

Should Kids Have Cellphones?

Mason Owens

Department of English, Anoka Ramsey Community College

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Professor Chris McCarthy

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For many kids, getting their first cellphone marks a milestone in their life. It is a time when they can finally start to become independent and on their way to adulthood. However, is it the best thing for a child? Most people will argue that children need a way to communicate with their parents, an adult, or the authorities if something were to go terribly wrong. Everyone has heard the horror stories of children getting abducted and murdered by strangers. If only they had a cellphone on them so the police would be able to track them down and prevent such tragedies from occurring. The idea of all kids having cellphones and being tracked by their parents could be a deterrent enough to keep strangers away from your loved ones. However, giving kids access to cellphones can lead to much more common instances of horrible events that can traumatize them. Giving kids the unrestricted access to the internet can lead them to seeing things that they shouldn't see. It can lead them into traps set by predators trying to lure in kids and commit atrocities. It can lead to immense amounts of cyberbullying, which affects millions of kids each year. However, it's not just other people that you need to worry about, if you're a kid with a cellphone, you are likely putting your own health at risk too, in more ways than one. I believe that there are a lot of benefits to kids having cellphones, but do they really outweigh the overall costs and potential problems?

At a certain age, kids start to become more independent and begin to do all kinds of things without the supervision of their parents. Whether it's hanging out with their friends, going for a bike ride, or even getting off the bus from school to an empty house because the parents aren't home from work yet, there are many reasons as to why kids should have a way to communicate with those that look after them. For many kids, becoming independent is

something that can't be done without access a cellphone. Without the ability to communicate with their children, many parents would not feel comfortable leaving them somewhere, even if they're with a friend or at a location that has been previously deemed safe. However, if that child has a cellphone, and the parents can track that phone using applications such as *Find My Friends* or *Life360*, I believe that parents would be much more comfortable allowing their children to become more independent. Furthermore, landlines are becoming much less popular in homes, likely due to a rise in smartphones. Without the ability to contact an adult, many kids that are left alone at home can still be in danger. I remember one time when I was a kid, home alone with just my brother, and neither one of us had access to a phone. There was a stranger that kept ringing our doorbell and neither one of us wanted to answer because he looked frightening. It turned out to be someone that our parents knew, but we hadn't met, but it could have easily been someone who was there to hurt us. Without access to a phone, we couldn't call anyone for help and just had to lock all the doors and stay inside and hope that he wouldn't break in and harm us. However, one quick phone call to a parent could've remedied the situation and made it a lot less scary. That is definitely not an isolated incident. I grew up in a very safe area, but if I were a latch-key kid growing up in an area that was more populated and dangerous, having the ability to contact help would've been a necessity. One of the most integral reasons to get a child a cellphone is for safety purposes.

Once a kid is finally able to get a cellphone, whether it's for a birthday, Christmas, or just on a whim, it's a monumental time for that child. It's a way that they can communicate with their friends, make plans, and grow their friendships. Without access to a phone, many kids are only able to hang out with the people that live in their direct vicinity. However, once they can communicate with others over the phone, kids can make friends and hang out with other kids that

live much further away from them. Furthermore, once a child receives a cellphone, which is almost always a smartphone nowadays, a new world opens. In fact, 99% of kids today who have cellphones, have a smartphone (News Center, 2022). This access to a smartphone gives kids the ability to access the internet which can be used for so many educational opportunities. Using applications such as YouTube can be extremely beneficial for kids who are visual learners like myself. Watching informative videos with interesting graphics can make learning easier and more fun. The ability to easily research anything online can be a beneficial tool when struggling to do homework. However, the ability to find quick answers online could also lead to many kids cheating, both at home and in class. It's all about finding a proper balance. Kids need to know when to use the tools they have at their disposal, and when not to do so. For a kid, having a cellphone seems like a necessity, but there are many ways that it can be used where it causes harm to themselves or others.

Moreover, kids having cellphones isn't always a great idea. Most kids get a cellphone between the ages of 12 and 13 (all4kids, 2022). This time in a child's life can be very tough because so many things are changing. They are making the shift from elementary to middle school, many kids are going through puberty, and it can be a tough experience for them if they are not surrounded by a supportive group of their peers. Furthermore, with 95% of teenagers in the United States having access to a cellphone, problems such as cyberbullying become very apparent (Taylor, 2023). Bullying is such a common event in schools today, that many people overlook how serious it can be and how harmful it can be to the development of a child. 1 out of every 5 students report being bullied, and the highest percentage of kids that report being bullied are in 6th grade, at 29% (Statistics). Since smartphones have become so popular in the last 15 years, cyberbullying has gone up by more than double. 59% of students have reported that they

have been bullied online and 90% of students think that it is a major problem that the youth of America are facing today (Statistics). Cyberbullying can lead to low self-esteem, depression, self-harming, and even suicide. Kids that experience cyberbullying are twice as likely to commit suicide than someone who does not (Statistics). If kids didn't have unrestricted access to their cellphones and weren't able to go online and say anything they wanted about anyone, cyberbullying would decrease substantially.

