

02. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



“We know they aren't ideal, but everyone else is getting them, we have no choice.”

This sends the message to our children that as soon as they feel pressure to do something by their peers, even if they know it is wrong, that it is ok to just give in and go along with it. We need to be role models and show our kids that it is important to stand up for something you know is right, even if no one else is. Be a leader not a follower!

“But they need independence, this is part of growing up”

Yes, however this independence can be gained with an alternative like a watch or Basic / Dumb Phone.

“But they will miss out on chat groups with their friends”

We believe and the research shows that chat groups are doing more harm than good, and are in fact one of the greatest contributors to cyberbullying, sextortion and exposure to inappropriate content. However if you really want your child to be in a chat group this can be accessed on a computer at home. Ideally set a family computer in a shared space and have an agreed time when your child can check and respond to messages. Show them the evidence, discuss why you feel this is important. They will let their peers know that the chat can be viewed by their parents which is likely to keep inappropriate content down. Ensure security settings are such that your child cannot be added by strangers to groups - this can be done in settings.

“But we promised them...”

Sometimes as parents it's okay to change your mind, especially if you have new information about something being harmful to your child. We recommend that you talk this through with your child and after offering them an alternative to the smartphone incentivising them with something you see fit e.g. the money for a smartphone being invested in their savings account, etc.



“What age is recommended to give a smartphone to my child?”

It has been suggested that 14 is youngest a child should be before being given a smartphone. This is based on data and research and the work of Zach Rausch and Jon Haidt at NYU.* The suggested age to delay is at least 14 as the lowest baseline. Even at this point, this is a smartphone that is highly restricted. Many of our parents have decided to delay the smartphone until the end of high school. Although 16 is agreed as a more appropriate age to be given a smartphone, currently the collective mindset is already stretched at 14, so we believe this must be done in stages. The age of consent was originally 12, then 13 and then 16.

*they have the biggest global research of children’s mental health in relation to smartphone and social media use in English speaking countries by pulling together multiple studies. here is one such study:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-022-29296-3>

What about social media?

It has been shown that every year later a child has access to social media, the better their mental health is as an adult. Our brains do not finish developing until our mid 20s so the longer without social media messing with brain development the better!

Shouldn't we be campaigning to make the tech companies accountable?

Yes absolutely, but this isn’t one or the other. While we are waiting for big tech to be held responsible for the mess they have created, we need awareness amongst parents of the harmful effects of smartphones and awareness of the alternatives. Parents and guardians need to feel like they can make a difference right now rather than waiting for legislation. Yes we need more regulation of the tech companies and in particular social media companies but delaying the purchase of a smartphone is something we have immediate control of.

As a parent I'm worried I am setting a bad example - what should I do?

It’s good to be mindful of our own phone use, particularly in front of our children. We recommend having screen free days and leaving phones behind sometimes when you go out. Charge your phone out of your bedroom at night and leave it away from the dinner table. Try leaving them at the front door when you get home and turn off notifications to prevent distractions. Changing your settings to grey out your phone icons is also an effective way of making your phone less attractive and easier to ignore.



“My child shares their time between two parents’ houses, aren’t smartphones a necessity?”

Kids can communicate with each parent on a simple phone and use a family or parent managed iPad for Facetime calls if required.

“Can’t we just use a stripped back iPhone with parental controls?”

Unfortunately parental controls are incredibly easy to bypass. It takes a lot of intentional, consistent effort. It is difficult and constantly changing. Why take the risk when everything we need them to have can be done on a simple phone. If you do want to go down this path have a look on our website for information on the safe surfer software, and a video tutorial on how to dumb down a phone - please let us know if your youngster manages to bypass it!

“But my child needs a smartphone for train tickets and bus trackers!”

Actually they don’t, yes these things can make life a little more convenient, but we have to weigh up the benefits and risks. Smartphones are causing considerable harm to children so is that convenience really our top priority?

“This will never work, the genie is out of the bottle! Smartphones are essential to our lives now.”

For adults, this may be the case, but not for children. Everything we need from a smartphone for our kids can be done with alternative devices/phone. It will and it is working, we have insight which parents didn’t have 10 years ago, we owe to our children and all children to make the right choice. People were sure that child prostitution could never be stopped in Victorian times when the age of consent was 12. As our knowledge changes so does our behaviour, we can and we must make better choices for our children.



“That’s how kids communicate now!”

Yes, with devastating effects. We’ve all seen teenagers sitting next to each other who are choosing online social interaction over in person interaction. Even when they are with their friends! In ten short years we’ve gone from a childhood based on play to a childhood based on phones. That first generation of children who were given smartphones before high school are now experiencing the harmful effects and are begging us not to make the same mistake.

“They can’t be the only ones without one or they’ll be left out!”

This is the whole point of this movement, to make sure they aren’t the only ones! Get the word out and get your child’s friend’s parents to commit to delaying too. By caving in and getting our kids a smartphone, what is the message we are sending to our child about peer pressure? If everyone else is doing it, you should too? What about the latest craze with teens vaping?! Should we start buying them vapes? No, because we know they are addictive and bad for their health. Well we know smartphones are addictive and bad for their mental health - so lets not get them one! It is a matter of weighing up the risks and finding ways around feeling isolated due to not having a smartphone. By uniting together on this issue, we reduce the risk of them feeling excluded as more and more young people delay having smartphones and social media, and increase the chances of their improved mental health. Studies have shown that since young people have had smartphones, they have in fact started feeling MORE lonely and isolated due to a reduction in time spent in face to face interactions with peers and family.

What are your goals for Unplugged Rebels?

We want it to be normal for children to be free from smartphones. We want every child to know other children without smartphones and every parent to know other parents who are also choosing to delay. By the end of 2025 we aim to have Volunteer UR Ambassadors in every primary school in New Zealand and hopefully secondary schools as well. We know that sustained change is only possible when communities do this together.

You may well come across some other arguments as to why delaying smartphones is not possible. If you are at a loss as to what to say, bring the question to the WhatsApp group, monthly zoom call and email ur.ambassadors@gmail.com and we can figure it out together!

YOU MUST
BE THE CHANGE
YOU WANT TO SEE
IN THE WORLD

