



Phone and Social Media Free School Sample Policy & Frequently Asked Questions/Resources

- ❖ Sample language to help schools adopt a clear evidence based policy that reflects best practices
- ❖ Frequently Asked Questions for parents, teachers, and administrators

This document was created from various successful public and private middle schools & high schools from across the country that are joyfully phone and social media free.

Phone Free School Policy (sample language)

School as a Personal Electronic Free Zone:

- Every school (elementary, middle and high school) shall adopt a policy to prohibit use by its students of personal digital product communication devices for the entire duration of the school day. Phones may not be used on school buses traveling to and from school or for field trips.
- The following products may not be used during the school day: internet connected “smart” devices, “smart” phones, cellular phones, internet connected watches “smart watches”, air pods, or headphones.
- The entire duration of the school day includes while the students/teachers are on a school site (for instance during classroom time, lunch breaks, transition times, breaks) or while under the supervision of and control of an employee or employees of that school. Students will not use these products during after school activities.

This requirement can be implemented by the following methods:

1. Students do not bring personal electronic devices to school.
2. The device is placed in a designated area which is not accessible by the student during the school day such as in an over the door shoe rack in the administrators/principal's office.

3. Schools may utilize a product that functions to secure and render the device not accessible prior to the start of the school day.

- A. A device locker – phone locker in the administrator's office
- B. A lockable pouch such as a 'Yondr' pouch

Exception:

When a licensed physician or nurse practitioner determines that the possession or use of a personal digital communication device is necessary for the health of a student (such as a medical need certified by a licensed physician/nurse practitioner to care for diabetes or seizure monitoring), that student may be allowed to carry the device on their person, but they may not use the device for non-medically related purposes. The licensed physician/nurse practitioner will provide documentation to the school in the same way documentation is required for other medications.

Every school shall adopt enforcement measures for their school as a personal electronic device free zone policy which will include consequences for students found in violation of the policy.

Social Media Free School Policy (Sample language)

No school (elementary, middle, high school) will:

1. Utilize social media for communication with students directly or indirectly.
2. Allow students to access social media while the students are on a school site or while under the supervision of and control of an employee or employees of that school.
3. Allow students to access social media on school issued devices, and shall have in place measures to prevent students accessing social media while on school devices and while under the supervision of the school.
4. Permit students, teachers and coaches to use social media for school activities, out of school academic work, homework, school sports, extracurricular clubs and activities.
5. No schools will use social media to communicate with families, communities and students.

Schools may use any of the following means of communication:

- A. School's public facing internet site
- B. In person assembly to share school related information. Examples of successful times are morning drop off, and before pick up.
- C. In person class or grade meetings

- D. Paper communication mailed or sent home with students
- E. Phone calls to parents
- F. Electronic mail to parents/legal guardians (*this cannot be electronic mail attached to social media products*)

Phone Free School Policy, Sample Enforcement

Enforcement and Consequences:

- Each school will designate staff to monitor student violations of the cell phone policy.
- Consequences for students found to be in violation of the policy will be as follows:
 - First offense: Student's cell phone will be confiscated. The student may pick up the phone at the end of the school day from the administrative office.
 - Second offense: Student's cell phone will be confiscated and returned only to the student's parent or guardian.
 - Third and subsequent offenses: The student will be prohibited from bringing a cell phone to school for the remainder of the school year.
 - Students committing repeated violations of this policy may be subject to additional disciplinary action, consistent with the school's Code of Conduct.

Example Protocol using lockable pouch such as a Yondr pouch

Start of school day:

- 1) Prior to the bell, turn off your phone, airpods/earbuds, and smart watch off (not simply on silent or vibrate mode).
- 2) Unlock your empty pouch using an unlocking base.
- 3) Place your phone, airpods/earbuds, and smart watch inside the pouch, securely close it, and store it in your backpack.
- 4) This process may take a few minutes. **Student is responsible for getting to classroom on time with a secured pouch.**

During the school day:

- 1) Keep your phone, airpods/earbuds, and smart watch **inside your pouch** for the duration of the school day. The phone may not be accessed during the school day.
- 2) If you leave school grounds for an appointment, or an event, you may unlock your pouch upon leaving and lock it upon re-entry.
- 3) You may not access your phone during the school day anywhere on school grounds unless you are leaving school grounds.

End of school day:

- 1) When your school day ends, unlock your pouch using the unlocking base.
- 2) Remove your phone from your pouch.
- 3) Securely close your empty pouch so the pin does not get bent and place it in your

info@phonefreeschoolsmovement.org
<https://phonefreeschoolsmovement.org/>

backpack for the next day.

