



With more choice than ever and rising concerns about safety, phone ownership can raise important questions for families.

These might be:

- Is my child ready for a phone?
- How do I keep my child safe?
- What's the right approach for our family?
- Are children and phones a good mix?

Every child is different, and the decision about when to introduce a phone is down to the parents or carers – and should be based on your child's individual needs, maturity, and circumstances. While there's no one-size-fits-all answer, this guide is here to help you weigh the pros and cons, understand signs of readiness, and set up healthy habits from the start.

Is my child ready for a phone?



Before giving your child a phone, consider their emotional and social maturity.

It's helpful to ask yourself whether they can follow rules and boundaries – and if they understand what's safe and unsafe online.

Consider, too, whether they are able to talk to you if something worries them, and if they show responsibility in other areas of their life.

Together with Vodafone, we developed a [decision tool](#) with 8 questions to help you decide when is the right time for your family. We also have [advice on access to technology for different ages](#) to help guide your decision.

Why do some families choose to give their child a phone?



We often hear from families who have decided to give their child a phone, and their reasons vary widely. For many, it's a practical decision shaped by their child's growing independence and the realities of modern life.

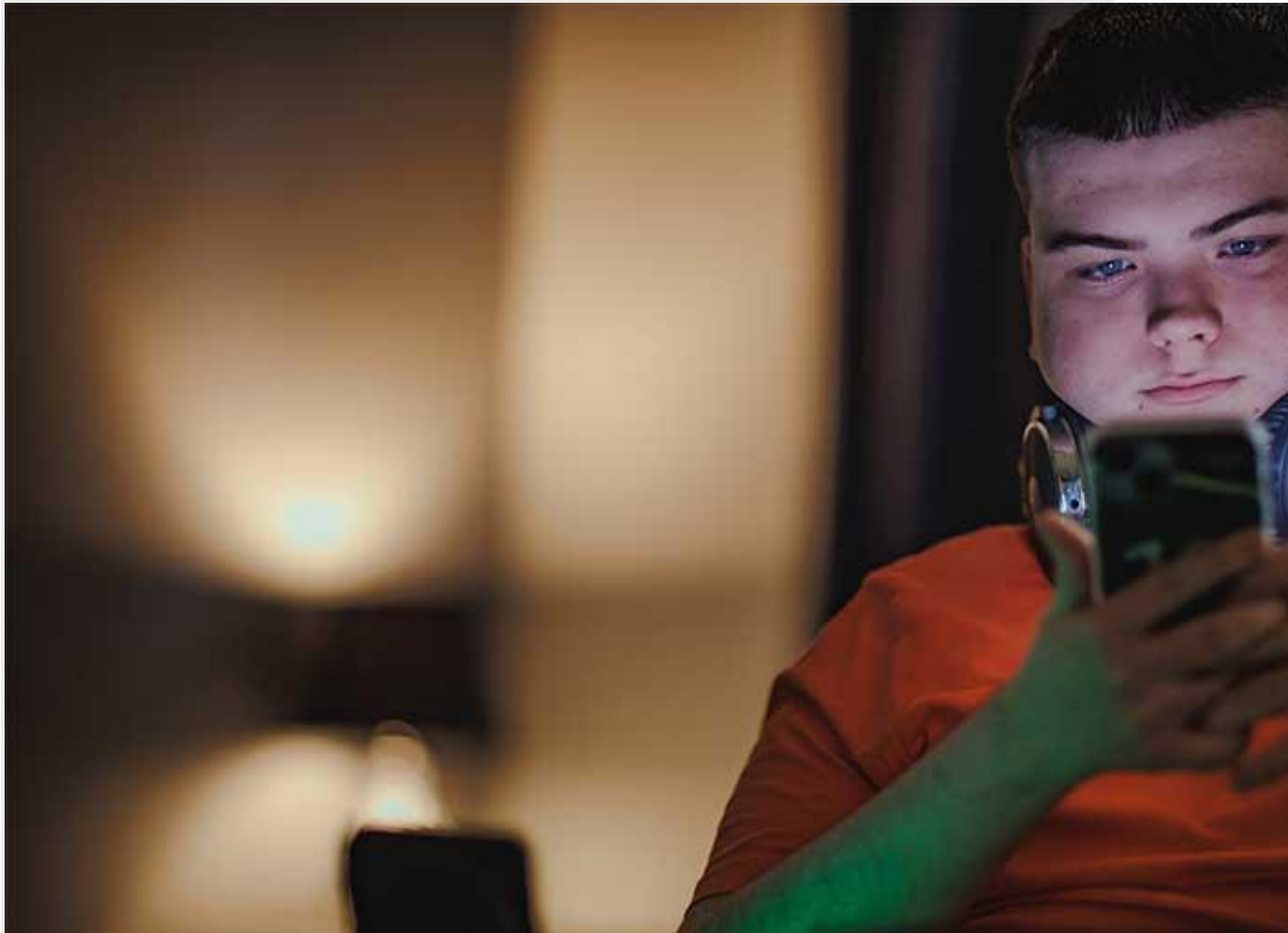
Some of the common reasons include:

- Staying connected: Phones can help children keep in touch with parents or carers when they're out, especially as they start travelling independently.
- Learning and creativity: Many families value the educational apps, games, and creative tools that devices can offer.
- Developing responsibility: Managing a phone can be a way for children to learn about boundaries, time management, and digital responsibility.
- Social dynamics: Some families buy a phone for their child because they want them to feel socially included by their peers.
- Passing on old devices: Some families do this instead of buying a new phone. This can feel like a natural transition rather than a planned milestone and may lead to children having access to a phone earlier than originally intended.

Each family's situation is different, and the decision to introduce a phone is often a balance of benefits, concerns, timing and costs.

Not all families have the financial flexibility to provide smartphones or ongoing data plans, which can make decisions around digital access more complex. It's important to acknowledge this openly and explore alternative options, such as shared devices.

What are the risks and how do I manage them?



While phones can be helpful, they also come with challenges:

- Screen time: Without limits, children may spend too much time on their devices.
- Inappropriate content: The internet isn't always child-friendly, and children may come across upsetting or harmful material.
- Social media pressures: Children can feel anxious or pressured by likes, comments, and unrealistic content on social platforms.
- Harmful online interactions: Social media and messaging apps can expose children to bullying, peer pressure, or contact from people they don't know.

- Privacy concerns: Sharing personal details or location online can expose children to identity theft or unwanted contact.
- Unwanted or inappropriate contact: Children may be approached by individuals with harmful intentions, including grooming. This can happen through messaging apps, gaming platforms, or social media.

Questions and answers about children and phones

How do phones impact my child's wellbeing?

Phones can be helpful for communication and learning, but they can also affect wellbeing if not managed carefully.

Risks include disrupted sleep, reduced attention span, and increased anxiety from social media pressures. Setting boundaries and encouraging offline activities helps maintain balance.

I don't want my child to have a phone until they are older. How do I go about doing that?

It's important to explain your reasons clearly and consistently. Focus on the benefits of waiting, such as more time for play and face-to-face interaction. Offer alternatives like family messaging apps on shared devices or basic feature phones without internet access for emergencies.

My child could benefit from a phone for travelling to school but I'm worried about the risks. What do I do?

Consider a phone with limited features, such as calls and texts only, or use parental controls to restrict apps and screen time. Talk to your child about safe use, including not sharing personal details and reporting any unwanted contact. Regular check-ins and agreed rules can help reduce risks.

Six top tips to help you manage the risks



1. Talk regularly about how your children use their phone

You could start by asking what apps, games, or websites they use most often – as that could help you move on to discussing what they enjoy doing online and what worries them.

Through these conversations, you can set clear boundaries around screen time and device use. It's a good idea to encourage your children to take screen breaks and help them plan in offline activities.

2. Help children understand their right to feel safe online

Begin by explaining that they should never feel pressured, scared, or uncomfortable online and reinforcing that they can say no to things that don't feel right. Follow this up by teaching them how to block and report harmful behaviour and remind them that adults are there to help if something goes wrong.

3. Use safety and wellbeing tools together

A good place to start this is by exploring privacy settings on apps and games with your child. This will help to limit who can contact them or see their posts. You could also use wellbeing features, screen time limits or content filters and set up parental controls and filters where you feel that's needed.

4. Offer calm support when challenges arise

If you let them know they can talk to you without fear of getting into trouble, they'll be more likely to tell you if something is bothering them.

When they do share something worrying, it's best to stay calm as you're listening. If they see harmful content, then you could help them report or remove it. And reassure them that lots of people make mistakes online –most can be fixed and we can learn from them.

5. Keep the conversation going as they grow

As your children get older, you can still regularly check in about new apps, games, or trends they're exploring. Making online safety part of everyday conversations, instead of one-off talks, can help this feel more natural. It can help to stay informed about emerging risks and online behaviours. Adapt your guidance as they become more independent online.

6. Use the TRUST toolkit to guide safe sharing

Working through the [Vodafone & NSPCC TRUST toolkit](#) together can help to structure your conversations.

The toolkit covers:

- talking about who they will share their phone number with and why
- discussing what personal information should stay private
- encouraging them to think before sharing photos, videos, or location details
- reinforcing that TRUST means checking if something feels safe and talking to an adult if unsure.