



## 5 Ways to Know Your Child Is Ready for a Phone

**Good parenting involves a certain amount of discretion. There is no one standard rule for all children. Thinking of getting your child his first cell phone? Read this checklist first.**

Cell phones for kids remain a hot debate and a difficult choice for parents. When is it time? When is it just too early? We talked to Stephanie Mihalas, PhD, who specializes in treating children and families, to get the scoop on when kids are truly ready for their own cell phone.

### 1. There's a valid reason to have one.

For elementary and middle school kids, a cell phone isn't a default accessory. Every family situation is different. Consider your needs. Would it be convenient for you to be able to reach your child more easily? Are you interested in using the phone to track your child's whereabouts? Would it provide you peace of mind and security? Essentially, your child should *need* a cell phone -- not just want a cell phone.

### 2. Your child will accept being monitored.

Mihalas says that kids must be OK with authority and being monitored. Parents will want to see what types of phone calls kids are making, data usage, etc., she says. A child who won't agree to being monitored isn't ready for a phone. It will only cause you extra strife at home.

### 3. Your child is mature and responsible.

"Look for developmental signs," says Mihalas. "Does your child misplace things easily? Does he or she have more immature habits?" The last thing you want is for your child to leave an expensive phone on the bus. If your child is easily influenced by peers or you're concerned that he or she may use the phone camera inappropriately, wait a little longer to look into getting a smartphone for your child.

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### 4. You're willing to do the research.

According to Mihalas, there are dozens of apps parents need to be aware of. For instance, there are social media apps that allow anonymity, which are particularly troubling. "Kids will often ask repeated derogatory questions [on apps like this] that target one person," she explains. "Due to the anonymity of the badgering, it creates a virtually consequence-free form of cyber-bullying." Unless you're willing to research apps and monitor what your child installs, it isn't time to get your kid a smartphone.

### 5. You have a good relationship with your child.

Cell phones introduce kids to potential risks, so you need to be able to talk to them about the responsibilities and dangers associated with owning one. "Have an honest, open, two-way conversation with them about risky behaviors such as disclosing personal details to strangers, taking inappropriate pictures, and revealing private information," says Mihalas. "Be a supportive and attentive listener. The more a child trusts their parent, the less they will try to hide."