deleted... unless someone who receives it takes a screen capture of the message/pic. Then it is on their phone forever. This is a popular app used for sexting and sending sexually explicit messages.*
  
- **Secrets** and **Rumr** and **Whisper**  
*Apps that allows people to submit secrets they have and don’t want to share. These posts are completely anonymous and often very sexual or destructive.*
  
- **Other apps to be avoided or banned from your child/teens devices** (due to the anonymous nature of the posts or because posts “self-destruct” - automatically delete):
  - Chatous
  - Burn Note
  - Omegle
  - Yik Yak
  - Jah
  - Shrtwv
  - Bragger
  - Guilt
  - Blabber
  - Peekr
  - Cyber Dust

- **Apps/Sites to be familiar with and keep a close-eye on** (due to the content posted on these sites/apps):
  - o Reddit
  - o Tumblr
  - o Vine
  - o Instagram (to include Private Messages)
  - o “Images” or “Videos” searches on any search engine: *Google Images, Google Videos, Bing, Yahoo, etc.*
  - o Google Hangouts/Facebook Messenger
  - o Twitter
  - o YouTube (including the history of viewed videos)

**NOTE:** Any app or program that allows posts to “self-destruct” (which means they delete or disappear after a set amount of time – usually minutes or less) or allows users to post anonymously should be avoided at all costs, regardless of how fun or popular the app. Even Facebook is experimenting with the idea of “self-destructing” posts for possible use in the near future. These apps are usually the most dangerous and create the darkest virtual corners for our children.

### **Suspicious Things/Activity to Look For On Your Child’s/Teen’s Device:**

- Secret apps. Under the Apps Menu many devices have the option to hide apps (usually used to hide annoying apps that the phone will not let you delete). Select the “show all apps” option on their device to see what they have installed.
- A child/teen changing their passcode to one you do not know. Should this happen take the device and refuse to return it until you can access their info (and then look through their phone, messages and apps thoroughly).
- Are you blocked? If your child/teen block you from any social media site (or you learn they’ve set up a secret account/profile). If you are not allowed access to their social media for any reason, they should not have access to a phone/device.
- A top ground rule of social media should be full access to all their accounts (you should have their logins and passwords for all accounts to check in on them from time to time). The reason for this is not everything is publically visible (in particular Private Messages/Inboxed Messages).
- **Types of posts/pics your child makes or “likes” . A lot can be learned by the posts they “like” or share online – to include warning signs of depression, anxiety, lust, heartbrokenness, anger, loneliness, hurt, infatuation, addiction, drug use, etc.**
- **#Hashtags.** Often posts and pics are followed by hashtags which are searchable tags. For example, *#TeamJesus* is a hashtag people use to associate a post with their faith (or for some to mock Christianity). Once posted, if you click the hashtag *#TeamJesus* you can see other posts with the same hashtag. This is one way teens build community online – good and bad. There are many positive hashtags as well as negative ones associated with drug use, suicide/depression/self-harm, sexual activity, etc. Hashtags are not always clear as to what it is (i.e. *#Sue* is a suicide hashtag). When in doubt ask and/or research.
- Who their friends are. This is very important! Glance at their “friends” or the people they follow in social media. Note who your child/teen interacts with the most (chatting with, “liking” their pics/posts, taking pics with, who they mention, etc.)
- Invisible history. If when you go to check their browser history and they are blank or you can only see a limited time frame (today only, only last day or two, etc.), chances are something is being hidden.
- Disjointed text conversations. If you read through a text or KIK conversation between your child and a friend and the conversation appears out of sequence or so random it is as if part of the conversation is missing, chances are it is. Ask your child/teen where the rest of the conversation is.
- Know your *emojis*. Emojis are emotion-pics like smiley faces 😊 😞, farm animals, hand gestures (thumbs up/down) and even poop. These are more than simple little pics to teen/child users and can be used for an entire conversation. No matter how innocent emojis may seem, even they are used for sexual purposes, body parts (cake, peach, etc.), drug use (plant, smoke, etc.), gang life, etc.
- What time are they posting? Liking pics/posts? Sharing posts? Sending texts? Each action comes with a timestamp as to what time they are using their devices. It is not uncommon to see teens posting throughout the night/morning. Even more worrisome – what activity is *not* seen due to self-destructing messages?
- Are they posting their phone number? Address? Pic of their driver’s license or school schedule? This is a major issue among teens who put this info out in social media all the time whether in conversations or in their bio. Many post their locations in posts, complete with GPS map of their precise location.

- Are they grounded from a device but still posting to their accounts or active in social media? A popular trend among teens right now is giving each other devices when theirs is taken. Friends lend an old device they no longer use to their friends until their parents give them back their device.
- Do they refuse to leave their phone unattended. If they are constantly carrying their phone, refuse to let a sibling or parent hold it or become very defensive about letting go of their device, then one of two things are true: (1) they are hiding something (either on the phone or what they are afraid might come through their phone via text/notification), (2) they have no idea how to unplug. Either way, they may need to have a long-term break from their device.

### Some Basic Ground Rules to Consider:

- No Phone Zones. Have certain areas of the house where phones are restricted – bathrooms, bedrooms, private areas, etc. Have a basket or location in the house where everyone leaves their phone.
- Hours of Operation. Have a set time where no one can answer texts, notifications, posts, emails, etc. Maybe even have everyone turn their devices off at that time. This can be extremely difficult for you as a parent, especially if you have removed your house’s landline, but you can go to your settings and turn off all notifications except the phone’s ringer. This way you can still get a call in an emergency, but are able to participate in “unplugging”.
- Transparency. Children/teens must know that as the parent you are to have unrestricted access to their phones, devices and accounts at any time. Make sure this is clear when you give them their phone/device. Should there ever be a time they refuse, hesitate, become defensive or ask for a “couple minutes” first before handing you their device (or you try to access their phone or certain apps and find yourself locked out) they should know they will lose their phones.
- Have clearly established consequences laid out: First offense, second offense, etc. With it also clearly known that these consequences are case-by-case and can change based on the severity of the offense or attitude of the child/teen in their handling of the offense with the parent.
- **PARENT RULE: Consistency. Like anything with parenting – a parent’s greatest tool can also be their greatest nightmare... consistency. If you are not consistent with rules, monitoring devices, clearly communicating expectations and enforcing rules you will make this a difficult and unnecessarily sensitive issue in your home. A teen having a phone or device is as much an added responsibility and commitment for the parent as it is the child/teen, if not more.**

### Additional Resources:

- Common Sense Media (fantastic site to help parents navigate social media and the internet)
  - o <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/video/advice/digital-citizenship>
- Step-by-step Guide to Changing Common Settings for Privacy or App Usage on iPhone/iPad (from North Raleigh Christian Academy)
  - o [http://www.nrcaknights.com/uploaded/Technology/Setting\\_Additional\\_Restrictions.pdf](http://www.nrcaknights.com/uploaded/Technology/Setting_Additional_Restrictions.pdf)
- Text/Chat Lingo
  - o <http://www.netlingo.com/>

*And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. <sup>2</sup> Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)*

<sup>8</sup> *And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. <sup>9</sup> Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)*