



Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.



Know! New Year, New Rules – Cell Phone Contract

The New Year is always a good time to hit the reset button and establish any new rules you may need. When it comes to our kids and their phones, this may especially apply as we learn the potential connection between smartphone use and depressed and suicidal teens.

Social media can be accessed through a variety of digital devices, but the smartphone is the tool tweens and teens use most often to share posts, pics, and personal info.

There are several key pieces to social media that can cause a teen harm including *Cyberbullying*, *Picture-Perfect Lives*, *Social Isolation* and *Sleep Deficit*. Please refer to the previous tip, **Know! Social Media is Bringing Our Teens Down**, for the specific connections to each of those.

Now we must ask ourselves what can we as parents do to help protect our children from the potential downward smartphone spiral? Here are some simple, but effective steps:

When it comes to Cyberbullying:

- It is critical to engage our kids in regular and ongoing conversations on the topic of cyberbullying. Youth must be clear on what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior online (and in-person) and they must know what to do if they find themselves being bullied.

When it comes to those supposed Picture-Perfect Lives:

- Remind your child that the pictures they see online are only a glimpse into another person's life – and even then it's likely only the pretty parts and only with the help of filters.

When it comes to Social Isolation:

- Limit the time you allow your teen to be online to two hours or less per day – and encourage activities that benefit their mental well-being, like fresh air, exercise, volunteering, meeting new friends, and participating in group activities (to connect with others in the non-virtual world).

When it comes to Sleep Deficit:

- Remove the temptation of late night texting and internet surfing by charging your child's phone in your bedroom each night.

Another thing you can do is sit down with your child and create a cell phone contract to establish or re-establish the rules.

The following is a sample contract created by youth advocate and expert Josh Shipp.

The Teen Cell Phone Agreement:

1. I understand that the rules below are for my safety and that my parents love me more than anything in the world. I understand that my parents want to give me freedom, while also giving me enough security to make smart choices. Initial here: _____
 2. I promise that my parents will always know my phone passwords. I understand that my parents have a right to look at my phone whenever there's a need for them to do so, even without my permission. Initial here: _____
 3. I will hand the phone to one of my parents promptly at _____ pm every school night and every weekend night at _____ pm. I will get it back at _____ am. Initial here: _____
 4. I will not send or receive naked photos. Ever. I understand that there could be serious legal consequences that could put mine and my parents' future at-risk. Initial here: _____
 5. I will never search for porn or anything else that I wouldn't want my grandma finding. Initial here: _____
 6. I understand that my behavior on my phone can impact my future reputation—even in ways that I am not able to predict or see. Initial here: _____
 7. I promise I will tell my parents when I receive suspicious or alarming phone calls or text messages from people I don't know. I will also tell my parents if I am being harassed by someone via my cell phone. Initial here: _____
 8. When I am old enough, I won't text and drive. I understand it's very dangerous and pretty stupid. Initial here: _____
 9. I will make an effort to learn phone and internet etiquette. I understand this is an extension of normal manners. I will turn off, silence, and put my phone away in public—especially in a restaurant, at the movies, or while speaking with another human being. I am not a rude person. I will not allow the phone to change this important part of who I am. Initial here: _____
 10. I will NEVER use my phone or social media to bully or tease anyone, even if my friends think it's funny. Initial here: _____
 11. I will not lie about where I have been or how I am using the phone. I promise to answer questions openly, honestly, and directly. Initial here: _____
- I understand that this is NOT my phone and that it was paid for by my parents. Having this phone is not a right—it is a privilege that can be taken away. As such, I have read the following document and agree to the above rules. I understand that if I have any questions, I should talk to my parents face-to-face.
- Sign here: _____

Sources: [Josh Shipp: The Teen Cell Phone Agreement.](#)

[The Washington Post, by Jean Twenge: Teenage depression and suicide are way up — and so is smartphone use, Nov. 2017.](#)

[SuicidePreventionLifeline.org: Youth.](#)