- 4) Students may not use phones on school grounds after school ends
- 5) Phones may not be used on school buses

Example Protocol with admin office collecting the phone and putting in phone locker

Start of school day:

- 1) Prior to the bell, turn off your phone, airpods/earbuds, and smart watch off (not simply on silent or vibrate mode).
- 2) Place the phone in the designated area of the principal/admin office or phone locker
- 3) This process may take extra time depending on how many students bring personal devices to school. **Students are responsible for getting to the classroom on time without the phone on your person.**

During the school day:

- 1) The phone may not be accessed during the school day.
- 2) If you leave school grounds for an appointment you may arrange to retrieve your device at the front office. Upon returning to school, turn off the phone and return the device to the front office/phone locker.
- 3) You may not access your phone during the school day anywhere on school grounds.

End of school day:

- 1) When your school day ends, you may line up and retrieve your phone from the office.
- 2) Students may not use phones on school grounds after school ends
- 3) Phones may not be used on school buses

Frequently Asked Questions, Myths and Concerns:

1. How do I contact my student during the school day?

Parents and guardians who need to contact their student during the school day may do so by calling the office administration number. The staff will be prompt at delivering the message to your student. If it is not an emergency, they will wait until their current class is finished to pass along the message in order to not interrupt the student's learning and focus.

2. **What happens if there is a security incident or a lockdown at school?**

Security experts from the police and military consistently say mobile phones and portable digital devices make children *less* safe. Phones can alert perpetrators/assailants of children's locations. The devices also distract children from listening to the security instructions by their teacher/staff member. Using digital devices during an emergency can also interfere with first responders' ability to conduct essential communications.

3. **What if I need to change pick up time with my child?**

Please call the front office if you need to alter a pick up time with your child. Contacting your child during the school day distracts them from opportunities to engage with their peers and optimize time in person with their teachers and other support staff.

4. **Why is this policy being put in place?**

The school day is when students need to be able to focus and have opportunities to learn to interact with each other, build in person community, and engage teachers and trusted adult mentors. **Study data shows that having a cellphone, even turned off in their backpack, decreases student test scores.** A phone & social media free school gives students back joyful face to face opportunities.

5. **What if my child feels anxious without their phone?**

If your child feels anxious without their phone the school counselor will work with your child on strategies to manage their anxiety through supportive tools. If more support is needed the school team will speak with you about accessing more support outside of school with a physician, nurse practitioner, or licensed mental health specialist to help manage their anxiety. **Multiple studies (independent, not commercial industry funded research) show that phones make anxiety and depression worse in children.** See <https://screenstrong.org/phoneaddiction/> for more information.

6. **What if my child has a medical condition where the electronic device is needed such as for diabetes and seizure monitoring?**

A licensed physician/nurse practitioner can write a note for accommodations when there is a medical need to carry a device for health concerns such as diabetes or seizure monitoring. Please note the device may not be used for communication/internet access during the school day for reasons beyond the medical need. The school nurse can work with your child to make sure they are supported.

7. This is a big burden for schools to take on, what about the role of parents?

Schools have a huge microphone for the community in terms of health messaging and product endorsement. What schools endorse or do not endorse in terms of health practices is heard and seen by the community. If schools stop endorsing phones and harmful online products such as social media, video games and access to pornography, parents and the community will take this cue from schools.

Once this policy is in place a lot of burdens that are currently on schools are significantly decreased. There is less fighting, less in school bullying and a more overall positive atmosphere that is conducive for students to learn and thrive.

8. What if teachers want to use phones in class for instruction?

Given the weight of the risks of significant harms vs the benefits of using a phone for classroom purposes, it has been demonstrated numerous times that the harms significantly outweigh the benefits. There are other ways of delivering instruction that do not pose risks for cyber-bullying, stress, anxiety, distraction and other harms.

9. My child is very introverted and socially awkward, their phone helps them.

A child that is shy and still developing social skills is more harmed by having a portable phone. If these are concerns you have please work with the school counselor who is a licensed professional and can support your child to help navigate socially in school. Phones and social media detract from opportunities to learn social skills.

10. This is a “digital world” – don’t we need to teach our children how to responsibly manage these digital devices?

Our best brain science research and expert psychiatrists tell us the adolescent brain is not able to manage the addictive pull of portable devices and social media products. For-profit companies that sell these products, hire experts in addiction and behavior to design the products to be so addictive that it is nearly impossible for children to resist the pull to constantly check their phones. One experienced high school teacher said, **“I have to take their phones during class because I cannot compete with the digital drug of social media.”**

11. Why can’t teachers just be in charge of the class and collect the phones?

We know that all children need consistency. One policy for the entire school benefits all students. Additionally, it should not be the teacher’s job to monitor phones. This takes away from their most important job of teaching and supporting students.