Furthermore, with access to cellphones, kids quickly become entrenched in an adult world full of things that their parents would likely disapprove of. For example, 24% of kids ranging from 6th to 12th grade have been asked by others for sexually explicit pictures over the phone, and 14% of kids have reported sending sexually explicit pictures (Statistics). With unlimited access to applications such as Snapchat, some kids have no issues partaking in such illegal activities. Snapchat makes it so easy to send pictures of yourself or anything at all, because that is their entire gimmick. When it becomes a casual thing to consistently send pictures of yourself to mass amounts of people, problems can start to arise. Additionally, some parents decide that their child isn't ready for a cellphone but will still get them a device such as an iPad or an iPhone that doesn't have a phone plan, but that can easily lead to the exact same issues. Even if a child doesn't have the ability to call someone with ease, they are still able to easily communicate with other people using applications such as *WhatsApp*, *Snapchat*, *Messenger*, and several other apps that provide app to app internet calling. They are easily accessible, free to use, and only require an internet connection. These applications can have incredible benefits and be cost effective, but if you don't want your child to be able to communicate with anyone at any time, you should consider setting restrictions on their device. All it takes is one wrong person to get their information and things could get out of control.

It has always been up to the parents to decide when the time is right for their child to have a cellphone. There are multiple reasons as to why parents decide not to get their kids phones, especially smartphones when they are at a young age. For instance, there are multiple health concerns that regard children and overusing cellphones. For example, 80% of kids with phones reported that they use their phone when they are supposed to be in bed asleep (NortonOnline, 2020). Without the proper amount of sleep, kids are much more likely to do poorly in school. Kids aged 10-18 need anywhere from 8-12 hours of sleep, and if they are getting substantially less than that, it can lead to much bigger problems than doing poorly in school (Children's Hospital Colorado). When kids are supposed to be asleep, but are rather on their phone, it can lead to issues such as a decreased development of the brain, increased negative emotions, weight and growth issues, as well as overall learning issues. When I was growing up, I had a serious problem with my phone at night. I would stay up until 2, 3, sometimes 4 in the morning doing whatever on my phone when I had to be up at 8:30 the next morning for school. For some kids, myself included, the temptation is too steep when your phone is right next to you, and you don't want to go to bed quite yet. For some kids, it's easy to put down the device and go to bed. However, for other kids, it would be beneficial if their parents set restrictions on their phone to disallow usage after a certain time of night or potentially even just taking their phone away each night of the week, so their child is able to get an adequate amount of sleep. The ability to set restrictions on phones is lost on many parents, but as smartphones have become more popular in the last decade, many parents are starting to wise up to this option.

One aspect of children having cellphones that is often overlooked is the high price point that is set for smartphones nowadays. For most people, having a cellphone seems like a necessity, but to put a technological device worth hundreds to thousands of dollars into the hands

of an irresponsible child, it can lead to disaster. For some, this aspect doesn't matter, and I envy the people that can just spend money on whatever they please and not worry about it. But for the average American, adding that major expense can be a big setback, especially in situations where the child is living in a single parent home where there is only one source of income.

Furthermore, these devices that are worth lots of money can lead kids to become targets for thieves looking to make a quick buck. In situations where a tracker has not been setup in their phone, the theft of a smartphone can be incredibly easy, especially in a school situation where nearly everyone has a similar looking phone. If you're not able to get the phone back or don't have insurance to cover the theft of your phone, it can lead to another large sum of money coming out of the parents' pocket. There are many risks associated with getting a child a cellphone, and it is up to their parents to decide when the time is right, and the benefits outweigh the costs and potential drawbacks.

Overall, there are many pros to kids having cellphones, especially for safety purposes. It allows them to communicate freely with their parents and others, it can prevent serious situations from becoming worse, and it allows a child to experience a new sense of freedom. However, in my eyes, there are more issues that come along with the idea of buying your child a phone. For instance, they're incredibly expensive and easy to break, it can lead to kids spending too much time on their screen when they should be outside, doing homework, or sleeping, they can cause bullying and harassment online, and it can lead to serious health issues. When I first started researching this topic, I wasn't sure what side I was going to take. I remember how happy I was when I got my first phone, even thought it was a slide phone with a keyboard, it was still incredibly cool. It was the first time in my life where I was finally able to experience some sort of freedom, something every kid desires, and I wouldn't want to take that experience away from

anyone. However, after doing the research and seeing all the statistics that go along with getting a young kid a cellphone, I see how dangerous it can be. I encourage parents with kids who already have cellphones to consider setting restrictions or some sort of monitor to know what they are getting into. Furthermore, I strongly suggest future parents and parents with young children to consider the potential costs. Is your child mature enough for a cellphone? For many, the answer to that question will be yes. But if you're unsure, I encourage you to wait. It is up to you, the parents, to decide whether the time is right for your child to grow up, because that is the result of your child having a cellphone.

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