

## Potential Actions

More American schools—arguably all schools—should make themselves into genuinely phone-free zones. How would that look, in practice?

Students can take their phones out during class, but only to use them for class purposes.

Students can hold onto their phones but are not supposed to take them out of their pockets or backpacks at all during class time.

Phone caddies in classrooms: Students put their phones into a wall pocket or storage unit at the start of each class, and then pick them up at the end of that class.

These three options seem to be the ones most commonly employed by American schools today. I believe that the first two are nearly useless. Many students do not have the impulse control to stop themselves from checking their phone during class time if the phone is within reach. One teacher at Scarsdale High School told me that even when a ban on using phones during class is enforced, some students will say that they need to use the bathroom in order to check their phones.

Phone caddies are a little better for learning, because they get the phone out of the students's pocket, but their effect on school social life may be worse: A likely result of the practice could be that *all times between classes* will be dominated by kids looking down silently at their phones, getting the fix they were denied for 50 minutes during class. When they do talk with friends, they'll give those friends only a fraction of their full attention.

Lockable pouches (such as those made by [Yondr](#)). Students are required to put their phone into their own personal pouch when they arrive at school, which is then locked with a magnetic pin (like the anti-theft tags used in clothing stores). Students keep the pouch with them but cannot unlock it until the end of the school day, when they are given access to a magnetic unlocking device.

[Phone lockers](#). Students lock their phones into a [secure unit](#) with many small compartments when they arrive at school. They keep their key and get access to the phone lockers again only when they leave school.

## Misconceptions around phone bans

Those who oppose phone bans raise a number of objections. Smartphones can be useful teaching tools, for instance, and may make it easier for some teachers to [create engaging lesson plans](#). That's true, but any increase in engagement during a lesson may be offset by students following off-ramps during the same lesson. When we add in the costs to all other teachers and the loss of social connection between classes, it's hard to see how the marginal benefit of a phone-based lesson outweighs the costs of a phone-focused student body.

A more common argument comes from parents, many of whom are afraid that something might go wrong at school, and want to ensure that they can reach their children at all times. These fears are understandable, but are also part of the causes of Gen Z's mental-health problems. In his book "[Paranoid Parenting](#)," the sociologist Frank Furedi describes how a new style of protective parenting swept through British and American society in the 1990s, in response to the perception that risks to children were rising. When parents believe that everything is risky and they can't trust other adults to protect their children, they take a more defensive approach to parenting. They try to protect their children from all risks, even when that deprives their children of valuable experiences of independence.

But today's parents, who grew up during a period when crime rates were much higher than they are now, generally have fond memories of walking or biking to school with other kids, or just having time away from parental supervision to hang out with friends. I believe that children and teens would benefit developmentally if they were to go six or seven hours each day out of contact with their parents.

What about school shootings? I'm the father of two high-school students, and of course I would want to connect with my children in such a nightmare scenario. But would a school where every student has a smartphone be safer than one in which only the adults had smartphones? Ken Trump, the president of [National School Safety and Security Services](#), cautions that cellphone use during emergencies can actually *increase* safety risks. "During a lockdown, students should be listening to the adults in the school who are giving life-saving instructions," [Trump explains](#). "Phones can distract from that. Silence can also be key, so you also don't want that phone noise attracting attention." In addition, it seems to me that 300 parents rushing to the school in 300 cars would probably make things more difficult for first responders.