12. Why are phones not allowed for sports events and after school programs?

Just like during the school day phones distract from children reaching their potential to learn. Additionally, posting photos of children playing sports and doing other activities on social media makes them vulnerable to predators (trafficking) and other attention that may cause them unneeded anxiety.

13. Why can't my child use their phone on the school bus or during school transportation?

Learning situational awareness is an essential skill for school children. If something dangerous happens to the bus driver or on the road children need to be alert and aware of their surroundings in order to best respond to an emergency. Here is a real life example of a school bus incident from this past year. Only one 7th grade child on the bus was not on a device, and therefore able to be observant and aware of their environment and able to respond to help when the bus driver became unconscious.

<https://www.insider.com/michigan-boy-helped-unconscious-bus-driver-not-phone-cbs-reeves-2023-5>

14. What about the Wait until 8th movement? We thought we were supposed to give our children phones for the 8th grade.

Pediatric psychiatrists who are experts in adolescent development explain that 8th grade (the early teen years) is not a developmentally appropriate time to give a child a mobile phone. This is precisely the time when they can be most harmed by the content accessible on a phone (ie. bullying, comparisons, toxic content, and violent and harmful pornography). Listen to the ScreenStrong Families Podcast, Episode 122, for an interview with nurse Melanie Hempe and psychiatrist Dr. Adriana Stacey. They explain the brain physiology for why 8th grade is not a developmentally appropriate age to give a child a phone. <https://screenstrongfamilies.buzzsprout.com/1460173/13337652-encore-why-8th-grade-is-not-smart-for-a-smartphone-with-dr-adriana-stacey-122>

15. But what about all the parental controls? We subscribed to all of the content filters so I thought my child would be safe online.

Data and experience shows that children and teenagers are always able to find ways to work around any and all filter control efforts to block harmful content.

Listen to this podcast interview (episode #173) with a content expert who explains the various ways children easily bypass products marketed as “filters”:

<https://screenstrongfamilies.buzzsprout.com/1460173/13971587-20-ways-kids-get-around-parental-controls-with-doug-smith-173>

16. Why should schools stop using social media to communicate with students?

While use of social media for communication has become a “norm” it does not mean it is a healthy practice to use with children. Experts say that when schools use social media products to communicate with students this is inviting them to participate in using a product that the US Surgeon General stated is not safe for children in his advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sq-youth-mental-health-social-media-advisory.pdf>

It is fair and inclusive to use other communication methods rather than risk having the harmful algorithms of social media products expose children to possibly lethal content. <https://fairplayforkids.org/no-social-in-schools/>

Read the testimony Feb 14, 2023 to Senate Judiciary Committee by mother, Kristen Bride who lost her teenage son, Carson to cyberbullying. There are 17 other (non-exhaustive) real examples of tragic loss in this powerful testimony. Significantly many of these deaths **did not have warning signs** and they were directly and immediately caused by phones and online social media product exposure: <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2023-02-14%20-%20Testimony%20-%20Bride.pdf>

17. Are there any positive solutions? What do we do?

The best thing to do to help your child thrive socially and academically is to not expose them to toxic screen content of social media, video games and pornography at all, even through the teenage years. Even something considered “benign” like sending text messages can be very harmful to teenagers since it displaces real life human conversation.

Find like minded parents or as a PTO consider encouraging everyone to wait until the end of high school to give children phones.

There is nothing in a phone, social media or video games that helps or supports developmental needs of children and teenagers. No parent ever said I wish I gave my child a phone or social media sooner. Instead the opposite is often the case. They wish they had waited.

18. What do children and teens need?

Children and teens urgently need as many opportunities as possible to connect in person and have human to human interactions without the interference and distraction of digital media products. Children need vigorous movement and time outside every day, ideally for 3 hours outdoors.

Additional resources:

SmartPhone Addiction: Teens use smartphones mostly for social media, youtube viewing and internet access. With social media comes gossip, comparison and problematic content. Research informed article about why it is best to avoid phones for children and teens: <https://screenstrong.org/phoneaddiction/>

Smartphones are not smart for teens, especially 8th graders by Melanie Hempe, BSN, Founder of ScreenStrong.org:
<https://screenstrong.org/why-smartphones-not-smart-for-teens/>

The Case for Phone-Free Schools: The research is clear: Smartphones undermine attention, learning, relationships, and belonging.
<https://jonathanhaidt.substack.com/p/phone-free-schools>

ScreenStrong Student Course which explains brain development and how digital screens and online products interrupt healthy brain development.
<https://screenstrong.org/student-course/>