

# 5 Tips to Build Healthy Cell Phone Habits

Cell phones and social media are a big part of your teen's life. But how big is up to the habits and boundaries that you help build. Here are 5 tips that might help.

One: Lead by example. It sounds so simple. But it can be so challenging. Kids learn their habits from you. So check in with yourself.

If you're using your cell phone at dinner, or constantly checking for messages, your kids will think it's okay to do that too. Use your kids as motivation to do what's good for all of you. You could start by creating "no cell phone" zones, like at dinnertime, bedtime, and car time.

Two: Suggest other activities that build connections. Sure, your teen may dismiss your ideas. After all, they're a teen. So make sure you have a lot of ideas, so they experience the freedom to choose.

Could they invite friends over and make a meal? Pick an activity or class at the local community center? Redecorate their room? Organize a weekly movie night?

Three: Keep it safe and healthy. Teach them to only respond to phone numbers they know. And talk about how it's good to use the phone to feel connected. But it's not so good when phone time makes them, or others, feel unsafe, left out, or not good enough. Remind them that once a text or photo is sent, it could be out there forever.

Four: Set limits and goals together. Why? Because your kids are more likely to play by the rules and reach goals if they have a say in creating them.

Design a contract together that says where, when, and how long it's okay to be on the phone. Then, post it where everyone can see it.

Five: Have consequences. Some children learn best when consequences happen right away. And there are tools to help make that happen.

For example, you can ask your cell phone provider about parental controls that let you set daily limits. Or you can download an app that disables the phone when your teen hits a set limit. Or, maybe you have your teen pay for data after they reach a certain limit.

So, 5 tips: Lead by example, suggest other activities, keep it safe and healthy, set limits and goals together, and have consequences. You can also ask other parents what's worked for them.

And try picking a few hours each week where you all leave your phones behind—for the pure adventure of it!