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### What is the right age to give your child a smartphone?

As a parent of three girls, the argument of if and when to give my daughters a smartphone is very relevant in my household. My 14 year-old and 12 year-old already own phones, but my 7 year-old daughter constantly argues that she needs one. Does she? When should I give her a smartphone? Is she missing out on something? Her sisters have one, why can't she? Many parents in the US and all around the world are dealing with this debatable topic while children are introduced to smartphones at an increasingly younger age. As children today are born into a society addicted to smartphones, parents should delay providing a child with a phone to the age of 12-14 depending on the level of maturity of a child. It is essential for parents to take more responsibility in guiding a child into the technological world, and using the correct amount of supervision.

Smartphones have some amazing benefits including educational tools for studying, social media apps for connecting with friends, and unlimited information available at all times, but according to studies and internet safety experts, the cons overwhelmingly outweigh the pros. In an article for the international New York Times, Brian Chen interviewed an internet safety expert, Jesse Weinberger who stated, "The longer you keep Pandora's box shut, the better off you are." (2). Basically, Weinberger is implying that the smartphone can be an extremely dangerous device if you introduce the gadget at an early age. The findings from a survey she conducted among 70,000 children were very disturbing: "On average, sexting began in the fifth

grade, pornography consumption began when children turned 8, and pornography addiction began around age 11” (Chen 3). Children should not be exposed to this kind of material. Not at this early of an age in particular, and not at all if possible.

There are also medical and mental concerns to consider as a result of smartphone overuse at an early age. One of these issues is the risk of damaging the prefrontal cortex, a part of our brain that controls our impulse(Chen 3). In addition to this problem, using phones to avoid boredom robs our children of the opportunity of having free time to think, inspire and promote creativity(Tsavliris 6). We all should consider the ramifications of this early exposure to our children’s brain and soul.

According to Chen, there have been many studies on smartphone use among children and the conclusion is unambiguous; smartphones should not be introduced at an early age. The recommended age is between 12-14, but there is no legal guideline as to when it is the right age to give your child a smartphone. These devices are intensely addicting, providing a distraction for children which affects schoolwork and reveals unwanted dangers such as cyberbullying and more. In the article “ Dealing with the Device-Addicted Generation”, author Reid Goldsborough discusses a poll conducted by Common Sense Media, a nonprofit organization that promotes safe media use for children. The poll indicates that 50 percent of American teenagers and 27 percent of American adults feel addicted to their smartphones. “American children between the age of 8 and 12 spend an average of six hours a day using digital media, and older kids on average spend nine hours a day on social media”(2). These media platforms are mainly consumed through smartphones. According to Goldsborough, avoiding the use of technology like some puritan communities do is not something we can or need to commit to in the modern world. Recognizing the benefits of technology in our everyday life is undeniable and we cannot ignore its need, but

we should definitely use smartphones for the right reasons in mind and without over-using these devices(2).

It seems as if smartphones have taken over the lives of adults and children, and increasingly, we are becoming an addicted society that cannot function without smartphones. As parents, we are responsible for our children's safety and mental development. How can we expect our children to have the self-discipline in using smartphones responsibly if we do not apply that same discipline on ourselves? The article "Guilty As Charged", discusses many parents true struggle of raising children in a digital world. For example, Michaela Wooldridge, a psychology PhD candidate, discussed the findings of her research, which pointed out that as much as parents like to use the "education" card as the reason to allowing screen time at an early age, or arguing that screen time is necessary for children growing up in a tech world, it is clear that children need guidance and limitations. The article goes on describing the struggle of Lisa Guernsey, a mother of two, Journalist, and an educator that is confronted by this topic on a daily basis. Guernsey indicates that there is no right or wrong when it comes to exposing your child to technology, yet it's all about a guideline she created: The three C's. "We have to consider the content of the screen, the context in which media is used, and your child's own personal needs"(4). The importance of sustaining a normal schedule of screen-time and social communication is vital in creating a stronger sense of parent supervision and guidance.

As different studies show, age is not the only crucial component when it comes to deciding when to give your child a smartphone. The maturity and responsibility of a child is very important as well. If a child respects the rules and shows ability to take independent actions with good judgment, then he or she may be ready to receive a smartphone. However, not without setting clear guidelines. These basic guidelines that parents need to implement include time

limits for use, disabling in-app purchases in order to have more control over the content the child is exposed to, having an open conversation about privacy and the dangerous aspects in sharing your personal information, and more. Leading by example is also very important. If our children watch us using the smartphone moderately and responsibly, they will most likely follow.

The struggle is real. Children today are born into a digital world and we cannot ignore the fact that technology plays a huge part in our lives. However, we definitely don't need to be intimidated by it. Instead, we need to establish rules and guidelines when it comes to our children and technology. As a mom, I am fully aware of the addicting component of smartphone use and all the other dangers that are mentioned above. I see my daughters attached to their phones and cannot stop wondering if the decision to give them a smartphone was the right decision to make. Supervising the content and context of what is revealed to my daughters is challenging, especially when it comes to teenagers. The maturity of your child is extremely critical so that he or she can deal with all the disturbing content they are exposed to. I do believe the longer you wait the better. I guess my 7 year-old will have to wait a little longer to get her smartphone.

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